The Greatest Adventure

by Kaatosade

Summary

It was even more absurd to hear Luffy talking about marriage.

Notes

I've thought of publishing this in English for a long time, even though it's a big project. Finally decided to go about it anyway, so here we go. English is not my first language so be merciful about it, please. :)

This in an alternate version about what happened after Dressrosa. Basically just Sanji & co coming back to fetch the others despite Law's orders, so it's now Law and the Straw Hat crew going towards Zou, which is not what it is in canon, but alternate version, too. Things that have happened in canon after Dressrosa do not exist here.

The fic is starting slow, but I rated it E right away because that's what it's going to be.
In a few days spent aboard the Thousand Sunny Law had learned that a dinner with the Straw Hat pirates was a harsh struggle for survival, where you needed to be both quick and unscrupulous to get enough nourishment. They were alive mostly because Luffy was impartial while stealing food from everyone's plate – the Great Eating Battle, Luffy versus everyone else.

It was a game requiring tactics and teamwork, and the timing had to be right to succeed. Usopp, Brook and Zoro managed to get another helpings of clam casserole while Luffy concentrated on snatching a bread stick from Chopper. When Luffy's attention was drawn to Franky's plate, Chopper hogged three of those bread sticks and ate all of them in one go. And so on.

Law wondered how he had been able to get used to this insanity so quickly, but at least it kept him from thinking too much. After Dressrosa the contents of his mind had started to resemble a scrapyard, completely rummaged and turned upside down, where he was forced to find all kinds of broken things he had never wished to see again. It wasn't possible to go through it without hurting himself with the shards of those abandoned things, so getting a break was surprisingly welcome.

When his fish steak disappeared from his plate to Luffy's, Law just activated his Room, swapping their plates and thus getting the steak back, and continued to eat.

"Hey! No Devil's Fruit Powers at the table!" Sanji snarled.

Law looked meaningfully at Luffy, whose arm was stretching impossibly long towards the bread basket, and Robin, who was helping herself to the clam casserole with extra set of arms she had grown from the table. "Really? It seems to be more of a custom here."

"Only because no one is able to get this idiot to stop." Sanji tugged Luffy's cheek to make sure they knew which idiot he was talking about. The cheek in question stretched in an absurd manner and Law couldn't help staring, even though this really wasn't the first time.

Law shook himself mentally, returning to the subject. "What about Robin?"

"Of course Robin-chwan can do whatever she pleases." Having looked at Robin, Sanji seemed to turn into some kind of amorous jelly, starting to explain how incredibly much more elegant she was, and after that the ode to feminine charms just kept intensifying.

Robin only smiled with amusement. Law stopped listening to Sanji's droning and asked Robin to pass the clam casserole to him next, which she did with a smile. And this was the way dinners with the Straw Hats tended to go.

Zoro interrupting Sanji's babbling was also a common occurrence. "Feel free to play some kind of a knight and woo every skirt you see, there's no way you'll ever get any."

"Haven't seen you having any company either!" Sanji snapped. "And that's good – if I so much as imagine what a horrible sight that would be, a delicate flower with a muscle head like –"

"And you are a pervy cook!"

"Algae head!"

Most of the listeners were rolling their eyes to the beginning of the eternal 'like a cat and a dog' spat. Law concentrated on his clam casserole, it was very tasty. The table kept getting emptier in front of
him with a staggering speed, and soon there was only a few lonely crumbs and sauce stains in the vessels, reminding of the massacre of food.

"Could someone please stop those morons from fighting?" Nami gave a sigh while looking at Zoro and Sanji, who were clutching each others collars, growling.

"Yeah!" Luffy echoed. "I want some dessert! Sanji! Dessert!"

Brook joined the chorus, tapping the table rhythmically with his fork and knife. "Dessert! Dessert!"

These orders didn't have any effect on Sanji. Instead, he exploded into action, when Nami breathed half a word about dessert and how nice it would be to get some. He seized the empty vessels as a hurricane, declaring that a lady shouldn't be made to wait, and soon coming back with the desserts. Nami and Robin were the first ones to get theirs, of course. Today it seemed to be some fried fruits with vanilla sauce.

Everyone calmed down remarkably after getting a bowl full of dessert. In the name of a healthy and balanced diet, Sanji strictly followed the principle of one serving to each, when it came to desserts. Law appreciated it as a doctor but not as a diner. Even the most thick headed ones had realized it was futile to fight in order to get more treats. Anyone who tried got only some cook's shoe served in their face for their efforts.

This was the phase of the dinner Law liked the least. The calmer atmosphere meant there was actually time to converse instead of simply evading starvation. There was no escaping from the table before all food was eaten, so many took the opportunity to grill him with the most peculiar questions.

Law had tactically sat next to Chopper and now started to discuss with him about the newest medical article in the news paper, featuring new kind of vaccines that were being tried at South Blue. He hoped their discussion would sound so damn intelligent and important that nobody dared to interrupt them.

It actually was a pleasure to converse with Chopper, even though Law sometimes was stupefied by his naivety and was forced to use a bit cleaner language. It also was awkward that they reached the topic of animal testing and its ethics – to tell the truth, Law didn't care much, but saying it aloud felt like a dick move when his interlocutor happened to be an animal.

"What other means are there to find out what kind of side effects you can expect if some Zoan-type Devil's Fruit user is vaccinated?" he asked, trying to stay strictly scientific.

Chopper seemed to be extremely disappointed with Law's lack of empathy, starting to rant about animals' sufferings. Had Bepo happened to be present, he wouldn't have been any more impressed with Law, even though he would have expressed it with silent and depressed disapproval. Getting an earful wasn't much fun for Law; it made him feel exactly like that cold asshole he knew he was, so he started to glance around in hopes of whatever form of rescue he could find.

Franky and Usopp were discussing about some 'cola compressor' and Law didn't want to know anything about it. That discussion even seemed dangerous, Franky's giant hands gesticulating excitedly, about to wipe half of the vessels from the table. Luffy had eaten his share already – the biggest surprise of the century, really – and was staring at everyone else's bowls with a resemblance to a puppy begging for food. Robin asked for some coffee and Sanji bolted to get it in a second. Law made use of the chance to tell that he would like some, too.

"– just because you humans don't understand animals – oi, you're not even listening! Law!"
"I'm sorry." Law turned to face Chopper again. "It's not possible for all doctors in the world to be as warmhearted and righteous as you are, doctor Chopper."

Law thanked his fortune for noticing how responsive Chopper was to flattery. Chopper forgot droning in favor of just prancing happily on his chair, and for a moment Law imagined actually getting through the dinner unscathed and making an escape to the peaceful library room.

Sanji twirled from behind the kitchen island with two cups of coffee in his hands. He shoved one cup roughly towards Law and offered another to Robin, kneeling like he was holding at least a wedding ring.

"What a slave," Zoro said.

"I've committed my life to serve beautiful ladies!" Sanji declared.

Law had a nightmarish vision about the extremely dysfunctional relationship Sanji and Baby 5 could have formed, had they ever met each other. They would never had reached an agreement about who had the privilege to crawl on the ground in front of the other, maybe licking some toes if it was a good day.

"Well good luck with that," Zoro said. "Doesn't seem to do much."

Robin had snatched her coffee from Sanji, starting to chat with Nami after that, like the kneeling cook didn't even exist. This, combined with Zoro's coarse words, seemed to hit the nerve. Sanji started to depressedly wallow in self-pity, moaning that he didn't know what he was doing wrong.

There were some educated guesses of what might be wrong. Zoro blurted that maybe he could start by treating women like human beings, Usopp suspected that maybe many women found Sanji's intensive worship a bit unnerving, and Brook suggested some romantic music to create an atmosphere. When Franky offered to install nipple lights to Sanji –

Law didn't even want to imagine what the fuck, his brain was kind of cramping while trying to commit suicide. He wanted absolutely nothing to do with this conversation. He concentrated on drinking his coffee as fast as he could, even though it was too hot. About half of his dessert was still un-eaten and getting to the library didn't feel only tempting, now it was a requirement for survival.

About half of the Straw Hats took part in a quarrel where it apparently was essential to nag everyone else about reasons leading to the lack of romantic company – muscle for brain, long nose, and so on. Law thought that a bunch of five-year-old kids could have had similar quarrel while playing in the sandbox, but luckily it was cut short when Franky decided to play the part of a big brother.

"Oi, isn't it super stupid to argue about this? Everyone's in the same boat, 'cause no one's getting any more action."

Law knew, knew, what would happen next. Like he suddenly had developed an ability to read cards like that damn Hawkins. He wasn't the least bit surprised when everyone's eyes suddenly were glued to him.

"What about you?" Usopp asked at the same time as Sanji asked, "Is there a lady somewhere, who's crying because you're away?"

"Nothing to talk about," Law said. He started to get a sneaking suspicion he'd never finish his bowl of dessert, doomed to be grilled here for the end of the time.

"How about a man?" Franky asked, having taken an unexceptionally long look at Law.
"I don't have anyone like that."

Luffy teared his gaze from Nami's dessert and turned his attention to Law. For a moment Luffy's dark, round eyes were studying Law thoughtfully, with even more intensity than they had studied the fruits floating in vanilla sauce. Law didn't have a clue what Luffy was thinking, but it was a mild relief when those eyes turned back to the dessert.

When the topic had surfaced like this, Law became unpleasantly aware of how long time he actually had been without any company, it was downright pitiful. He usually didn't bother to find company very often, feeling like he always had more sensible things to do; or maybe it was because he didn't have a chance when he happened to be in the mood. It was like some cosmic joke that he usually happened to be in the mood while being in his submarine somewhere between two islands, a thousand meters below the surface, and only his own crew was present. Never was he desperate enough to consider any of them; sleeping with his own crew seemed like an excellent way to get trouble and mess. No thanks. He did have talented hands and an amazingly dirty imagination.

He still had hit the rock bottom, having spent half a year without getting laid even once. He hadn't expected to get stuck on Punk Hazard for months. Monet had once suggested that they could have some fun, undoubtedly in order to find out if she could somehow get her heart back, or for some other strategic and calculated reason. Law had refused from that honor, goosebumps all over his skin and every hair standing – even the thought had felt so damn chilling.

His love life really was nothing to talk about.

"It's so unfair," Sanji wailed, hitting the table with his fist. "The only one of us who has any luck is also the only one who couldn't care less about romance." The glare he sent to Luffy was so ugly, you could imagine it would make the target combust.

Luffy blinked, having noticed everyone suddenly staring at him. "Huh?"

"Just how many times did Boa Hancock say she wishes to be married to you?" Sanji asked.

"Oh, Hancock?" Luffy shrugged. "Didn't count. Pretty many. It started to piss me off."

"You hear that?" Sanji was pointing at Luffy with his finger, seeming to be ready to gnaw the edge of the table just because of frustration. "The world's second most beautiful woman wants to marry him, and he – he just –"

"Naaah, stop yammering, Sanji. It's not a big deal."

Law started to be concerned that Sanji would have a heart attack because of mere incredulous, envious rage. Sanji was pulling his hair, wailing why Hancock wouldn't want to marry him, he'd be the happiest man in the world if that happened, but Luffy just couldn't appreciate what was good.

"Oh, of course Hancock's really nice," Luffy hurried to say. "She gave me tons of food and helped otherwise, too... but I still don't wanna marry her."

"I guess that's no wonder," Usopp pointed out. "I don't think you're the type to get married anyways..."

"That's true, he wouldn't know what to do after getting married even if he decided to wed," Sanji said.

Luffy glared at Sanji, looking deeply wounded. "Of course I know, I'm not stupid!"
That drew out several 'Yes you are' mutterings; Law didn't believe anybody seriously meant it. Sure, no one would have insisted that Luffy was intelligent, but 'stupid' just felt like way too unimaginative, easy and off-target way to try to describe that bundle of peculiarity that was known as Monkey D. Luffy.

"I know you have to like someone in a special way to wanna marry them," Luffy declared.

Law decided this was the most absurd conversation over dinner he had ever been forced to witness. This was topping the unforgettable event when Penguin had interrupted Law's meal to tell how he had managed to break the heart monitor. Law still didn't understand how anyone was able to get jam to – no, he wouldn't even try to imagine it. He suspected being even this sane only because he hadn't ventured to ask for details, he had just ordered Penguin to mop the floors for the next month or so. Later, he had heard some pretty messed up facts concerning Bepo, a pair of roller skates, and a school of flying fish. That event had easily stayed as the most absurd for the last three years.

It was even more absurd to hear Luffy talking about marriage.

It was so insane Law realized he had forgotten to eat. He continued to spoon his dessert in order to make an escape to the library as soon as possible, that might prevent the mass destruction of the last of his brain cells.

"All right, all right, good that even you know that much," Nami said to Luffy, sounding fed up. "I need to speak about our route –"

"In other words, you'll never marry", Usopp pointed out to Luffy.

Law sighed with relief when Nami joined the conversation, probably soon steering it to some sensible direction like the issue with their route. He was interested in the topic, too, he wanted to know when they'd get to Zou so that he could get off this asylum also known as the Straw Hat ship. He took a big gulp of coffee.

"Will too. I wanna marry Traffy," Luffy said.

Coffee spurted out of Law's mouth and nose; he was about to choke. In the middle of uncontrollable coughing he managed to look around, seeing he wasn't the only victim. Every one who had been eating or drinking something while Luffy uttered his sentence was coughing and blowing their nose, eyes watering.

Nami got up, marching to Luffy and hitting the back of his skull. "That wasn't funny, you idiot."

"Ow! Wasn't supposed to be funny! You got it, I just told that I like –"

Nami hit him again. "You can't just blurt it out just like that, dimwit!"

Law agreed with her keenly. You just couldn't. Simply because, just, no.

Then the stares turned from Luffy to Law; suddenly everyone wanted to know what he thought of this... expression of affection. And he didn't feel like dealing with this right now. If ever.

To hell with the library, it was way too public a place anyway.

Law activated his Room, teleporting straight to the infirmary, where he was sleeping. After getting there he securely locked the doors.

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Nami blinked for a while, trying to understand what she was seeing. At one moment Law was sitting on his chair next to Chopper, and next moment he wasn't anywhere to be seen. There was only a thick, opened book lying on the chair, it look medical. Going by bulging eyes others were seeing the same thing she was. A couple of mouths were gaping.

Apparently Law had been reading in the infirmary before dinner, and now he simply had... swapped himself with the book. It was infinitely disturbing that an ability making that kind of thing possible even existed.

"Luffy," Robin started and waited for Luffy to look at her. "That's not the way people usually confess their feelings."

"Oh? How is it done, then?"

"First, you try to get more familiar with the other," Sanji said. "Become closer and at the same time feel about if it's mutual —"

Nami thought that was pretty rich, coming from someone who threw himself at the feet of every pretty woman, hearts in his eyes.

"I already know that Traffy is an awesome guy!" Luffy interrupted. "Why should I wait and mince words, if I know very well how I feel and what I want?"

Nami needed to shut her eyes and shake her head, because Luffy-logic sometimes was a bit much for normal people. No one looked very impressed with Luffy, but no one was laughing, either – the situation was so strange it had all of them frozen.

"Because some of us have more complicated thought processes," Robin said. She was using that patient but emphatic tone Luffy sometimes listened to, and looked significantly at the book lying on the chair. "It looks like poor Trafalgar found your surprising announcement very confusing – some of us would appreciate some time to get their brain along."

"Everyone who actually has a brain..." Usopp muttered.

Luffy blinked, seeming to be at a loss for a moment. "Is it really that important? He's thinking too much anyway. If you like someone, you just know it."

"Perhaps, but you sure didn't beat around a bush —" Nami started.

"There are no bushes in here!"

That was too much. This situation called for an emergency meeting concerning Luffy, they seemed to need them too often. Usually their topics tended to be something like 'Luffy declared a war to Big Mom, what should we do?' and 'Luffy formed an alliance with the Heart pirates, what should we do?' None of them had imagined a day they would need to discuss the topic 'Luffy wants to marry Trafalgar Law, what should we do?'

Not that there was much they could do about it. In a dictionary, the word 'stubbornness' could have been defined with a picture of Luffy, nothing could make him change his mind. Usually it also was too late to prevent the catastrophe, because Luffy had already been an idiot, but at least some complaining and 'peer support' – one of Chopper's favourite expressions – made them feel better. Maybe it was some kind of group therapy they needed to survive with Luffy every day.

Luffy had spotted the remnants of Law's dessert. "You think he'll come back to eat that...?"
Nami would be deeply amazed if anyone saw even a glimpse of Law for the rest of the day. There was no doubt that Luffy had made an impression.

"I doubt it," Sanji said.

"I sure as hell wouldn't," Usopp said.

"Then I can –" Luffy's hand was already stretching towards the bowl.

"You can have it if you go out to eat it," Sanji said.

"Out? Why?"

Nami tried to make a clever excuse about being on lookout or something, but couldn't; her brain felt like it was frozen because of the most bizarre confession she had heard in her life.

"The weather's nice," Zoro said. "It would be like a picnic."

"Yeah, you're right! Okay, I'm going to the deck to have a picnic!" Luffy snatched the bowl along, leaping out from the kitchen.

Sometimes, it was fortunate that the brains of those two idiots were almost in sync, even if Zoro had a bit more practical sense. Nami wouldn't have thought anything as simple, and keeping it simple often was the best way to deal with Luffy.

Zoro was the one Nami turned her gaze to, after the door had been shut after Luffy. "Is he serious?" If anyone had an answer, it would be Zoro.

"Who knows? I don't." Zoro seemed ready to leave it, but sighed after everyone started to stare at him. "But there's one thing I know. It wouldn't be like Luffy to joke about a thing like this."

Most of them were nodding and agreeing, Luffy really didn't use to joke like this. Actually, Luffy's sense of humor couldn't be described as very complex and sophisticated.

"That's true, but isn't confessing like that seriously also very untypical of him?" Usopp asked. "I mean, it's Luffy. He's not even a bit... romantic, you know? Does he even know what he's talking about?"

"He said that he knows, isn't it enough?" Chopper asked.

Nami didn't think that Chopper's naivety was needed in this conversation. Actually she wished for some excuse to make Chopper leave before someone said something and managed to traumatize him.

"No, because he doesn't behave like that," Nami said. "I mean, it's clear that all of you are perverts –" She pointed at Franky, Sanji, Brook and Usopp one after another, and stopped right before Zoro, who actually wasn't so bad. Or at least he was better at hiding it than the others, if he was. "But Luffy, he doesn't even watch even if he sees a scantily dressed beautiful woman –"

"But doesn't this mean he likes men?" Usopp asked.

"No, one of us would have noticed," Sanji said.

"That's not a thing you can hide aboard a ship," Franky said.

Nami nodded. Shared sleeping quarters and having a limited amount of space made sure you had to see and know more about your crewmates than you actually wanted to. "That's right. In other words,
he doesn't like women or men like that – he just doesn't. So why would he –"

"It might be just Law," Zoro said.

"What do you mean?" Robin asked.

Zoro was leaning back in his chair, crossing his arms comfortably behind his head. He didn't seem to be inclined to talk.

"If you have any idea what's going on in his mind, tell us," Nami said. "Or do I need to remind how much you owe me...?"

Zoro didn't look amused. "Witch."

"Talk."

"Luffy's really serious and loyal in his own kind of way," Zoro said. A few listeners nodded. "Not the type to be interested in any kind of frivolous flirting around, unlike some –" An ugly glare at Sanji.

Nami tried to imagine Luffy flirting around and stopped before she had a cerebral hemorrhage so bad that even Chopper and Law wouldn't be able to save her. She couldn't even imagine imagining such an absurdity.

"Maybe it just hasn't occurred to him ever before, because he hasn't met anyone he finds genuinely interesting," Zoro finished.

"That would make sense," Robin mused, having considered a moment. "And because he hasn't been interested in things like this, he doesn't have a clue of what to do now, even if he has met an interesting one."

"That might kind of make sense in an irrational way," Nami agreed. After all, Luffy was inexplicably efficient while ignoring things he didn't find interesting, like they didn't even exist. Maybe romantic feelings were one of those things Luffy just didn't bother to notice before they hit him with a sledgehammer. "But how can he know he wants to get married just like that, he doesn't know Law that well; none of us does."

"That might not be true," Sanji said. He continued after getting everyone's attention. "I mean, none of us knows what really happened after Marineford. None of us were there. And had Law not happened to be there, we wouldn't have a captain any more."

"That's a pretty deep connection," Robin said.

Nami didn't want to think about it and saw that others didn't, either. That one time Luffy had needed them and no one was able to be there for him... Thinking of it hurt even after two years, and then, because of some insane occurrence, Luffy had ended up surviving because Trafalgar Law had saved him, 'in a spur of a moment', like Law insisted.

Who was crazy enough to go in a place like that to save a person who would be a considerable rival one day?

Right, so they did have some history, unknown to the attendants of the meeting. "But still, to marry..." Nami sighed. "I don't get it. How can he be so sure?"

"Instinct," Zoro said.
"That does sound like our captain," Robin said, smiling.

"Are you trying to say that some kind of dormant mating drive has awakened in him because of Law, just because some irrational instinctual part of him recognizes a potential mate, or something like that?" Nami asked.

"That sounds like a pretty natural thing," Chopper said.

"It might be, for animals," Usopp said.

It made too much sense – it sounded way too Luffy-like. Nami started to fear their theory might prove to be correct.

"Wait a minute, isn't this really bad?" Usopp screamed, having thought of the same thing.

This was.

It would have been awkward enough, if Luffy had joked about wanting to marry Law. It would have been enough to create an uncomfortable atmosphere they really didn't need aboard a ship this small.

It would have been even worse, if this had been some frivolous, yet clumsy, flirting.

Luffy being probably dead serious – that was a disaster. Even with favorable wind they had a week before they'd reach Zou, and wind probably wouldn't be favorable all the time. Nami didn't understand how they would be able to live in this ship for a week.

They needed to take action and try to figure out how badly Luffy was irritating Law, and if there would be a reason to start building an emergency raft for the worst case scenario.

"We don't need this," Nami wailed, burying her head in her hands.

"I don't know... it sounds super interesting," Franky said.

Zoro shook his head. "No. Law doesn't need this, either."

"What do you mean?" Chopper asked.

"I'm sure I didn't see or understand everything that happened on Dressrosa, but it's clear that the guy has enough ballast to sink ten marine warships."

That was the cherry on top. Nami had noticed Law couldn't be described as a very happy person, but if Zoro, who didn't make a fuss because of anything, went and said that... it had to be seriously bad. Everything Nami had heard about Dressrosa was hinting that it hadn't been the most pleasant experience in Law's life. He was probably rubbed mentally raw.

In other words...

This was really bad.

This also was a really bad beginning for a romance.
I can't believe I got this chapter done so quickly. It will take more time usually, I'm sure of it. But it's very nice to get this project started and to notice how many people there are who like this awesome pairing. <3

It was so cramped, Law didn't have any chance to straighten his legs. They were pressed against the inside of the treasure chest, his knees were almost in his mouth, and air was getting stuffier in a closed space. And he was so sick and weak as it was. He needed some fresh air, needed it desperately – but if he would stretch out his arm, he would notice the chest couldn't be opened from inside, he knew it – he still had to try it –

His straightening arm didn't meet any kind of obstacle and he blinked his eyes open, confused. It wasn't pitch black like in the treasure chest, like he had expected. And the air wasn't nearly as used and stifling as it had been in his dream.

This was the dim infirmary of the Straw Hat ship, and he was lying on the bed meant for a patient, in the corner of the room. In his sleep he had managed in twisting himself into a small heap at the foot of the bed, and his legs were leaning against the wall. That had created an illusion of being in some cramped space.

Most definitely this was not the treasure chest into which Corazon had stuffed him to be hidden, thirteen years ago. His subconscious had stuffed him back into that very same chest hundreds of times during the dark, restless hours of night.

Law took a few deep breaths before sitting up. A look towards a clock told him that he had managed to sleep about one hour and a half, and he felt shaky and sick.

Post-traumatic stress was a very interesting topic if it was described in medical tomes, but Law didn't much enjoy getting some first-hand experience. He wasn't surprised, either. Dressrosa and everything that had happened there had been a massive pile of shit, Doflamingo had looked almost same as thirteen years ago, and there was still phantom pain in Law's arm. Being fine would have been abnormal.

But still, the treasure chest again? Couldn't his subconscious come up with something else for a change? Like some man eating plants, whose enzymes would slowly dissolve his flesh from his bones, or maybe piranhas tearing him apart tiny bit by tiny bit; just for some change? Just anything else than that treasure chest?

Apparently not.

He pressed his forehead against his knees, concentrating only in breathing until it would become easier and at least some of the weight he was feeling would disappear. He pressed one of his palms to his side to guide a very deep breath better towards his sides, feeling his ribs moving and slightly separating under his palm while his lungs got full of air; he was a pufferfish that kept inflating and inflating and inflating –
Then he let the air out and repeated the whole thing several times. It didn't calm him down as much as it should have.

It felt like someone was holding his heart in their hand, squeezing it with even force. Just enough force to make him feel like being slowly strangled.

There was no way he would be able to sleep for some time, so Law got up from the bed, yanking more clothes on. If only the thought of rummaging through Chopper's medicine cabinet and stealing some sedatives hadn't bothered him so much. He would have stolen from almost anyone else without even feeling guilty, but not from any person he actually happened to respect. Not very many persons like that even existed, anyway.

At daytime he could ask Chopper for some medicine, but in that case he'd be forced to explain himself. Chopper was responsible like that, and explaining didn't feel like an appealing idea to Law. It would be easier to just endure somehow, until he got onto some island with a pharmacy.

He had been sitting there for some time, enjoying his own cheerful company, when the cabin started to feel as stifling and cramped as the treasure chest. He had to get out.

It was one of the pros of a sailship that you could go out anytime you pleased, instead of having to first take the submarine to the surface. The night was colder than Law had expected, but he didn't go back in to get his coat. Being a bit cold actually felt quite good in this mental state, it gave him something to focus on, instead of wallowing in his own head.

Weather was favorable, so they were sailing all night. A tall and very thin figure standing steering had to be Brook, even though he was only seen as a black shadow against light of the lantern. The afro made his head look enormous and he was humming quietly some melody Law had never heard before. His bone white hand could be clearly seen in dim light when he pushed his crown to a better position.

Luffy really loved to collect freaks into his crew. But maybe Law was disqualified to say anything about it, because his own navigator happened to be a talking polar bear.

And, fuck. Maybe Law didn't wish to think about Corazon and the treasure chest, but it didn't mean that thinking about Luffy was any more welcome. Why wasn't he able to remove his brain, get these thoughts bleached from it, and then put it back into his skull? It would be so nice and handy.

He didn't feel like chatting with Brook, who luckily kept watching the sea and didn't look back to the main deck. He was even more grateful that they had decided to lock Caesar into an emptied storage room after it was clear they'd be forced to put up with their hostage for a longer time than they wanted to. No one missed having that psycho on the deck.

Law stepped next to the railing, starting to stare at the black churning of nocturnal sea; it didn't seem one bit more unfriendly than his own mind.

Of course I'm all kinds of fucked up now. And I have every right to be.

Repeating this to himself didn't make him feel any more delightful. It was true, though. He had spent half of his life running away from Doflamingo and plotting to avenge Corazon; at the same time trying to glue his mind back together with any psychiatric method or self-help book he could get his hands to. And then, finally, Dressrosa.

Doflamingo's appearance had been almost as it had been back then, like he already was eternally young like he wished to be. Like time hadn't passed at all and Law still was a weak brat, and that
was how he had felt like. He had done everything he could, mostly managing in getting shot and kicked and mocked. He didn't remember being as scared as he had been while sitting tied to the Heart Seat for a long time, mind full of visions of how Doflamingo was going to finish him.

But it hadn't been dying he had been scared of, it had been whatever Doflamingo would do before killing him. Law had imagined countless infinitely unpleasant alternatives, and just imagining them made him want to crawl out of his own skin. Whatever it would have been, he really would have wanted to die after it.

Law wrapped his arms around himself, shivering. His fingers hurt, he realized squeezing his sword with too much force.

It was over now. Everything. But nothing had gone according to his plans.

He would have been quite satisfied, if he had died, managing to take Doflamingo to hell with him. Even if it meant getting the world's shittiest company to his trip to afterlife.

But Luffy had happened, and won, and in some strange way Law had survived because of him.

That was the biggest problem. Never had he imagined surviving, not really. But it had happened and now he was standing here, shivering without a coat, and now what? What the fuck was he supposed to do now?

The sea started to seem too desolate and enormous, Law wanted something smaller to look at, something he could comprehend. He sat on the swing, pressing his forehead against the chain.

Luffy had a bounty of four hundred million berries, and the guy had a swing and a slide on the deck of his ship. And he used them too, every day. Laughing. Who would have imagined such contradiction? Everything concerning Straw Hat was absurd.

"I wanna marry Traffy."

WHAT THE FUCK?

Seriously, what the actual fuck?

Law couldn't even start to deal with this blurt, his brain was cramping. It had been a joke, of course – he refused to even think of another alternative, because simply no – but even as a joke... There were many guys who could joke like that and he would have been able to stomach it, answering with some smart retort, but this just didn't fit Luffy's persona. Law didn't get it at all.

He knew what he needed in order to get his bearings after everything he had gone through. He wanted back to his own submarine, to the company of his own crew, into a familiar environment. Some peaceful life below the surface, without needing to worry if some unkind eyes would find him. He would read a mountain-sized pile of interesting books, drink coffee in an uncontrolled manner and alcohol in a controlled manner, play cards with his crew, betting their turns to wash the dishes for a month. Maybe he would go ashore for a while to find some company for a night, maybe even two nights, just to get some human contact. He could use it while being in this mood.

There was no way in hell that he needed a joke proposal coming out of the blue.

That's what it had been, hadn't it? It was insane to even consider that the widely-smiling idiot might be serious.

And if he was... well, that was absolutely the last thing in the world that Law needed.
Why weren't they in Zou already?

The chain of the swing was cold and would press a mark into his forehead. He forced himself to go in before he'd catch a cold. Chopper would forcibly reduce him to being a patient, without caring about the fact he was also a doctor, and force him to stay in bed; taking care of him so kindly he wouldn't be able to stand it. After that there would be no wandering on the deck at nighttime even if he felt like he was suffocating.

He was feeling better now, anyway, but he didn't want to go back to his bed. Maybe it would have been better to consent to staying in the men's quarters, where every male in the crew was sleeping. Even the captain. Who had ever heard of a captain having no personal cabin? He had heard that Franky had first built one, but it had been modified into a storage room right away; Luffy didn't want to sleep alone.

There were moments like this, when Law almost understood that. Perhaps it would be calming to have other people somewhere close, listen to their even breathing. Then he imagined dyssynchronous snoring and knew he'd go crazy if he was forced to accommodate with other people.

After some wandering around he found himself from the aquarium bar. He sat on the large half-circle-shaped couch to watch fish swimming behind the glass as mere dark figures in the dim light, waiting to be eaten.

He could almost imagine watching out through the window of his submarine. His very own bed was right in front of a window, he used to sit up and watch out after waking up in the night. The depths of the sea were often too dark to see anything, but sometimes something flashed across the beam of headlight too quickly to see it clearly, or headlights revealed some giant figure slowly floating by. For some reason he found a reminder of cold mass of water pressing against the glass, so ready to easily swallow him, calming – he preferred not to analyze what that told of his mental condition.

This was almost like being in the submarine. If there had also been silent purring of the engines...

Suddenly lying down felt like a good idea, maybe he'd manage to sleep a bit more before morning.

~*~

Sanji froze in the doorway and his unlit cigarette fell from his gaping mouth. He picked it mid-air, putting it back between his lips and cursing silently.

He had only wanted to take a quick look at the fish they had caught recently and start planning lunch while making breakfast. He truly hadn't expected to find Trafalgar fucking Law sleeping on the couch in front of the aquarium.

In their emergency meeting yesterday they had decided that someone needed to talk with Law a bit, whoever it was who would first catch the man in some suitable situation. They needed to find out how inflammable the whole situation was. Sanji had been nodding and agreeing – after all, of course it would be a task for Robin or Chopper in the peace of their library, there was no way Sanji needed to bother.

What the hell are you doing, sleeping here?

There was no helping it. Apparently Sanji would have the pleasure to chat with Doctor Gloomy.

Perhaps Nami and Robin would praise him, if he did this exceedingly well? He imagined them, thanking his conversational skills and petting him with their slender hands, and got lost into his own pink pervy world for a moment, until shaking himself out of it. That kind of mental imagery gave
him power to do just anything.

Sanji stepped closer. Law was clutching his sword even in his sleep, he was practically curled up around it like it was the only thing in the world worth trusting. With those shadows under his eyes, and his absurdly long limbs, Law resembled some kind of a panda-spider.

Luffy wanted to marry that?

Sanji had long ago stopped all attempts to really understand Luffy, but this had to be Luffy's most incomprehensible idea ever.

Sanji wondered if Luffy had any chance. He took a better look at sleeping Law, trying to find signs pointing to one way or the other – he had learned a lot during his two years in Kamabakka, that time had given him kind of a gaydar, but Law was a difficult one. Everything could be explained with a very questionable sense of aesthetics, starting with too damn many earrings. But there were those shoes... Law was overly tall as he was, so why the fuck he thought it was necessary to wear pretty gay boots with six centimeter heels?

There was also the fact that Law hadn't thrown a fit after Franky had asked if he had a man. Like it would most naturally be as good and likely option as a woman. But there was a possibility that Law hadn't considered the discussion very interesting; hadn't bothered to get provoked because he simply didn't care even if someone mistook him as a homosexual.

Sanji walked slowly towards the couch, keeping an eye on the pile of panda-spider lying on it and taking care not to enter the range of that sword. His instinct told that Law was one of those individuals who were extremely dangerous, if they felt like being threatened while being half-asleep.

Sanji had came here to choose ingredients for lunch, so it was best to do it. The fish in the tank weren't plentiful at the moment, he should ask others to catch more later. Luffy, Usopp and Chopper liked to pass time like that, if there was nothing more interesting going on.

One long and thin fish looked bony as hell but quite tasty, that would make some excellent broth. A slowly swimming round fatty screamed being fish rissole. It was decided – after breakfast Sanji would go and pick those from the tank and start cooking broth with small fire.

"Is it morning already?" Law asked, pushing himself to sit up. He looked like he had been dug from a grave and had a headache.

"An early morning. Almost everyone is still sleeping." Everyone except Usopp, who was steering, and Sanji, who always woke up early to feed the crew. "You can either sleep some more before breakfast, or come to the kitchen to drink some coffee while I'm cooking." Like Sanji needed to guess which alternative would appeal to Law more.

Law yawned, stretching his arms. "I'll be in the kitchen soon."

A big surprise. Law drank even more coffee than Robin, and that was some remarkable accomplishment. Sanji wished he'd get to enjoy Robin's company instead of Law's, but the situation was what it was. So, he nodded, leaving to make some aforementioned substance. Having immersed himself into a familiar rhythm of cooking, he started to ponder how the hell he was going to approach the subject 'Um, by the way, what do you think of that thing Luffy said...'

That kind of thing just couldn't be blurted out straight away, first you needed to chat about something else and feel about a bit. Small talk. In his mind Sanji went through everything he knew about Law; it wasn't much. He thought what similarities they might have and picked a few starting lines that
didn't seem too dangerous. The weather was a classic topic, but also pitiful as fuck, even though it was important while sailing. Maybe he could guess how long it would be before they would be found by marines or Kaidou; that would be some cheerful opening.

Everything that had to do with Dressrosa seemed as safe as smoking in a storage of gunpowder. Sanji reminded himself of avoiding that rocky shallow; do not ask, do not talk, you don't want to hit that ballast heavy enough to sink ten warships. After that he definitely wouldn't be able to talk about Luffy and marriage.

Shit, why did he need to do this?

Coffee was conveniently ready when Law came to the kitchen, looking a bit more awake. Apparently he had cleaned himself up, because he had changed his shirt. Sanji couldn't say he appreciated the style; the shade of yellow of that hoodie was about to burn his retinas.

"Here you are." Sanji pushed a cup of coffee over the kitchen island and continued chopping the ingredients.

"Thanks." Law sat on a bench in front of the cup, trying to see what Sanji was doing. "What are you cooking?"

"Sea King omelettes." Sanji was chopping a sweet pepper without much watching what he was doing. His hands were working automatically and easily.

"Mhm."

"Are you hungry? Didn't have an intention to start frying these before more people are up."

"Not much." Law sipped his coffee, freezing to stare at the cup. "This blend is really good."

"Of course it is, you think I'd offer to Robin-chwan anything else than the best coffee, made of prime quality beans I've ground myself?"

Law hmm'd, the corner of his mouth quirking. "No, but as far as I know, I'm not 'Robin-chwan'. I thought you have some stale remains here that you use to make coffee for guys."

It was such a brilliant idea, why Sanji hadn't thought of it before? It would be a bit cheaper if he didn't need to waste good coffee for those who weren't worth it. When you needed to feed Luffy, there was never enough money for food.

A comfortable silence fell in the kitchen. This was going quite well, Sanji was positively surprised he was able to communicate with the guy. Also, he always had to appreciate a person whose palate was fine enough to recognize good coffee if they got some.

He didn't want to touch awkward topics yet, so he needed to move on to the next light topic they could chat about. He could babble about cooking all day but most people got tired of listening to it, so he abandoned that idea. "I heard you're from North Blue?"

Law's shoulders tensed and he glanced at Sanji suspiciously. "So what?"

This wasn't looking good. "I am, too," Sanji said nonetheless. Everyone wanted to talk of their homeland, didn't they? "I'm the only one in this crew, so..." He fell silent, awkward – Law's face warned from going there, but leaving the topic hanging like this and moving awkwardly to the next one would have felt stupid. Maybe they knew some same places, or something. "Just thought I'd ask where you exactly come from."
He knew he had hit a massive naval mine even before Law said anything, and hurried to back up. "Forget that, you don't need to -" 

The smile creeping to Law's lips was one of the most ghastly Sanji had ever seen. Perhaps it's purpose was to ironically highlight how bad an idea this topic had been, but Law couldn't hide hurting godawfully somewhere deep inside. Whatever it was that Law was going to say, Sanji didn't want to hear it.

"If you want some cheerful small talk, I was born in Flevance," Law said.

Oh fuck. Oh hell. Oh shit, shit, shit, shit. Sanji wanted to cook his own head.

This topic was worse than everything that happened on Dressrosa. If he had thought even for a second it might be Flevance, he would have kept his trap shut fucking tightly. But as far as he knew, the place was destroyed and there wasn't supposed to be any survivors. Of course the government hadn't said it like that, but Sanji had learned how the government did things.

"Apparently you want to know why I'm alive?" Law inquired flatly.

"Actually not. It has to be a pretty shitty story."

When the topic had been abandoned as a definitely bad one, Law relaxed a bit. The silence wasn't the least bit as comfortable as the earlier one.

Sanji started chopping big chunks of Sea King side for omelettes, glancing at Law, who seemed to be lost in his coffee cup. The next topic had to be chosen with damn much more care than the previous one.

He did his best to try to understand what in the world Luffy was seeing in that panda-spider, who apparently did have enough ballast to sink not only ten warships; no, make it twenty.

His restless glancing didn't go unnoticed, for Law glared at him from behind the rim of his cup.

"If you want to come out too and joke about wanting to marry me, go ahead. I'm starting to get used to it."

Sanji almost cut his finger, he was so surprised. He kind of started to like Law's sense of humor, even though his tone was grumpy. "Yeah. Actually I had something to say, about Luffy. How did you know?"

"It's apparent you don't really want to talk with me and you're circling some awkward topic. What else could it be?"

A good question. Sanji didn't answer it in favor of pouring more coffee.

"Thanks," Law said. "But why bother? Yes, it was surprising and hardly very tasteful, but I don't think a joke is so big a deal you need to do something about it."

Sanji stared at the hand holding the cup of coffee, thinking it was pretty hypocritical of Law to grouch about lack of good taste. Everyone who saw fit to tattoo the letters DEATH over their fingers had to have either very questionable sense of aesthetics or a really sick sense of humour. Probably both.

He heaved a heavy sigh, because he didn't actually want to say what he needed to say. "Listen... the problem is, all of us talked about it yesterday, and actually... we don't think he's joking."
Yesterday, before going to bed, there had been a flood of questions in the men's quarters, and it had started to resemble some kind of inquisition. Luffy had answered for a while, before growing bored and showing it by falling asleep in the middle of Usopp's sentence. They still had heard the most essential confirmation.

"What do you mean? Of course I love him, why else would I want to marry him? Are you stupid?" Luffy had been looking at them like they were idiots who didn't get it. Maybe, from Luffy's point of view, that really was the case.

And if Luffy said it straight, he had to be serious – all of them knew Luffy wasn't capable of telling a believable lie, even if it cost him his life. He simply was the worst liar in the world.

Sanji had never imagined having to hear Luffy declaring that he loved someone, in that candid and natural way Luffy did pretty much everything. Luffy and love was not a concept his brain was ready to process yet, but on the other hand, he was the first one who was ready to admit that love was always like a hurricane. This one just had come out of the blue and struck an unpredictable target.

Sanji decided to save Law from further facts, Law could hear those words from Luffy himself and do whatever he wanted with the information. Passing out seemed like a likely reaction, because it seemed like Law had enough to process in a fact that maybe he hadn't been a victim of a particularly poor attempt at joking. Or if he was, then that prankster had been a cosmic force bigger than a human; perhaps destiny in an ironic mood.

"What?" Law was staring at Sanji, eyes wide, and looked more like a panda than ever. "I can't even – just, what?"

"I mean that, yeah. Luffy really wants to marry you. Congratulations. What fillings would you like in your wedding cake?"

"Cyanide. Lots of it, thank you very much."

Sanji did his best to hold in a snort of laughter, it was evident that Law was not amused with this turn of events. "I take it that you're not interested?"

Law shook his head. "Don't get me wrong. I owe him fucking much – starting with my life – and I guess I must like him, because nothing else explains the fact that I haven't sliced him into a hundred tiny pieces yet. But I have never thought that..."

"Understood." And Sanji really understood. People used to have many thoughts and feelings concerning Luffy, but they usually were not of sexual kind. Nothing in Luffy's behavior encouraged imagination to take that path even momentarily. And that was why this whole thing was so ridiculous.

"... Not my type," Law finished.

"What is your type, then?"

Law shrugged. "I don't even know if I have some special type. More like some no-way-in-hell-limitations."

"What are those?" Sanji knew he was prodding too much. This had nothing to do with the Luffy-problem and it wasn't his business to ask about other's sexual preferences, but... when it came to that, he was just too curious. Many people would have said he was a pervert and a peeping tom – they would have been correct.
"I have no need to tell you."

"That's true." Sanji sighed, disappointed. "But I have a need to know one thing."

"And that is?"

*Are you going to experience some kind of nervous breakdown and split our ship in two before reaching Zou?*

"Come to think again, nothing," Sanji said. You couldn't ask a thing like that. Anyways, this was stupid. Law was a Devil's Fruit user and swam as gracefully as an anchor, he hardly wanted to drown himself.

Sanji remembered that ghastly smile, and suddenly he wasn't so sure. Maybe Law wanted to do just that... but whatever, he still couldn't utter the sentence.

Law nodded, like agreeing that keeping his mouth shut was a good solution. "In that case, thank you for coffee. If you'd be so kind as to bring my breakfast to the infirmary – I don't believe I want to see the others right now." *Especially Luffy*, echoed in the air, unspoken. Law had spoken like consenting to the request was granted, making refusing impossible.

"All right."

Sanji watched with mixed feelings, how Law was striding out, the sword leaning against his shoulder. He had a sneaking suspicion that the ship would feel really, really small for the rest of the journey.

If Luffy wanted to convince *that*, it definitely wouldn't be easy.
When Luffy stepped into the kitchen, yawning, he was greeted with a delicious scent, and smiles on his friends' faces. It seemed that he had slept for longest, because even Zoro had already had time to sit at the table despite looking like he was more asleep than awake.

One of the chairs was still empty, and that prevented Luffy from flashing the widest of his smiles. He really would have wanted to see that chair occupied, because Law hadn't shown up after the dinner yesterday. "Is Traffy still sleeping?"

He was answered with some shrugs from here and there. Apparently no one knew.

"Okay, I'm gonna get him," Luffy decided. Surely no one wanted to skip a breakfast.

Sanji stopped piling toast on the table for a moment to look at him significantly. "Don't."

"Why not?"

"He's up. Saw him earlier."

"Isn't he hungry at all?" Luffy did his best trying to understand how such a thing was possible, but on the other hand, Law didn't eat very much anyway.

"Idiot," Nami sighed. "He's clearly avoiding you, don't you get it?"

Why on earth would Law be avoiding him? And if he was... Well, Luffy was the *captain*, no one was able to avoid him aboard his own ship. He knew its every nook and cranny, and was allowed to go anywhere he pleased.

Sanji had quickly loaded a tray with a portion of omelette and everything else that was being served, except toast. "I'm going to take this to him, you can start already."

"I wanna take it," Luffy said, stretching out his hands.

"No way," Sanji snatched the tray aside before Luffy had time to grab it, and on top of that, delivered a kick to his fingers.

"Ouch! Why not?" Luffy was glaring at Sanji unhappily, rubbing his sore fingers. Had it not been him, that shock would surely have broken some bones – but then, Sanji probably wouldn't have kicked him if he didn't know it wouldn't do any real damage.

"It's clear that he doesn't want to see your face, plus I'm not crazy enough to let you take care of any food meant for someone else."

What was supposed to be the problem there? Luffy would only confirm that the food really was
good before giving it away, and tasting was the best way to find out if it was.

"But I wanna see him," he whined.

"Sit down and start eating!" Sanji snapped.

All right. Never had Luffy refused from eating if he was told to do so, but the situation still pissed him off. Even though the food was one of his favourites, he found himself constantly glancing at the empty chair on which Law should have been sitting. No one was talking much, so this had to be one of the dreariest breakfasts ever.

Sanji came back soon, without the tray and without saying anything.

"Is he okay?" Luffy asked.

"Quiet and grumpy – seemed exactly like himself," Sanji answered.

On Sabaody Archipelago, where Luffy had met Law for the first time, he hadn't thought that 'quiet and grumpy' was the best way to describe Law. Now it fit. He hadn't thought of it before hearing Sanji's words.

Two years ago Law had seemed to be more ready to smile, a kind of amused smile of an observor; nowadays that smile was nowhere to be seen. His posture and the whole of his being had been a thousand times more relaxed than it was now, his humour less biting.

Luffy really would have wanted to know what Law had been doing these years. Must have been something really awful, because it had made Law seem much more aloof and kind of... strained, like he never relaxed even for a moment. That couldn't be healthy, and as a good doctor Law should take care of himself better.

A lot of things had time to happen in two years. Luffy knew he had changed while being separated from his friends, and they had changed, too. He watched their faces; all of them had grown in some way and became stronger. Franky had built his body to be much bigger and more robot-like, which was the coolest thing ever. But the thing Luffy was most curious about was what had happened to Zoro's eye. Luffy wouldn't ask. Zoro would tell if he wanted to; in other words, they would never hear a word about it. In any case, the scar was very manly and Luffy liked it.

So, it was to be expected that Law had also changed in some way. But his changing had taken a path that didn't feel completely good and right. Not smiling; that kind of thing was never right.

Luffy told himself to stop useless thinking; he didn't even like thinking, so why would he do it now. Law might just feel lonely, and probably missed his crew dearly. Even Luffy himself was a bit more quiet, if he had to go through a lot without his friends.

But still, they were here for Law, so there was no need for him to feel lonely. If that was the case, closing himself in the infirmary seemed like the stupidest thing he could do.

"Is he angry?" Luffy asked. That would explain avoiding him, perhaps.

Sanji sighed, patting Luffy's shoulder while passing by. "I don't think so."

"Maybe more like in shock?" Usopp guessed.

"What else were you expecting, after yesterday?" Nami asked. "You can't just blurt out wanting to marry someone and expect them not to be surprised."
"I was also so surprised I couldn't believe my ears," Brook said. "Even though I have no ears!"

"I realized just then that I wanna do it, so I told it right away," Luffy said.

Most of his friends pressed their face into their hands, groaning like they were in pain.

"I had thought what –"

"You were thinking?" Nami interrupted.

"I do sometimes!" Luffy did his best to avoid it, but sometimes there was no helping it. Like when he tried to understand why Law felt different. During his journey he had gotten to know many people who were easy to call friends, and there was always that moment when he needed to say goodbye to them – their paths crossed each other and separated and he was left waving his hand, hoping to see them again; that was the natural course of things. He never liked saying goodbye, because he liked his friends, it would have been awesome if he could spend eternity with them all, but...

He had never wanted to keep someone from going as desperately as now. If he imagined their arriving to Zou, where Law's own vessel was waiting... He wanted to cling to Law's coat to prevent Law from going away, and that was stupid, because Law was a captain and they both had their own things to do, and Luffy knew it quite well. Still the thought of saying goodbye like he used to, it made him feel like he had fallen into the sea, sinking slowly towards blackening depths without any hope of being rescued. He just didn't know why, or what to do about it.

He had been about to ask for advice, but hadn't decided who would be his best choice. Robin was smart and felt like she always knew everything, so she was a good option, but on the other hand Zoro's advice was easy to get and reasonable...

And then, that conversation had happened yesterday, making it all clear. He had remembered exactly how uninteresting that idea of marrying Hancock had been, thinking that maybe he really wasn't the type to marry; it had never felt like an appealing idea. Law had been sitting opposite him, listening to the conversation and absent-mindedly spooning his dessert, and – Luffy remembered suddenly thinking something along the lines of 'It might be so nice if I could marry him' – and there it was, pieces falling together, he realized that was exactly what he wanted to do.

This was that special way of liking; loving, which made a marriage sound like a warm and right idea. Of that Luffy was sure. That was the reason why he had to constantly glance at Law and why his heart was racing madly every time they were close to each other.

When the others had claimed he would never like anyone like that – well, he had just gone and said it. Having everyone present was actually handy, this way he didn't need to repeat himself.

But he hadn't expected Law going 'in shock'. He had expected Law saying yes or no.

He didn't say 'no'.

That, at least, was a good thing.

~*~

A story of a plague epidemic at West Blue, narrated by a nameless coeval, didn't feel as interesting as Law had thought. He was lying prone on the bed, trying to bury himself in a book in order to not think too much, but he found concentrating hard. This really wasn't his day.

He didn't remember when was the last time he had felt like this was his day, but this sucked
particularly badly. Sleeping had been even shittier than usually, then nightmares and a nocturnal bout of anxiety, a reminder of Flevance, and on top of that a claim that Luffy was serious. There was about three components more than he could take in at once, now he was unable to even enjoy his reading.

If he imagined those villages and cities, deserted because of the plague, and heaps of bodies piled in carriages, he was suddenly in Flevance again. People dying from poisoning everywhere. Lami. Grown-ups desperately searching for a cure. The fact that he would never live old enough to reach puberty.

Life could be surprising once in a while.

But he didn't want to think about it – why the heck he had mentioned his birth-place to Sanji? To shock Sanji enough to make him stop asking useless questions? Or was it just to be a prick and make Sanji feel foolish? It seemed like Law had succeeded in that, at least. He was sooo proud of himself once again, definitely one of his finest moments.

He couldn't stomach the book about plague right now, thus closing it and taking the next one from the pile. It was a catalogue of different dangerous diseases you could catch on tropical islands. Its illustration was lively realistic and absolutely charming, with all due loving irony.

There was a knock on the door. He didn't feel like getting up and opening, even though his back would appreciate changing his position occasionally.

There was a shy tone in the knocking, and it sounded like it was coming from low; it had to be Chopper. Law almost considered opening the door, because tolerating Chopper wasn't difficult, but on the other hand he would probably get a lecture he didn't particularly want. He already knew all too well everything he was going to hear.

"Law? I'm coming in," Chopper said, waiting for a moment and then pushing his key into the keyhole, really making his threat come true.

Of course the little doctor had the key to his own infirmary. Law gave a heavy sigh, letting his forehead fall onto an utterly appetizing picture, which was demonstrating symptoms of terminal phase of cobrafever.

Chopper's took some light steps towards the bed, stopping right next to it. "You're not looking well."

"I'm sure of it," Law admitted. Perhaps he should have got up, pull his mental walls back in their place, and distantly tell that he was doing just fine, but he couldn't find enough energy to do that.

He had lived only for revenge for so long, it felt like it had been the purpose of his life. Now it was done, and there were moments when bothering to do anything at all felt useless. Ever. Why, for whom, just fucking why he was still alive?

"What's wrong with you?" Chopper asked. "Don't say you don't know. You've probably already made a diagnosis? Or if you haven't, tell me the symptoms, and we'll figure it out together."

Law sighed again, turning on his side to stare at the wall. But that was the tone he knew all too well and he had very personal experience of how stubborn doctors used to be, if they got a clue that someone needed help. This was a battle he had lost in the moment he had chosen staying in bed over going to open the door, pretending to be chipper.

It would be easier to answer straight away than tolerate the flood of questions that was to come if he didn't answer. Thus, he muttered something about post-traumatic stress and chronic insomnia, that
were all too happy to worsen each other's symptoms. He didn't mention his other diagnoses. They
didn't have anything to do with this phlegmaticness, he knew how to deal with them.

That was one of those things he had just had to learn.

Chopper jumped to sit on the bed, using Law's back as a backrest. Had Chopper been a human
being, it would have been really awkward and disturbing, but Law had already noticed that he didn't
mind Chopper being close enough to touch him. Ot the contrary, actually. It might have a lot to do
with the fact that, honestly speaking, Chopper looked like a stuffed toy. Plus, Law had gotten used to
Bepo ages ago.

He missed Bepo, who was the best and most relaxing backrest ever.

"I have some sleeping pills," Chopper said.

Of course, a doctor of Chopper's calibre always had some sleeping pills at hand. Law hadn't
expected anything else. Usually he had some, too, because he knew himself, but getting stuck on
Punk Hazard for such a long time had made his storage run empty. Caesar and Monet weren't
exactly what you'd call relaxing company, and Law wasn't masochistic enough to tolerate them
while being dead tired all the time.

"But that is just a short-term solution for the worst –"

"I know," Law growled. "I'm a specialist in this field, with first-hand experience. I'm not expecting
some magic pill taking the problem away for good. But it might have a miraculous effect on my
mood if I managed to catch a tolerable sleep once in a while."

"Doctors are the worst patients, don't you agree?" Chopper asked.

"Indeed."

"Then you probably also know that isolation isn't good for you. You should come to the deck, to the
company of others, and do everything that is normal."

"Nothing aboard this ship is normal, ever."

Chopper snickered. "Might be. You know what I mean."

And Law did. The Straw Hat pirates were so crazy company that he didn't have time to think too
much, wallowing in his own mind, and that was a healthy thing. Sometimes he even felt a slight urge
to smile at some particular madness. He could go on, would go on, of course, he knew it quite well
despite being lost momentarily.

Right now he still felt like a marionette whose strings were suddenly cut off. That might be a good
metaphor. He had spent so many years trying to wrench himself free of Doflamingo's strings, to have
them suddenly gone was a shock. The reason that had kept him moving had ceased existing, and
now he was a limp pile of limbs in a tangle, cut off strings full of knots. Remembering how to walk
would take some time, finding out where he exactly wanted to go even longer.

"So, why are you staying in?" Chopper asked.

Law didn't have a clue how to deal with this situation with Luffy, that was the reason. If he went to
the deck, Luffy would be there. Wanting to speak with him, perhaps. Then he would really start
thinking about Luffy's words and wonder if it ever was possible –
He was so not going there, period.

"Are you mad at Luffy?"

"What?" Law yelped.

"He thinks you are."

"Of course not." Was being mad at Luffy even possible? Law had never experienced that. He was constantly frustrated, irritated, impatient, every emotion of that kind, but never angry. There was something in Luffy that made being mad at him impossible.

"Why are you avoiding him, then?" Chopper asked.

"Just don't know what to do."

"Maybe you should talk with him about it?"

"Maybe I should... but I don't feel like I'm emotionally ready for that and I don't want to think of it right now."

Chopper was silent for a long time, feeling as a warm, light and relaxing weight against Law's back. Law thought he might be able to doze off like this.

"But if this prevents you from being out, you should deal with it," Chopper said finally. "Because isolating yourself --"

"Thanks for caring, but I'll get by until we reach Zou if I only manage to catch some sleep sometimes. I'll start dealing with my messes once I get back to my sub." It was an unbelievably tempting thought; all of those familiar faces, his own books, exactly what he needed.

The silence radiating from Chopper felt heavy. He definitely wasn't pleased with Law's answer. Finally he changed the subject nonetheless. "Is your arm still hurting?"

"Not much."

"I want to have a look at it."

"I already did this morning – it looks exactly the same as yesterday. Nothing to see there." The only visible evidence of the ordeal was stitch marks where the limb had been sewn back, and even they seemed to be many years old after the miraculous healing. But the arm felt like it still remembered being cut off only a few days ago, pain nerves didn't agree to settling so soon after a shock like that. The pain was still less disturbing day after day.

"All right. But if it gets worse --"

"I promise to let you take care of it if it gets worse, doctor Chopper." Law didn't believe he would need to keep that promise. The arm felt like new except slowly lessening phantom pain.

Chopper hopped from the bed, insisting that being acknowledged as a doctor didn't make him happy at all, even though he was wiggling in delight at the same time. Being so easily pleased and delighted must be nice.

It felt like absolutely nothing pleased Law. He had reached his long-term goal, fulfilling Corazon's wish at the same time, and to top it off, a very warm-hearted and pretty good-looking man wanted to marry him. And these things equaled him wanting to bury himself in bed and not getting up ever
again. There was just too much to deal with at once.

Something was put onto a shelf that was fastened to the wall beside the bed, pulling him out from his thoughts. That something had made a promising rattling sound, so he turned so as to reach out for it.

The thing was just what it had sounded like – a small glass vial, half full of pills. He felt his eyes widening as he saw the label. The medicine was damn good stuff. "Thank you." He really, really meant it.

"You look like you need it. But dare to overdose and –"

"Won't happen," Law promised. He wasn't willing to tolerate side effects very often, but it was very soothing to know that tonight he would be blissfully knocked out for ten or twelve hours, knowing absolutely nothing of the world. That should break the worsening circle for a while.

"Well, I'll go now." Chopper sounded hesitant.

"Yeah."

"You really don't want to come to the deck? The weather is beautiful. And we're going to catch loads of fish for Sanji..."

"I'm quite comfortable here." Law hoped Chopper would go already. This conversation made him feel like a sulking brat shutting himself in his room, it was absurd.

"All right then." The door of the infirmary was opening.

Law turned to his book to continue learning about tropical diseases, but the book wasn't on the bed any more. Neither was the pile of books waiting for their turn.

Chopper was practically swaying under the weight of the books he was carrying, inching out of the door.

"Hey, bring them back!" Law said. "I haven't read even half of them yet."

"They're mine."

"True, but you lent them to –"

"If you want to read them, come and get them!" It looked like Chopper was about to stick his tongue out before shutting the door.

Well damn. Now Law was forced to either step to the deck to get his reading material back or stew in the infirmary without anything to do, and the latter was a sure way to end up thinking too much. On the other hand, there was the problem on the deck he didn't want to face yet. Perhaps he would be more willing to do it tomorrow, after finally catching a proper sleep.

He was tempted to open the vial, deciding that fuck the sleeping schedule; he wanted to get some sleep right now. There were moments when you just couldn't take it anymore. But had he done that, he would wake up at midnight, staying awake the whole night. It didn't sound particularly tempting, he had already had enough of lonely nocturnal moments, anxiety squeezing his chest in an almost concrete way.

At daytime the ship was full of sounds, and despite being loud and irritating at times, they were also comforting. If the yells that could be heard through the walls were any indication, fishing was going
well. At least Luffy and Usopp were there, supposedly, maybe sitting on the railing.

Law really couldn't understand how Luffy was able to sit on that railing in that careless way he always did. Law himself would never have done that, and neither would many other Devil's Fruit users; it was perfectly normal to stay away from places where you could fall into the sea so easily.

He didn't want to think of Luffy, but now his thoughts had already run away.

Luffy didn't have any kind of self-preservation instinct, and maybe that explained how he was able to say whatever he was thinking. Without pondering if it made him vulnerable.

'I wanna marry Traffy.'

If Law tried to accept that Luffy might be serious and thought about it... it was clear that they would make the worst and most incompatible couple ever. Their whole philosophies of life were incomprehensibly far from each other, and it was absurd to imagine their thing could work otherwise, either, what with such a fundamental difference in attitude.

However, the most important thing was Law having absolutely no intention to even try to find out if it could work. He wasn't going to give this thing any kind of chance. He didn't want to have a relationship with anyone and he didn't intend to love anyone ever again. That was what he had decided thirteen years ago; figuratively speaking closing his heart to be kept safe in a box, and he couldn't even find its key anymore. And he didn't want to.

It was worrying that he hadn't remembered this reason earlier, as the first one. He had spent too much time pondering an issue in which there was nothing to speculate – almost toying with the idea like he secretly liked it. That kind of idiotism needed to stop right now.

The answer to Luffy's insane idea was an absolute, unconditional 'no'. Too bad that he needed to see Luffy to tell him.

Law buried his face into his pillow, wishing against all his expectations that he would doze off for a moment, and concentrating to feel really miserable. It was so much shit that he was almost delighted when there was another knock on the door.

The knocking was light and polite, so there was no way the person behind the door was Luffy, who would probably have been happily shouting 'Traffy' in between his pounding to get his attention. And if it was not Luffy, Law had no reason to not open the door.

Robin was standing there, smiling slightly.

"What is it?" Law asked.

"I got a paper cut in my finger, so would you mind bandaging it?" Robin raised her hand, and there really was a red scratch in the side of her forefinger.

"Chopper is on the deck, isn't he?"

"Yes, indeed he is. But this is an infirmary, is it not? And there's even a doctor present. Are you going to let me bleed to death or get a blood poisoning, doctor Trafalgar?"

Law gave a heavy sigh, slapping his palm on his face for a moment, but stepping aside nonetheless so as to let Robin come in. He showed his patient to sit down and washed his hands; then starting to open some of Chopper's closets – all of them were awkwardly low, forcing him to bend his back uncomfortably. It seemed that Chopper kept his equipment neatly organized, though, so Law found
some antiseptics, cotton balls and band-aids easily.

He sat in Chopper's work chair, wetting a cotton ball with antiseptic solution and getting to work. The wound was just how you could expect small paper cuts to be; very neat and the bleeding was already slowing down.

"What is it you wanted to say?" he asked.

"What could you possibly mean? I was turning the page of my book carelessly, and then this happened. I didn't want any unnecessary risks -"

"If someone is able to bleed to death from a wound like this, I'd really like to see it."

"How sadistic of you," Robin said. Her smile twitched a bit wider and even more enigmatic.

Law couldn't help answering that smile with one of his own. Some light and dry exchanging of words with Robin felt always easy, so he didn't hurry with the wound, letting himself be pulled along. "That's no news. The newspapers and newscast broadcasted ages ago that I'm a sadist. And a lunatic and a psychopath too, of course. I'm looking forward to what they decide to cook up next."

"I'm sure you're not nearly as bad as your reputation indicates to, but you have surely worked hard to seem as bad as possible." Robin was back to serious.

"No, I'm even worse."

Robin shook her head. "Making people scared of you is much easier and feels safer than letting them close."

Law didn't answer because he couldn't come up with a witty argument, and he didn't wish to confirm a guess that hit too close for comfort.

"I've been thinking that way myself, so I recognize that kind of behaviour when I see it," Robin said.

Law decided to change the subject, having covered the wound with a band-aid. "One month of absolute rest in bed, books strictly forbidden in future in order to avoid serious injury like this, and if that hand starts turning green, it needs to be amputated."

Robin gave a soft laugh, pulling her treated hand into her lap, but didn't make a move to get up from her chair. "Furthermore, Luffy wouldn't like you, if you weren't a good person somewhere deep down."

Law had so known that Robin's ulterior motive was to talk about Luffy. He wished he could object, saying that Luffy's judgment wasn't to be trusted; what with that naive dolt liking everyone, believing anything, refusing to see there also was darkness in the world... but Law knew the objection wouldn't be true. Unfortunately.

Whatever kind of primal instinct Luffy used while forming his opinion of people, it was sharp as hell. He hated two-faced people, tyranny and things like that – hated people like Doflamingo and Caesar more than anything, and Law whole-heartedly agreed with that.

And maybe Luffy wasn't so wrong when it came to Law, either, even though Law tried to hide that fact from everyone. For Robin was right – being feared was easier.

"Flattering as this is, unfortunately I'm not looking for a relationship, and I don't feel like I need one."
"Sometimes the thing you don't even dare to wish for is given to you out of the blue."

"How deep."

Robin didn't look affronted when Law shot the words down. Apparently she felt like she had given him enough to think for now, because she got up. "Thank you for bandaging. Do I need to be scared of that blood poisoning?"

"I assume you mean lymphangitis. And I don't think so, unless that book was particularly dirty." Law felt the corner of his mouth lifting.

"You wouldn't believe how dirty it was." Robin had her playful smile again.

"Enjoy your reading, then."

"I thought that books are forbidden from now on?"

Law snorted with laughter, starting to put the equipment back to the closets. Now he had even more to think than earlier, but this little conversation had still cheered him up a bit. "You wouldn't have needed an excuse to speak with me."

"Maybe not, but I'm allowed to have my doctor fantasies, am I not?" Robin winked, smiling, before gliding out of the door.

Law could have done without that mental imagery. He quickly reminded himself of all the reasons for never getting intimate with intelligent women; noticing that the list was still valid. Good, now he was able to abandon these images into a figurative box with a label 'some potential jerk-off fantasies but nothing more'.

Of course he also knew that Robin wasn't serious, not even half-serious, just some flirting to lighten the atmosphere. Too bad that he seemed to be more receptive to that kind of thing than he usually was. Maybe it was because he had been forced to notice how long time he had gone without getting laid, or perhaps it was just his crappy mood, screaming for some brief human contact, a moment of connection with someone even if it was only physical.

It was dangerous to have emotions like these; he had imagined training his mind better than this.

And now his loneliness in the infirmary without any incentive felt even more unbearable.
I thought it will take more time to finish this chapter, but last night I just felt like working with this. So I did that. :D

Law stepped onto the deck, trying to look like he hadn't spent half a day sulking in the infirmary. He didn't have a clue what kind of reaction he would cause by showing up, but at least some curious glances were to be expected.

It was afternoon, and he couldn't take having nothing to do by himself anymore; he missed even that book about plague. He had managed to convince himself that there was no need to even think about Luffy's words, because 'no' was a perfectly adequate answer. Now, knowing what to do, he was pretty ready to face the reality again.

The weather was unexpectedly nice; cool and partly cloudy, and even waves were smaller and gentler than usually. Law thought he needed to buy a new thin coat to replace the one with Corazon mark, which had been shot full of holes.

His appearance didn't cause a great chaos, which was a relief. Robin and Brook were playing chess by a small table while Nami was watching their game – there was a group Law could imagine joining in, after thinking a bit more. Chess was an interesting game and he had gone too long without playing it. Robin waved her bandaged hand to him, smiling slightly.

On the other side of the deck were Luffy and Chopper, trying to catch fish without any remarkable success. They didn't seem to notice Law at all. Usopp was steering. Others were nowhere to be seen, but if Law had to take a guess he would have said that Zoro was look-out, Sanji in the kitchen and Franky tinkering somewhere. They were pretty easy to predict.

Law sat on a bench circling around the mast, placing his sword to lean against his shoulder comfortably, and just enjoyed being there. It felt nice to be outside and with other people again, even though he chose to keep his distance.

His gaze started to wander towards Luffy so quickly it was alarming, assessing him in a different way than ever before. It had never occurred to Law to look at Luffy in sexual light, but surely he needed to at least take a good look at his candidate for fiancé – even thinking of that word made him want to burst into hysterical giggles, because how surreal was this thing?

Realizing he wanted to take that look was unnerving, it pointed to Law not being as sure of that 'no' as he wished.

He had gotten used to seeing Luffy as that irritating, naive and overenergetic ally whose antics made him fear he would grind his teeth in two because of sheer frustration. And as a guy who surprisingly got serious at the right moment, became a trustworthy backbone, and saved the day and his life, whether he wanted it or not.

But there was more to Luffy, now that it had occurred to Law to look. He had never appreciated how proportionate Luffy's body was; despite his strength Luffy wasn't overly muscular, instead he
was slender and wiry. That was more than fine with Law. He wasn't picky but he did have some preferences, and he didn't want to have too intelligent women or too beefy men.

Luffy's posture was exuding extreme self-confidence and easiness, feeling that he was exactly like he wanted to be and didn't give a shit of what other people were thinking of him. He did whatever he pleased and was as noisy as he pleased, and it never occurred to him that as an adult it would be embarrassing to play in slide, screaming in joy. Law, for his part, would prefer dying to trying out that slide, even though Luffy had tried to push him down twice already.

Then Law made a mistake and imagined how that kind of enthusiastic and natural uninhibitedness could manifest itself in bed... and he had to admit warming up a bit.

Too bad he was still going to say 'no'. They weren't talking about having fun for a night, this was a matter of serious and long-term commitment. Law had never imagined ending up in a situation where he needed to even consider such a possibility. The longest time he had ever spent with someone was one week. Despite being eighteen years old at that time, and pretty much more romantic than he was now, he still wouldn't describe that thing as a 'relationship', more like an unfortunately prolonged coincidence.

Luffy turned to look back, not seeming to be a bit surprised because of seeing Law. Like he had already known Law was there and watching. Probably that was the case, what with all of that Haki—Law wanted to bang his head against the mast for not having thought of that.

Law was going to refuse the marriage and that's why he didn't particularly want to get caught staring at Luffy's ass. That sent a somewhat mixed signal.

Having caught Law's gaze, Luffy flashed a smile wide enough to reach his ears, placing his fishing pole to lean against the railing and hurrying to sit on the bench beside him. As usual, Luffy didn't respect the personal space of other people at all, sitting closer than Law considered suitable. Their legs weren’t quite touching each other, but it was a close call.

"Traffy," Luffy said.

Law mumbled something. He really wished that Luffy would bother to use his given name instead of stubbornly butchering the last one. At least he had managed to make the other Straw Hats stop using that terrible nickname by threatening them with dismembering, but Luffy was immune to his pleas and threats both.

In theory it was refreshing to meet someone who wasn't the least bit scared of him and didn't consider his reputation disturbing at all. In practise it was sometimes really annoying.

"You haven't shown up the whole day," Luffy said, and his eyes were very big, dark and sincere while he studied Law, uncomfortably close.

Law answered with an ambiguous noise, because what could you add to a fact like that.

"Are you angry or sick?"

"Neither. I needed to think."

"Oh," Luffy was watching Law for a while, silent. "What were you – hey, were you thinking of that thing I said yesterday?"

"... Yeah," Law admitted.
This was the point in their conversation where Luffy would burst laughing and pointing at Law with his finger before revealing it was a joke after all. Wasn't it? Some gullible fool Law was, being almost ready to buy such an absurd fat lie.

"So, what do you say? Shall we get married?" There was such an intensive, expectant look on Luffy's face it was almost scary.

_He's serious. He's really completely, one hundred percent serious._

Law had tried to make himself believe this since speaking with Sanji in the morning, but apparently he really hadn't believed it until he had to. There was no way Luffy would be able to play that look, and Law wasn't prepared to this, not really.

Luffy really thought it was a good idea to marry him. Law, for his part, thought it was the most terrible idea ever. It would be more merciful if they just stabbed each other to death right now, it would happen sooner or later anyway.

"Traffy?"

No.

Law opened his mouth, but his vocal cords felt like paralyzed. Feeling the weight of others' gazes on his skin didn't make him feel much better – of course everyone on the deck was staring at them, and he couldn't even blame them for their interest. Some epic bad romantic drama was surprisingly sufficient entertainment during a long journey, if there was a chance to follow such a thing.

"I... I need to think," Law said. Wanting to bang his head against the mast again. Why wasn't he able to say one word with only two letters, which was very easy to articulate?

"Still?" Luffy sounded stupefied. "You've been thinking since yesterday – how long can it take?"

"Things like this require some time."

"But you're really smart! You should think quickly then, right?"

... Wow. Law couldn't even begin to describe how desperately helpless this kind of absurd logic made him feel. He didn't even know how to argue with it, because there was a grain of truth in theory, it was just perfectly off target.

"I didn't even have a clue that you like me... like that," Law said, grateful that he managed to find something sensible from his brain.

Luffy looked at him like he was an idiot. "Why else would I want to marry you?"

"Sometimes people have other reasons for getting married than love." Even though Law knew this wasn't a case like that. Luffy didn't seem like a guy who would use marriage as part of his scheming, plus, he wouldn't achieve either money or status by marrying Law. No matter how you measured it, Law was a poor choice.

Especially poor indeed, if you happened to go for that 'love'.

"People like that are stupid," Luffy said.

Law tried not to snort with laughter. There was something very refreshing in that blurt, despite him not agreeing completely. Marriage arrangements of certain type were nothing but sensible, even
though they weren't far from human trafficking, and that was something he couldn't stomach. Still there were people who didn't have other options. And yet he had to admit that an idea of a marriage without feelings was... stupid. Had the world been an ideal place, a concept like that wouldn't have existed.

For a small and scary moment he thought he understood the way Luffy's brain worked. Then his own did a screeching emergency braking, tying itself into such a knot that he needed to close his eyes, breathing deeply and massaging his temples to collect his wits.

Fact number one: Luffy liked him like that. Fact number two: due to fact number one, Luffy wanted to marry him.

He only needed to say the feeling wasn't mutual, and this surreal problem would be cleared for good.

But that was the biggest problem. He didn't have a clue what he was feeling. His reason had made its decision ages ago, but awakening instinct had grabbed its arm, clinging with all of its strength to slow it down. Stopping him from being too hasty. It was apparent that his instinct didn't agree with his reason, suggesting it might be a good idea to observe the situation with a bit more open mind.

This was stupid. He was simply too tired to think clearly today, that was it. They could continue this discussion tomorrow, after Law had caught a proper sleep and gotten over his shock.

Luffy poked Law's arm with his finger. "Traffy? Hey?"

This was one of the things Law needed to consider carefully. Not even his own crew dared to be this familiar with him. Or maybe they would have dared to do it, but they knew how much he hated it when people – meaning 'human beings' – got too close, touching him friendly. They respected it and gave him his space.

So why the fuck he wasn't sorely tempted to murder Luffy, or at least cut off that intrusive finger?

It was really abnormal. But as exhausting as Luffy's company used to be, it also had a calming effect on him. Maybe it was the certainty radiating from Luffy; that whatever happened, it would somehow be all right in the end – and even if it wouldn't be all right, you couldn't change a thing by worrying. The most important thing was now.

Law would have been inclined to consider Luffy's attitude as fluffy dreaming of a fool who had lead a sheltered life, if he hadn't seen Marineford with his own eyes. But he had seen it and thus knew that Luffy had gone through his personal hell. It was staggering that Luffy still was capable of smiling widely so easily, but it looked like he had decided to indulge himself in the moment even more completely than before the incident; to live his life in a way that left no regrets.

Law's own remedy was to turn cold and cynical. He didn't even try to be happy, he aimed at making sure he wouldn't get even unhappier than he was. That was why he calculated everything so carefully, choosing moves that came with the smallest emotional risks. He couldn't say that his remedy tasted good, but it had kept him alive and kicking so far.

Luffy was prodding his arm even more persistently than before.

"I said I need to think," Law growled. "So don't bother me."

Luffy huffed, pulling his hand away. "You're no fun."

"No, I really am not." There was no use denying a fact, Law completely agreed with Luffy's claim. "I wouldn't make a good spouse, either." It felt like his instinct was strongly against uttering a certain
two-letter word, but perhaps Luffy would give up himself if he realized how awful Law was. That should suit his instinct – it would be a good proof that this thing wouldn't work anyway.

"That's not for you to decide."

"Huh?"

"You don't get to say what kind of spouse would be good for me," Luffy clarified. "That's for me to decide. And I want you, Traffy."

Law felt like he had just been knocked out.

This was just too much to take in at once, he needed to get some distance between them, because it seemed like his brain wasn't functioning near Luffy at all.

"I'll think of it," he muttered, escaping towards the group playing chess.

"You think too much!" Luffy shouted after him, but didn't follow.

Nami, Robin and Brook didn't bother to act like they hadn't been staring at their exchange of words. Law felt like some entertaining circus number, but at least they didn't insult his intelligence and power of observation by assuming he hadn't noticed their curiosity.

He took a collapsible chair and sat on it to watch the gaming board. Robin seemed to be very close to winning. Brook had played well, too, and their game appeared to have been a long one – there were very few pieces on the board left, both of them had lost most of them.

"You seem quite confused," Robin pointed out.

Was that some miracle? Law didn't want to comment. "I'd like to play, too."

"You can challenge the winner." Robin checked with her bishop.

Brook moved his king to a safe square, but started to be in big trouble. The game continued mostly in silence, and Law tried to predict Robin's moves to get a bit more familiar with her tactic before experiencing it himself.

Nami was watching the log pose attached to her wrist more than the board.

"Is there something wrong with our course?" Law asked.

"No... The right-hand needle has gone completely crazy, but that's not the one we are following." Nami stretched out her hand so that they could all see what she meant.

Law was familiar with log needles being anything but steady in the New World, oscillating back and forth according to crazy changing of magnetic fields, but this was insane. The needle that was protected by the right-hand little bulb wasn't only oscillating, it was spinning uncontrollably, changing the direction once in a while. "What the hell...?"

"I've never seen anything like that," Brook said.

"Me neither," Nami said. "Nor do I want to know what is causing that. It can't be safe. In other words – not a word to Luffy. He'd want to find out what is it, thinking it looks like an adventure."

Law could believe it, nodding. "I want to get to Zou as soon as possible, no detours."
"Some special reason to want to get off this ship soon?" Robin asked, smiling.

"A marital spat?" Brook suggested.

"I won't get married," Law said. "Not to him, not to anyone else either, ever."

"Did you tell him that?" Robin asked.

"... No, I didn't."

"Why not, if you're so sure?" Nami's smile was very crafty and disturbing.

"Or maybe the thing is, you're not so sure after all...?" Brook suggested.

Law thought he might have overestimated his will to spend some time in company by playing chess. Escaping into the infirmary started to sound appealing, at least there he wouldn't be teased because of his situation.

"There's hardly a reason for you to look so sour, mr. Trafalgar. I'm sure everyone could use a bit of romance," Brook continued and then made an indignant noise when Robin suddenly finished the game with a clever move with her rook. "Yo ho ho, it seems I never win Robin... it's your turn to try, mr. Trafalgar."

Law realized he preferred Luffy's nickname to Brook's, as hard as it was to believe. They turned the gaming board so that it was between him and Robin, starting to arrange the pieces again.

Chopper had apparently gotten enough of poor luck with fishing, for he came to follow the game too, climbing to watch from behind Robin's shoulder. Robin wasn't bothered by this – actually it seemed to Law they had some kind of symbiosis that was deeper than friendship. He didn't quite understand it but it might have something to do with both of them being bookworms.

"Good thing that you decided to come outside," Chopper said to Law.

"I'm slowly starting to regret it."

"You should know how important it is in your condition –"

"Professional confidentiality, doctor Chopper."

Chopper slammed his hoof in front of his mouth, looking extremely guilty. Too late – Robin, Nami and Brook looked way too curious, having heard a couple of words too much. Before anyone had time to ask what 'condition' they were talking about, Nami's eyes were widening and she hurried to cover the log pose with her other palm, especially the wildly spinning needle.

That was all the warning Law got before Luffy leaned his elbow on Law's shoulder, stretching over it to take a look at the gaming board. Way too close if you asked Law, even if Luffy thought it was normal to use whoever as a friendly support.

"Are you gonna play with Robin?" Luffy asked. "Are you any good? Robin is, no one ever beats her. I wanna watch!"

"You understand chess?" Law asked. It was a mindboggling thought.

"Not at all! But I know it's bad if your pieces get captured."

"A-ha." That made sense. Law would have been surprised if Luffy had enough patience to learn
how to move the pieces, not to mention any kind of tactic. "By the way, do not lean on me."

"I am, too."

Law took a few very deep breaths while pondering his options. He could make an escape using his Power, but it would seem ridiculous and on top of that, cowardly. He could start arguing with Luffy, but it didn't feel like worth the bother, plus it wasn't a very dignified option, either. Thus he was stuck with the third option, enduring it.

Not that the warm weight leaning on his shoulder actually was unpleasant, despite Luffy having a sharp elbow. It was disturbing, though, and would surely make him lose his game because he wouldn't be able to concentrate.

It also would have been nice if Nami and Brook hadn't been laughing aloud.

Robin was certainly smirking behind her hand, but at least she tried to maintain some semblance of consideration. "Is it fine if I start already...?"

"Go ahead." At least playing would give Law something else to think than Luffy.

This was the first time the chess board had been dug out during the journey, leaving Law with absolutely no idea what to expect of his opponent. He decided to take a careful approach with the least amount of sacrifices possible, waiting for his chance for a surprise attack with some really unexpected piece.

Robin was doing the same, which soon got annoying, because there wasn't much room on the board. Luffy apparently got bored when the line of captured pieces wasn't growing very dramatically, slithering to lean against Law's back even more lethargically. Law tried to not care about a chin digging into his shoulder or a chest rising and falling against his back. It felt like it was too late to throw a fit because of the contact, because he had allowed peeping over his shoulder, but he hadn't imagined it would come to this.

He could only hope Luffy couldn't feel his racing pulse.

The game was played mostly in silence, albeit Brook commented that Law and Luffy looked 'very sweet' and Nami tried to inspire someone to bet who would win. Law refrained from slicing Brook's bones into one centimeter thick pieces and nobody wanted to lose their money, so the peace to play was soon back.

"Traffy?" Luffy asked, finally.

"I'm trying to play, Straw Hat."

"What 'condition' Chopper was talking about when I came?"

"Nothing." Law glared at Chopper, who sagged to hide behind Robin's shoulder so that only his horns were visible. The sight made Law sigh – it simply was impossible to be angry at that, even if he wanted to.

"I'm not stupid," Luffy said.

"I didn't say you are."

"I saw your face when you stopped him, it was 'something' for sure. You said you're not sick."
"I'm not. I didn't sleep well, is all." Law doubted whether this would be accepted. It was a surprise to notice how much attention Luffy was paying to all Law's doings, but maybe it was to be expected in this situation. He was forced to admit that Luffy's interest was a fact.

Robin checked. Law's game was going to hell and it was clear whose fault that was, but he managed to block the line with a knight for now.

"It's because you insisted on having a room only for yourself," Luffy said. "You should come to sleep in our quarters, then you don't need to be alone."

The whole point of having a room only for himself was to get to sleep alone. Law didn't think trying to explain that to Luffy would be worth it, Luffy sounded so sure that having company would have a positive effect on sleeping. Law also didn't want to get any deeper in topic 'Trafalgar Law and the case of chronic insomnia'. Maybe a more practical argument would be good. "There isn't enough bunks."

"That's not a problem, I'm sure we can both fit in nicely," Luffy said cheerfully.

Law was about to choke because of fit of cough. He had imagined hearing that Luffy invited him to sleep in his bed, but surely he had heard wrong because of his tiredness.

"Luffy," Nami breathed, eyes wide.

Perhaps Law had heard it right, after all.

"What?" Luffy asked. "They're pretty wide and neither of us is very heavy, so that's not a problem, right?"

The problem lied somewhere else altogether than in how much weight a bunk could take. Law succeeded in shaking so much sense into his head that he understood Luffy had made his offer without ulterior motives, just because Luffy thought Law would sleep better that way. Surely Luffy had nothing against sleeping side by side, not if the way he was leaning against Law now was any indication, but there was no way Luffy had thought the same thing as most people thought when suggesting something like that.

"Thanks for offer, but I think I'll stay in the infirmary," Law managed to say.

"Okay. If you sometimes want to –"

At that point Robin mercifully checked again, and Law got a good reason to stop this awkward discussion and concentrate on saving his ass. He had very rarely been as grateful for playing so poorly.

Probably the end of the game could have been worse, if you took into account that Law's mind was spinning like the log needle Nami kept hidden.
Franky shoved Caesar back into the storage room he had changed into cell, watching him sit on a thin mattress on the floor. There wasn't anything else in the room, except some books lent to Caesar. If you asked Franky, Chopper and Robin were way too kind.

Thinking of those children who had been used as Caesar's guinea pigs still made him want to cry every time. Hell, he did cry every time he thought of it, there was no helping it. Caesar didn't deserve anything as nice as a way to pass time, only a locked cell, Sea Stone cuffs and the most inevitable trips to toilet.

Even those inevitable toilet trips were starting to annoy him at this point. If each of them could have been equally responsible of their prisoner, no one would have needed to tolerate Caesar too much, but their situation wasn't that lucky. After they had ruled out women, chicken and those who were too easy to provoke, the end result was that only Franky, Zoro, Sanji and Law were suitable guards.

Law had offered to take double shifts, saying it was only fair because the whole kidnapping had been his idea. Now Franky was glad that they had unanimously shot the offer down and that the shifts were evenly divided between the four of them. Sure, the attempt to hog the responsibility was manly and admirable in itself, but truth to be told, the poor guy seemed to be on the verge of collapsing even without extra baggage like that.

In any case, Law had made sure Caesar wouldn't try to come up with anything funny to escape from the ship. Handling the prisoner was no trouble for them as long as he was wearing handcuffs, but none of them enjoyed it. Every time Franky saw Caesar's face he was tempted to strike it through the wall, and he wasn't the only one with such temptations, that was sure. All of them were fed up.

He took the last look at the face in question, letting his gaze circle the whole super securely strengthened room. Everything was fine, Caesar hadn't tried pulling out nails in order to get through the wall or any stupidities of that kind. Thus Franky slammed the door shut, locking it securely.

Busying himself with the Shark Submerge III might be a good way to cheer up. It had taken some hits when Nami and the others had been fighting against that artsy hag, but most of the damage had been fixed by him already. Actually it would be a good idea to try it out.

Franky was striding through his workshop towards the submarine hall and was about to bump into someone in the doorway. Both of them startled, stopping at the same time.

"I'm sorry. Wasn't watching where I was going," Law said blankly, turning sideways to get past Franky through the doorway.
Franky got in the way, grabbing the doorframe and blocking the passage with his arm. "I was just enjoying the company of our prisoner. In other words, it's your job to watch him taking a leak this evening, then."

"Lovely." Law's tone was so dry you could have dried paint with it pretty speedily.

"What is it you have planned for him? It seems the original plan pretty much went to hell."

"Do we need to talk about it right here and now?"

"So it seems, 'cause you haven't been super enthusiastic to have a proper meeting considering the issue." They had been sailing several days already so there would have been time, but Law seemed to have an annoying habit to withhold information. Now they had almost bumped into each other in such a handy way just when Franky was so fed up with Caesar, and he really wasn't going to let the chance of getting some answers pass.

Law stood completely still for a moment, sighing finally. "It was my intention, but I've kind of had other things to think about." He was squeezing his arm with his other hand, probably not even noticing he was doing it.

They had said that arm had been cut off, completely off. It didn't sound like much more fun thing to experience than crashing with a train – and did Franky very well know what a blast that was. His will to shake Law until some answers fell out felt like withering and dying.

"As long as you tell your plans before we reach Zou," he said. "It may be that we have something to say, too. Don't forget we're allies."

"I won't forget. I wish your captain would remember that allies is all we are."

Franky suddenly got insight of the reason Law probably was wandering in this part of the ship despite not seeming the least bit interested in workshops usually. "Hiding from Luffy?"

"That's my business. And I'd like to continue doing it, if there hasn't been any problems with Caesar that would need taking care of right now." Law bent his back, succeeding in slipping under Franky's arm and thus getting past him.

"Well, he isn't exactly in such a condition he could make an escape, right?" Franky asked. "Thanks to you."

Law was just smiling evilly.

"Whatever." Franky shrugged. "It's not my business if you ain't a man enough to face Luffy. In any case I have a submarine to try out right now."

He continued towards the hall, turning to look back, surprised when he heard the sound of steps following him. You couldn't mistake the sound of Law's heels.

"I'll tag along," Law said. His tone wasn't a question if that would be fine, nor was it a plea to get to be taken along; it was an announcement leaving no room for arguments.

Franky didn't care for one way or another; actually an opportunity to introduce fine engineering to someone who maybe appreciated it was always welcomed.

~*~
Law had heard the Straw Hats had a small scouting submarine in their possession, but he hadn't had a chance to see the thing yet. There was no way he was going to pass the chance to get below the surface for a moment. He might consider Franky downright disturbingly eccentric but they got along well enough, plus he really was hiding from Luffy – even more of the reason to go somewhere Luffy wouldn't come for sure.

Three games of chess with Robin and three bitter defeats. Law wasn't a bad player but he seemed to be a bit rusty, having gone too long without passing time by playing with Jean Bart or Vince. Now, having started to get a hang of it again, he thought he could win Robin, but only if it was a good day. Definitely not when he had been unbelievably sleep-deprived three weeks nonstop and Luffy was breathing into his ear.

Luffy apparently thought Law needed some cheering up after losing constantly, for he had out of the blue urged Robin to tickle Law. How that was supposed to cheer him up remained as a mystery. But Robin had really done it, despite fake apologizing and justifying her actions with captain's orders. Law didn't buy it at all, Robin had looked way too amused, having gotten an excuse to start teasing him.

A pair of hands had grown from the backrest of Law's chair, attacking his sides, and even though he wasn't very ticklish, it had been an extremely disturbing experience. Enough to make him teleport somewhere else.

Then he had bumped into Franky. Almost literally.

During their short walk Franky took his time to explain every technical subtleties he had built to Law, pointing at this or that structure of the ship. All that remained in Law's mind was that the shipwright clearly was very adept at his work. And more than a little conceited because of it.

Soon they were in the right hall and Franky proudly pointed at a small submarine, made to look like a shark. In its own way it represented precisely as bad a taste as the color of Law's own submarine, he had to like it in ironical way instantaneously.

"I'll check the fuel and some other stuff," Franky announced, starting to fuss around the vehicle.

Law nodded. It was always somehow relaxing to watch someone skillful working. He wasn't much of a specialist in technology himself, but his own sub was also full of all kind of engines, so it felt pretty homey here.

"What's that?" he asked, as Franky carried two small barrels to the sub.

"Cola."

Should have guessed. It seemed like Franky considered cola as universally applicable fuel for everything, including himself, and the most ridiculous thing was that it really worked. Law tried not to think of it too much. Trying to understand what kind of chemical reaction among the ingredients of cola might produce enough energy always gave him headache.

"How do you like this super Franky-design?" Franky was pointing at the window of the submarine; it seemed to be in opened mouth of the shark.

"... Nice." It was very special type of endearing; typical for things someone had seriously tried to make 'cool' but without succeeding. Law thought it would be wise not to voice it – what did it matter, the contraption was charming anyways. "Streamlined. Sharks have developed to move smoothly in water after all, so why not."
"That's what I thought, too." Franky seemed to be in a really good mood while filling the tank with cola. "I heard you have a submarine too, right?"

"Yeah. It's pretty much bigger than this, though." And damn, he missed it, and his crew especially. It felt like it would be a depressingly long way to Zou.

Franky was bombarding Law with questions about submarines while confirming his own was in working order. Law couldn't give as detailed answers as Franky probably wished for, because he thought the most important criterions for a vessel were functionality, being large enough in size, having high class medical equipment aboard, and as tasteless bright yellow coloring as possible.

*How* was that functionality achieved and what kind of engines the submarine used to balance itself... well, there were two technicians in Law's crew, it was their job to know stuff like that. Unfortunately that was the thing Franky would have found the most interesting, but all in all, the conversation was pretty pleasant. It kept Law's thoughts from wandering.

"Ready! Jump in." Franky was pointing at the open hatch, grabbing a baby snailphone then.

"What are you doing with that?" Law asked. He really wished Franky wasn't going to do what he thought it was. Of course it was stupid to wish they could just slip away without telling the others – he would never allow such idiocy aboard his own vessel – but he still didn't want Luffy hearing about their departing and deciding at the last second he wanted to come along.

"Reporting to the deck, of course."

Yeah, of fucking course. Law gave a heavy sigh. "Any possibilities we have time to dive before Luffy charges here?"

"Not very likely. Listen, I don't know what you're trying to do, but –"

"I am trying to get some space to think and relax for a while, is that such an exorbitant wish?"

Apparently it wasn't, because Franky thought better of it, deciding to make his report after getting into the submarine and ready to go, after all. There were three seats in the cockpit, but with Franky being so big it was pretty tight even for two. Law was eyeing the controls interestedly, not really listening what Franky was explaining via the snailphone; something about testing equipment and turning the gear to three.

Then the hatch that lead through the ceiling straight to the deck opened and Luffy jumped down. "Hey I wanna come, too!"

Law would have been growling and burying his head into his hands, if he hadn't been so busy with trying to close the hatch of the submarine before Luffy had time to jump in. He was too slow, and they both ended up pulling the hatch with all of their strength; Luffy trying to get in and Law trying to keep him out.

When it came to mere brutal physical strength, unfortunately Luffy would have beaten Law even in his sleep. Law's gaze was darting desperately around the hall, searching for anything he could swap to Luffy, and noticing Usopp who was peeking down from the top of the ladder.

Perfect. Law quickly let go of the hatch, causing Luffy to lose his balance when the resistance suddenly stopped. He activated his Room, swapping Luffy to Usopp – Luffy yelped in surprise, clinging to the ladder to not fall when he suddenly found himself almost in the ceiling of the hall, and Usopp was windmilling like he tried to fly while sliding downwards on the side of the submarine.
Law pulled Usopp into the sub before he had time to collapse on the floor, and closed the hatch. "Dive!"

"You sure it's a super great idea?" Franky asked.

"Now."

There was a circular opening on the side of the ship, apparently opened while Law had been fighting with Luffy. They shot out of it, sinking below the surface, and Law let out a deep sigh with relief. "When we come back..." Franky paused ominously. "If you're a man, you'll clean the mess waiting for us yourself."

"Luffy won't be happy," Usopp said, rubbing his nose, which he probably had hit somewhere in the middle of the hassle. "And who gave you the right to drag me along in this? You're as bad as Luffy, he's always doing these kind of things, it's outrageous—"

Law glared at Usopp, who fell silent like his voice had been cut with a knife. It seemed that some people were afraid of him still existed in the world.

He pressed the right spots above his eyes with his thumbs, taking a few very deep breaths to get his nerves back to control. The pressings could be felt as far as the back of his head, making his whole scalp tingle, but at least his tenseness settled some. "Hell," he said, commenting pretty universally everything. And just to make sure he added, "Fuck."

"Rough day?" Franky asked.

"Don't even ask."

The silence falling into the cockpit wasn't very comfortable, but at least it was silence. The submarine was smoothly cleaving its way deeper in the blue water, and somewhere behind them the cola engine was purring in a cosy way. For a while Franky was following a school of yellow and silver striped fish.

"So..." Franky finally began. "What was that previous thing supposed to be? Wouldn't it be easiest if you just talked to Luffy?"

"I already did," Law said. "It was... okay, I guess..." He was an emotional wreck because of it, but he was capable of handling the situation and trying to think what to do, trying to fully convince himself of the solution his reason knew was good. Definitely not any kind of relationship, let alone getting married.

"Yeah, I happened to see, it looked like you had fun—" Usopp realized he was speaking, slamming his hand on his mouth and trying to back off further from Law, but the cockpit was too small.

"Stop looking like you think I'm going to cut you in pieces and then find my latent cannibalistic tendencies," Law sighed.

"Why did you bring that if you're not gonna use it?" Usopp pointed at the sword leaning against Law's thigh.

Law shrugged. "It's kind of like a part of my body, being without it feels weird."

"Normal people are not even able of being without their body parts! Your Power's way too creepy! Take me back to the ship, I have a can't-go-to-a-submarine-trip-with-a-warlord-syndrome!"
"As a doctor I recommend some shock treatment to it," Law said.

"What happened, if it was okay and then you're suddenly avoiding him?" Franky asked, like Usopp hadn't interrupted at all.

Did they really need to talk about this? Apparently, because there was no way to avoid the others while being in such a cramped space, and Law didn't want to look like a completely hopeless bastard – they needed to at least get along somehow, for they intended to fight Kaidou together. He gave a thousandth sigh during a short time, rubbing his forehead. "He thought it was a fun idea to recruit Robin to torment me, and that was kind of enough."

"Ugh." Franky shuddered, jerking the controls so that the submarine made a little uncontrollable turn. "All right, I super understand the situation."

"Luffy's still not happy, being left out," Usopp pointed out. "He loves this sub."

"Who wouldn't?" Law asked. "I try to sort it out after surfacing, but could we maybe enjoy the scenery for now?"

"I guess..." Usopp still didn't sound quite satisfied for having been dragged along, but at least he didn't seem like he was expecting Law to spontaneously kill him. "Hey, doesn't it seem like it's pretty shallow here? How deep are we?"

"Two hundred meters," Franky told.

There should have been only blue deepening to black below them, but instead they saw an underwater mountain top pretty near. Law and Franky agreed it needed to be inspected closer – Usopp was screaming that the place looked like a nest of monsters, but didn't have any other option than coming along.

~*~

Robin was hesitating for a moment before approaching Luffy, who was laying on the figurehead as an embodiment of miserable mood. Luffy was sprawling prone, greatly resembling a dejected rug, spread and left out to dry. Usually only small children were capable of such intense and apparent misery, when they had been mistreated in a way they couldn't understand.

"Luffy?" Robin called.

The answer was an ambiguous noise.

"Do you mind if I come there?" She had a feeling Luffy really didn't want to be alone, but no one was crazy enough to step onto the figurehead without asking for permission. Luffy considered it as his personal throne, being unbelievably, childishly selfish regarding it, despite there being enough space for two.

Robin was almost hoping that Luffy would huff something about his special seat; that would have been normal behaviour, but no, the silence was her only answer. Luffy didn't bother to give way, but wasn't resisting, either, as Robin sat beside him.

"If you want to tell what's causing your distress, I'm listening." Robin wasn't demanding answers, only offering to be there, and she was perfectly ready to be turned down. Considering that Luffy was such a noisy fool always blabbering this and that, he kept silent about an amazing amount of serious matters; like he thought it was the captain's responsibility to endure such things by himself and not to bother his crew with them. Robin guessed he had never told anyone what he had gone through in
Marineford, for example, not even Zoro.

On the other hand, if Luffy had told Zoro, it meant that no other person would ever be any wiser when it came to it. Zoro was very good at keeping his mouth shut.

Robin settled on the curved surface as comfortably as possible, being forced to sit in contact with Luffy to not slide down. She knew Luffy didn't mind, though, maybe even appreciated it; Luffy was hungry for company and liked touching people. Even if Luffy wouldn't wish to talk, maybe Robin would cheer him up just by being there.

It was more windy here than on the main deck, which was protected by walls from two directions. There was only sea to be seen under the figurehead, creating a bit unnerving feeling like flying, but also explaining why Luffy thought the place was so fascinating.

"I wanted to go, too," Luffy said, having been quiet for at least five minutes.

"The Shark Submerge?" Robin made sure she knew what they were talking about.

"Yeah. I was going already, and it'd have been so much fun, but Traffy – he threw me away with his Power and took Usopp with them! It's so unfair!"

It didn't surprise Robin that Luffy's chagrin was caused by that incident. Luffy always found it a very bitter pill to swallow if other people were doing something fun, leaving him out. On the other hand, Robin supposed she understood perfectly why Law had done what he had.

"You really like him, don't you?" she asked.

"Yeah."

Hearing someone to admit it straightforwardly and without hesitation was a refreshing thing, for there were so many young men in love who had a tendency to get embarrassed, explaining away and circling around the issue, unless they were downright trying to dismiss their feelings. But this was something Robin had already came to expect from Luffy; honesty going so far it was awkward and clumsy.

"Why everyone thinks it's so terribly strange?" Luffy asked. "It's like, all of you think that I won't... I'm not able to feel like that, or something like that."

This was an absurd thought. Surely no one was thinking like that, all of them knew better than well how very deeply Luffy was feeling for his friends and how far he was willing to go for them. Especially after Enies Lobby had happened... Why on earth Luffy wouldn't be completely capable of feeling romantic kind of love, too? It was only a matter of him never before seeming to be interested in experiencing such a thing.

It seemed it only took the right person to make Luffy open his eyes.

"It was just so sudden," Robin said.

But it wasn't so very strange, now that Robin had had some time to think about it. Luffy was inclined to make his decisions quickly and instinctively, so this could hardly be described as uncharacteristic behaviour. And when it came to the object of Luffy's love, Law was charming, with his cold shell and thorns and all, or maybe it was because of them; why on earth it wouldn't be him who was chosen by Luffy?

Despite their differences there was something very much alike in both Luffy and Law, something
very basic that was the most essential thing. Both of them were persons who simply refused to give up before reaching their goal, and were ready to sacrifice themselves without a moment of hesitation if that was a way to save someone else. Law had proven it on Dressrosa.

Different sides of the same coin, or maybe more like a positive and a negative of the picture of the same scenery – and Luffy would definitely be the positive and Law the negative.

The more Robin thought of it, the more beautifully they seemed to interlock. Both of them had both brain and heart, and the ways they were using them were exactly contrary. Luffy was fully following his heart, trying his best not to bother his brain; Law, for his part, was overusing his reason and logic, trying with all of his might to not notice he had a heart, too.

"But I think you might make a good couple," Robin continued. If two halves were put together in the right way, it had all the possibilities to work wonderfully. Besides, she had a feeling that a lapful of Luffy might do Law much good.

"Doesn't seem like it's gonna happen," Luffy said. He still hadn't moved a muscle, looking more and more like a beaten rug as the time passed. Robin had never seen him down for such a long time, usually he couldn't stay in bad mood more than a few minutes before bouncing back like an elastic ball of rubber.

"It seems pretty plausible to me." Robin had had an excellent opportunity to observe Law while they were playing chess. Having Luffy so close didn't seem the least bit repulsive to Law, even though it was apparent how much Law was avoiding such contact with people – so much that a little tickling had been enough to make him disappear altogether. Very enlightening. "If he didn't feel anything, he would have said no already."

"If it's not 'no', why doesn't he say 'yes', then?"

Robin gave a sigh. Law seemed to be a person who was planning things very carefully beforehand, reasoning what to do; and this kind of totally unexpected, spesifically emotion-related turn of events was probably throwing him completely off balance. Throwing Luffy out of the hall sounded like a sheer panic solution and desperate need to have some space. But how to explain that to Luffy?

It was hardly even her duty to try explaining, because this was Luffy's –

"You know what they say sometimes?" Robin asked, having had an idea.

"Well?" Luffy didn't sound like he cared, but apparently he had nothing better to do than listening.

"They say that love is the greatest adventure a person can experience."

At this Luffy got a grip of himself, enough to prop himself up on his elbows instead of just sprawling bonelessly. The hat prevented Robin from seeing his face, but he sounded thoughtful. "It's like an adventure, huh?"

"That's what they say." Robin didn't have much personal experience in this, but the metaphor felt sensible – there was excitement, successes and failures, being lost, conflicts, cold nights outside, supporting the other one, funny moments, and perhaps a treasure, too. "It might not be easy, but when have you ever wanted to have an easy and predictable adventure?"

"It's not an adventure if it's easy." Luffy was sounding cheerier already.

Robin was almost pitying Law. When Luffy got started with that attitude, nothing made him stop or give up. "But try to not push too much. I've gotten the impression he's the type who needs some time
to take in what's happening."

"Naaaaa... What am I supposed to do, then?"

"How about just being together before you start thinking about something as huge as getting married? That's the way people usually do it."

Luffy was thinking about it for a moment, then finally turning to face Robin. His smile was reaching to his ears. "Yeah. Thanks, Robin!"

"You're welcome." It was a relief to see Luffy in high spirits again, being depressed didn't really suit him at all. Besides, the situation would be extremely interesting to observe.

~*~

There wasn't any monsters on the mountain top, only a city, looking like it had sunken centuries ago and was now ruined and taken over by seaweed and starfish. Law had managed to talk the controls to himself, piloting the sub slowly between the tall, thin towers. Their walls were covered with starfish and sea urchins as a milling carpet made of echinoderms.

"This might explain the log needle gone haywire," Law said. The sunken island might very well be magnetic enough to cause the disturbance.

"We have a log needle gone haywire?" Usopp asked.

"Yeah. Nami showed us earlier today."

"And you didn't tell the others?"

When you put it like that, it sounded pretty bad. "Nami thought it would be best not to inform Luffy."

"It might be a wise thing to do," Franky admitted. "But he's the captain nonetheless. How would you like it if your crew neglected to tell essential things?"

"That's not the same thing, because I wouldn't be charging straight away –"

Usopp interrupted. "Both of you are just as arbitrary. Maybe you deserve each other."

"Ouch."

"Was that needle pointing down towards this place?" Franky asked, after the silence had continued a little too long.

Law shook his head. "It was spinning uncontrollably, changing direction randomly."

Come to think again, the disturbance couldn't be caused by this place, not according to any kind of logic Law was able to understand. But on the other hand, a sunken island right here was way too big a coincidence, those things needed to be connected somehow, no matter what their exact causality was. He didn't even imagine he understood every phenomenon in the New World – no one was able to do that.

"In any case it doesn't seem like we can continue our journey very soon," Franky said. "Not now, having found this city."

Law had already been fearing that, settling for a heavy sigh.
"I'm sure Robin wants to see the architecture of this place," Franky said.

"Nami wants to see if there's any treasure to be found here," Usopp said.

"And nothing can keep Luffy away for the second time, I suppose," Law said.

Both Franky and Usopp nodded emphatically, and then Franky dug the snailphone from the breast pocket of his shirt, contacting the ship and telling them to stop.

Law was wandering along wide streets of the city, counting octopi who took fright because of headlights and flashed to hide with their tentacles stretched out. The place seemed completely lifeless and safe, but at least it was relaxing to be below the surface again, and this submarine was really light to control. There was always a special kind of silence in the dephths despite the sound of engines, it almost was felt as tangible physical pressure, and there was something dream-like, surreal in it. Law wanted to drown in it.

He was unwilling to surface but didn't argue when the others suggested it. As appealing as procrastination was, it wouldn't solve anything.

They were slowly rising towards the surface, where it should have been more light instead of feeling like they were moving through diluted ink. It seemed the evening had started to darken, hinting that they wouldn't continue sailing before tomorrow. Not if Luffy and some others wanted to go and inspect the sunken city too.

One day more aboard the Thousand Sunny with Luffy was a turn of events Law really hadn't wished for. At least he was going to get some sleep tonight, that thought made him feel slightly better.

"You're not looking very glad," Franky pointed out.

"Do I have any reason to?" Law asked. And he really didn't want anyone answering that question, because he knew he had. Doflamingo was arrested and on his way to Impel Down, that should have been enough to make Law grin like a lunatic. But he had other things to think about, way too much other things. And perhaps he still had some bones to pick with Doflamingo, despite everything.

"Hey, Luffy's not so bad!" Usopp said. "I mean, yeah of course he's completely crazy and gets everyone into trouble at least once a day, and he knows how to be totally weird, but... he's also one of the best guys you can ever meet, and after he's decided he likes someone there's nothing he wouldn't do –"

"I'm aware," Law interrupted. The color of water was changed to purplish by evening twilight, and the big fish moving in shadows started to swim towards the surface too, slowly gliding by the border of headlights. "I would never have proposed an alliance to him, unless I already was well aware of it at that time," he added, quietly. "That's not it."

"What is it, then?" Franky asked. "You do like guys, don't you?"

... Wow. Law had ages ago pegged Franky as a hopeless and eccentric pervert, but even then this was too intrusive. Had he felt like talking about it, he would have wanted to know what the hell had lead to Franky making that assumption; not that his bisexuality was a great secret. "Guys too, yeah."

"So...?"

"I just don't want to have a relationship, period! Stop asking questions concerning this issue, or it might happen that I'm going to find those cannibalistic tendencies after all."
"Sounds super kinky," Franky said.

Law felt like banging his head against the control panel, but he might hit some button that was best to leave alone.

They were coming closer to the surface, it was only about ten meters to go. They could see the bottom of the ship swaying on the waves, and Law was steering towards it so as to surface beside it. He took a deep breath, trying to get ready for anything.

"You two go straight to the deck and tell the others about the city as I take the sub into the hall," Franky said.

They broke through the almost calm surface a couple of meters away from the ship. Usopp pushed the hatch open, climbing on top of the submarine, and Law was following him.

They had been seen already, for Robin was lowering the rope ladder from the deck. Nami and Chopper were waving their hands as a greeting, and Usopp was wildly waving back, seemingly eager to get back aboard the ship. And something was catapulting from the railing towards Law, screaming something along the lines of "Jiaaaaah! Traaffyyyy!" That something was wearing shorts and a straw hat.

"That idiot!" Law huffed, and couldn't help thinking that this sentence had been one of his most used ones after allying with Luffy.

What on earth could make any Devil's Fruit user practically jump in the sea? There was no way Luffy could imagine even for a moment that Law would catch him or something like that; the dolt had sped up so much that the kinetic energy would push both of them in the sea if he tried it. Especially while standing on a narrow and unstable surface, like on top of a small submarine. Even Luffy had to realize that much, right?

Law stepped aside to avoid the collision, and a surprised noise escaped Luffy as he realized he was flying over the sub at this rate. Using his Power, Law pulled Luffy to him before he had time to splash into the waves.

Something really made a splashing sound. Law realized too late that there hadn't been need for him to do anything – someone had already been up-to-date, diving in to save Luffy from the sea.

"Wah! Thanks!" Luffy was fumbling to have a footing on a slippery metal surface, managing to balance himself by grabbing Law's arm. "That scared me." The comment wasn't very convincing as Luffy burst laughing after it.

Law detached Luffy's fingers from his sleeve. "Why the fuck you didn't wait on the deck?"

"I've been thinking stuff so I wanted to ask im-"

At that moment a spluttering Zoro surfaced, and with him a shark's dorsal fin that was at least a meter tall. The fin was circling around Zoro in a way that indicated to the rest of the shark still being attached to it, and quite hungry for prey. Law was glad to have his sword with him.

"Luffy!" Zoro shouted. He looked like some kind of a grumpy sea troll, treading water and with his hair wet. "If you force me to jump after you, you could have fallen in for real at least!"

"Sorry!" Luffy answered. "Didn't mean to. But it seems you found an evening snack!"

"So it seems."
Perhaps it was Luffy's waving that had caught the shark's attention, for suddenly it became very interested in the submarine. In a romantic sense. Apparently the shark considered the design of the submarine much more realistic than Law did, trying to inch towards the submarine, rubbing itself against the side of the vessel.

It was too weird to stand on a submarine while an amorous giant shark was trying to court the vehicle in question. Luffy wasn't stupefied, though, instead knocking the shark out with a snappy strike with his fist. "What are you trying to do to my sub, you stupid barbeque steak!"

Law would have wanted to know what the fuck was going on here. Or, come to think again, actually he didn't want to know. In any case it was extremely disturbing.

"Who wants some shark barbeque?" Luffy asked.

Several arms were eagerly raised on the deck, like there wasn't anything abnormal in this incident.

Law felt like being mentally unbalanced even after climbing onto the deck. He had been prepared to speak with Luffy, but he hadn't been prepared to Luffy's insane catapulting, a grouchy soaking wet swordsman, or a barbeque steak wanting to copulate. Which was stupid, because incidents like this seemed to happen at least every other day with the Straw Hats.

"All right, what was it you wanted to ask?" he asked Luffy, as the shark had been pulled right beside the ship and Sanji had calmly started butchering it for food. If this was the question about getting married once again, Law would throw Luffy overboard. Then Zoro would be free to save Luffy by all means.

Luffy didn't blurt his question right away, opting to look Law in the eye. Luffy had to tilt his head backwards in order to do so, and the gesture made him seem confusingly cute. "Have a dinner with me?" Luffy finally said. "Like, just the two of us. I wanna talk to you."

Law had been expecting anything but that. The suggestion was so stunningly sane and normal that it took him some time to understand what he had heard.

"Well?"

Dinner for two sounded suspiciously romantic, and definitely like something Law shouldn't be doing. On the other hand, it would be a good opportunity to have a sensible discussion with Luffy, and finally put an end to this idiotism that was not growing between them, thank you very much. He would find out what was going on in Luffy's mind and thus manage to properly explain why he was a really bad choice for the object of affection. And he himself would understand that he really wasn't interested at all... and, well, the food cooked by Sanji was always delicious.

"When?" he asked.

"Tomorrow." Luffy was pointing at chunks of shark meat thrown onto the deck. "Tonight it's barbeque party."

"Fine. I'll have dinner with you tomorrow, but it's only a conversation, not a date." Law's mouth was left hanging open as he noticed Luffy hadn't been listening him to finish.

Luffy jumped high in the air, hands raised over his head, whooping in joy. "A date! A date with Traffy!"

*Good grief, WHAT am I going to do with that one!?*
Several Straw Hats were congratulating Luffy for their coming date, encouraging him to do his best, grinning and patting his back and being annoying in so many ways. Law was hiding his face behind his hand, wishing he could just cease existing.

"You saved him."

Hearing the voice startled him. It was Zoro, who had gotten a towel somewhere, drying his hair after his diving.

"Wouldn't have bothered with it if I had known it was your job," Law said.

Zoro was scrutinizing him from head to toe, it felt like he was seeing more with one eye than most people with two. Finally Zoro gave a short nod. "Fine. You'll do."

"What?"

"You can date Luffy."

"What?" Law repeated. Someone really needed to tell him what the fuck was going on here. "Does he need your consent to such a thing? I'm under impression he's the captain."

"He can do whatever he pleases." Zoro shrugged, being ominously silent for a moment. "And I'm going to cut everyone who hurts him while he's doing whatever it is he pleases to do."

That was actually pretty threatening. Law smirked; nothing restored his balance and wits more efficiently than the good old sense of danger. It anchored him pleasantly in the midst of all madness, making him feel more like himself. "Oh? I take it you're threatening me?"

"No. Just telling I'm watching your back. Got it?"

"Clear as water." If Law didn't do anything suspicious to hurt Luffy in one way or another, he could count on Zoro to have his back like he had his captain's. If Law did... Zoro would be the first one trying to kill him because of it.

Luffy had found a fine right hand man, so it seemed.

Law didn't have any intention to get attacked by Zoro, even if he had confidence in his capability to beat the man. He had no intention to hurt Luffy, but it didn't mean he had an intention to fall in love, either. He wanted to be in easy, comfortably distant, civil terms with Luffy, but it started to seem like a difficult thing to achieve.

How on earth that absolute, unconditional 'no' had been turned into this mess?
In the morning Law felt like he had been sleeping for eleven hours, knocked out by a potent sleeping pill – in other words it was like his brain had been put into a freezer for a night and it wouldn't consent to waking up from a coma for several hours; like his head was going to split open because of aching so much; like he didn't dare to even imagine grabbing a razor before he had drained a double portion of coffee, granting him some kind of control of his movements. He felt like a reptile sluggishly waking up after hibernation.

He was slouching into the kitchen, well aware he looked like a walking corpse, and tried to not cover his ears as a chorus of infuriatingly chipper voices chimed good morning.

"You look like you've crawled out of a grave," Usopp pointed out.

"No he doesn't," Robin said. "Moria's zombies seemed to be much more alive."

Law smirked, completely unamused. "Thank you very much. I thought it would be a good idea to be at my best today."

Luffy was merrily waving to him, saying something no one could understand, because he had apparently pushed a whole filled baguette into his mouth.

Law didn't believe this was a good image, considering the coming dinner this evening. And who was the damn sadist deciding that filled baguettes were a good breakfast in the first place, ever, for anyone? Baguettes were bread. He hated it.

Sanji had apparently heard Law's comment, for he took a look at the undoubtedly considerable bags under Law's eyes, then at Luffy, whose cheeks were puffed because of the amount of food like a greedy hamster's. "I really can see you're trying to make as good impression on each other as possible."

"Even if I wanted to make a good impression, it'd be too late to start pretending already," Law said.

Being on Dressrosa had definitely revealed him at his very worst, he couldn't have made any worse impression even if he had tried for real. Actually it had started on Punk Hazard already. He had managed to seem egocentric, vindictive, weak, ridiculous, cold, crafty, uncooperative, absolute prick – and the worst thing was, he knew the impression was the truth, that was exactly what he was seeing while looking in the mirror.

And despite all his scheming and selfish revengefulness he managed to be such a weak idiot that the whole plan had been undermined. Luffy had needed to rescue him, and he had thanked for that by threatening to kill Luffy.

Not that the threat had had any effect on Luffy, he just ignored it, galloping through half of Dressrosa, Law thrown onto his shoulder.
Fuck, that particular memory was so humiliating.

Even after all of that had happened Luffy apparently was capable of liking him, which was a completely uncomprehensible idea. It would be no use for Law trying to be a jerk in the hopes of making Luffy lose his interest – there was no way he could come up with anything that would make him look worse than the things that had already taken place.

"That's a good starting point for a relationship, actually," Brook said. "Not only an act showing your best sides but who you really are."

That might be the case indeed, but Law didn't want to think of it even for a moment. "I don't want a relationship." He turned to glare at Sanji, who was spinning from behind the kitchen island towards the table, a plate on each of his hands. "Nor do I want a baguette –"

A plate was set in front of him, with an aesthetically arranged assortment of everything the baguettes were probably filled with, and luckily there was nothing resembling bread. That would do better than well. A cup of coffee curbed his last will to complain about food.

"Well, what would the two of you like to eat this evening?" Sanji asked, glancing at Luffy and Law.

"Meat!" Luffy answered. No one was surprised.

Law shrugged. "Some kind of food, I guess. I won't complain as long as there is not bread or umeboshi in it."

"You could have been a bit more specific," Sanji huffed. He was grumbling about impossible extra work all the time he was carrying the second portion of baguettes to the table – you should think of a poor cook a bit, do you know how much work a romantic dinner is, and to top it off, Luffy doesn't even know how to appreciate wine –

"Don't mind him," Nami said to Law. One of the needles of the log pose around her wrist was still spinning randomly, and she didn't try hiding it anymore. It was hard not to stare at its erratic movements if you got lost in your thought. "He's overenthusiastic, having gotten a different kind of challenge for a change, and has inspiration overflow."

Law hadn't minded at all, but nodded nonetheless. He hurried to drain his cup of coffee in order to get more. His brain started slowly resuscitating thanks to caffeine; after the second cup he might feel like he was closer to being alive than dead.

Luckily for Law, the topic was changed to the program of the day, where the most important thing seemed to be investigating the sunken city waiting below them. Like they had guessed yesterday Robin wanted to see the ruins, Nami take a look if there was any valuables to be found, and Luffy simply was chasing some exciting adventure. Others weren't interested in taking a look, so they probably could continue sailing in the afternoon, or tomorrow at the latest.

All of this suited Law just fine. It would be peaceful on the deck while Luffy was investigating the depths, so Law could pass time comfortably by leaning against the mast, reading some book. In the evening he would be refreshed and relaxed, having had time to shake himself properly awake; in other words in optimal mood for tolerating the dinner with Luffy. He also would have some time for visualizing how to explain simply, politely and assertively that a relationship between them would be the worst idea in the world.

"All right, it's decided!" Luffy called out as the plan had been decided. "Franky, get the sub ready to go right after we've eaten."
"Yup."

"Sanji, make lunchboxes for us!" Luffy said.

"You've just eaten! How long are you supposedly staying below the surface? I'm busy, forced to cook for your fluffy date!"

"But it's not an adventure if there's not a lunchbox involved!"

Law took back his earlier thought about possibly being ready to spend some time with Luffy in the evening. He would never be ready for such a thing. What kind of fucking absurd logic that was supposed to be, once again?

"Fine, I'll make something for you." It seemed Sanji didn't have energy to argue with the impossible one.

"Yayy, an adventure!" Luffy was waving a whole filled baguette until his gaze caught Law and he got serious unnaturally fast. "You like adventures too, Traffy?"

"Um... I guess?"

The answer had Luffy flashing a face-splitting smile at Law and Robin laughing softly. Something in their looks made Law feel like he had succeeded in saying something that had him fucked head over heels. He just couldn't imagine what it was. Surely liking adventures wasn't a very strange feature for a pirate? There were certain kind of... risks involved with the occupation.

"It's gonna be really exciting," Luffy said.

"What? The submarine trip?" Law felt like he didn't understand the discussion at all even though he apparently was part of it. "I don't think so, the place was absolutely lifeless, there wasn't even –"

"Not that, the date! I've never been on a date. How about you?"

That depended on the definition of a 'date'. It seemed that it was considered to mean a planned romantic meeting with a certain person, aiming at forming or strengthening a relationship. If that was the case, Law supposed he had never been on a date, either.

He wasn't going to admit it to anyone, nor was he going to explain what was his usual style for finding company if he happened to feel like it. Especially not while being in this slowly dissipating stupor caused by sleeping pills.

He gave a heavy sigh, massaging his temples. "Straw Hat. I've already said many times it's only a dinner and a conversation. Not a date."

Luffy was like he hadn't heard at all, a real model example of selective hearing.

Sanji lit his cigarette, blowing out a heart-shaped smoke ring. "If you're asked out in a romantic sense, it's a date."

An annoying amount of Straw Hat pirates were nodding in unison just to be as irritating as possible. Law tried not to see them, concentrating on his coffee which deserved all of his attention.

"You're pretty gloomy, considering there's a date coming," Franky pointed out. Usopp and Nami tried not to laugh aloud. "Don't say you were staying up all night long, dreaming of –"

"I slept like a log," Law interrupted, not wanting to hear the teasing even for a moment anymore.
There weren't many times he had a chance to use this sentence without lying.

"Honestly, you don't look like it," Nami said.

No, that was exactly what he looked like. It was only a matter of waking up being a brutal task after he had managed to sleep properly, meaning abnormally much when talking about him. Unfortunately he needed to catch that compensating longer sleep at some point even by force unless he wanted to snap.

He didn't have strength to explain even a word, at least not before lunch. Besides, his head was aching, he shut his eyes for a moment, massaging his temples.

"Got a headache?" Chopper asked.

"Yeah." It happened almost every time.

"Take something that seems suitable from my cabinet."

"Thank you." Law forced himself to smile at Chopper, just because there was at least someone who had some sense and consideration.

"You need to be at your best on that date," Chopper added, giggling.

"Arh, just jump into the sea, all of you. It's not a date!"

It would have been nice if even Law himself had been able to believe it.

~*~

It was half an hour before the agreed time of the date when Usopp dragged Luffy into their sleeping quarters in order to give him some last minute advice and make sure Luffy really was at his best. Most of the crew had thought someone definitely needed to do it in order to avoid a total disaster, and somehow the task had fallen on Usopp's shoulders. He had taken the bait as Sanji had been pondering aloud who was that resourceful young man capable of doing it, as Sanji himself was too busy to leave the kitchen.

Usopp had been puffing out his chest, telling to leave the problem to him, the Great Captain Usopp knew everything about dating and had dated at least eight thousand ladies –

Yeah, right. All of them very well knew he had never been on a date in his life, he only had a too big mouth and he couldn't not open it at the very worst moment. And thus he had an absolutely impossible task in his hands.

Luffy glanced in the mirror on the wall, dropping his hat to hang off his nape, groping his hair with his fingers a couple of times, and grinning at his mirror image widely. "Yup. I'm ready."

"No you really are not. Don't say you're going to wear those clothes?" Usopp asked.

"Why the heck not?"

"I thought you're serious!"

"I'm serious, seriously. Why can't I be it while wearing these?"

Usopp had to pull his hair for a while before taking another look at Luffy, who looked – exactly like Luffy. His red shirt was unbuttoned, blue shorts were so worn out they seemed to fall apart at any
moment, and then there were those ragtag sandals... Sure, Usopp hadn't believed in managing to
make Luffy wear one of Sanji's suits for the event, but this was even worse than he had imagined. It
had been his expectation that Luffy wanted to try at least, his speech about getting married and
loving had been passionate enough a couple of evenings ago.

Usopp sighed heavily, trying to put his words so that they wouldn't just pour out of his mouth as a
chaotic mess. "A groomed appearance sends a message you appreciate your company –"

more if I wear something I hate? Isn't it more like an insult?"

Damn. Usopp didn't have any idea how to deal with this kind of logic. It was justifiable despite its
peculiarity, but so badly against manners that logically speaking you should have been able to argue
with it. "But good manners –"

"Besides, Traffy already said it in the morning. That it'd be too late to start pretending. It's a stupid
thing to do anyways."

"Fine, feel free to go as you are and see if you manage to charm him enough to get another date! But
to me he didn't seem very delighted, having to do it even once, so you should use this chance wisely
and make some effort!"

A charged silence was hanging in the air way too long, making Usopp shift on his feet restlessly.
Finally Luffy took another look at the mirror. "These are my favourites..." He was tugging his sash, a
gesture that would have seemed like nervous twitching if someone else had been doing it. Because
Luffy's nerves were nowhere near normal, he probably was more like lost in thought. "You think he
really cares that much?"

Truth to be told, it didn't seem very likely. Besides, Usopp had seen how meager Law's luggage had
been as he boarded their ship, and apparently he had done with it on Punk Hazard for months. In
other words, Law definitely wasn't carrying anything unnecessary with him taking up space, the least
of all an ironed tuxedo just in case of some idiot happening to invite him to a romantic dinner. And
Law definitely wasn't trying to make a good impression on Luffy, so he would probably slouch on
the date as he happened to be – wearing jeans and a hoodie, the sword on his shoulder, and without
even bothering to straighten his posture which was awful at times.

Come to think again, they started to sound like a good couple. Like they deserved each other. And
clearly Luffy was right at least when he said that clothes didn't matter.

"You could put on some new shorts at least," Usopp suggested. He wanted to make at least some
difference now that he had ended up as an advisor.

"Oh, these were worn out? Didn't notice."

Usopp was shaking his head, but luckily Luffy went to rummage his wardrobe to find a bit more
presentable pants nonetheless. There wasn't anything else he could do for the benefit of Luffy's
appearance, so next step would be his manners. That would require a lot of work.

His personal opinion was that it was an extremely bad idea to have a romantic meeting while
enjoying a meal, because Luffy had absolutely no control when it came to food. "Try not to empty
the whole table, got it? And no stealing from his plate."

Luffy pulled black not-very-worn shorts on and did his sash again. "Is this better then?"

"Much." Usopp nodded, having looked at Luffy from head to toe. The color of the shorts wasn't
clashing with the shirt, which was good. And undeniably the cutting of that shirt was pretty flattering for Luffy, so it was no wonder it was his favourite. "But were you listening what I said? Do not steal from his plate. Only the two of you are going to be there, so there's no need for you to fight for food."

"I wonder what Sanji has been cooking? I bet it's really good..." Luffy got lost staring at nothing, seemingly ready to drool.

Usopp grabbed Luffy's shoulders, shaking him. "And do not do that! You're supposed to listen when your interlocutor is talking. Don't fall asleep if he's saying something, is this clear?" Law probably wouldn't give very long speeches in any case, you could imagine that even Luffy could maintain his interest for that while.

"I listen if someone's saying something interesting," Luffy said.

"You mean my advice is not interesting?"

"Yeah."

Fine. Usopp crossed his arms, falling silent, because the advisor apparently wasn't needed. According to the clock it was twenty minutes before the date.

Luffy flopped down on the couch, pulling the hat to cover his eyes. "Wake me up when it's time to go."

"You're going to sleep? Right now?"

"Yup. Have to be at my best, right?"

Usopp didn't have time to answer before Luffy's breathing was evening to that light rhythm of a sleeping person. He could just wonder what kind of nerves Luffy had, being capable of falling asleep in this kind of situation.

He himself would have been nervously shaking jelly before his first date with just anybody, let alone a guy like Trafalgar Law. If you asked Usopp, Law still was damn scary and creepy. After everything that had happened he didn't believe Law would backflip and betray them at any moment, but that didn't mean he fully trusted the man, either.

And there was no way he wanted to have an experience like yesterday ever again. Being shut into a cramped space like a submarine with an obviously bad-tempered Law had been an oppressive experience, like Law's intensely cold presence had a mass that was weighing Usopp down, preventing him from breathing. It had felt like a cranky iceberg. He thought it was a middle-sized wonder he hadn't been cut in pieces – unfortunately the more nervous he was, the more he was babbling nonsense, and that tended to annoy people who specifically wanted to be in peace while in sour mood.

It was bad enough that Luffy went and allied with that kind of guy. Did Luffy need to get romantic for the first time in his life, too?

Despite having a lively imagination Usopp couldn't see either Luffy or Law doing anything genuinely romantic, not even so much as getting caught looking tenderly into each other's eyes. On the other hand, he hadn't been able to imagine many other things he had already seen during their journey, so who knew.

Mostly he was just wishing for the potential couple not disagreeing so badly that they would end up
fighting. Both of them were perfectly capable of splitting the whole ship with single strike, if they
lost their temper badly enough to forget where they were.

Luffy woke up by himself two minutes before he needed to, stretching his arms and saying it had
been a good nap. Before they started towards the kitchen, Luffy took one last glance at the mirror,
straightening his sash – perhaps he had nerves after all. Kind of.

Usopp made it his business to usher Luffy all the way to the kitchen door, because if it was Luffy,
anything could happen if someone wasn't keeping an eye on him. They arrived at the door pretty
much at the same time as Law, who looked exactly like Usopp had imagined. Jeans, hoodie, flat
expression, and that sword leaning against his shoulder.

"There you are, apparently," Law said to Luffy. Probably he would have looked happier if someone
had just came to inform the ship being on fire.

Luffy answered with a laugh and a wide grin. "Open the door and let's go."

"Don't order me around or I cut you as appetizers."

Usopp covered his eyes. Why had he been thinking that Luffy and Law would manage to get into
the kitchen before a spat started? This would be sweet indeed, they resembled a shipwreck.

Luckily Sanji came to open the door himself, shooing the duo at the table. The scent wafting from
the kitchen immediately made Usopp really envious, but before he had time to complain how unfair
it was, Sanji loaded his lap full of lunchboxes.

"There's dinner for everyone else, eat on the deck," Sanji said.

Before the door was closed Sanji glanced at the table, then meeting Usopp's eyes in a way that told
both of them were expecting similar kind of shipwreck. What else this could supposedly lead to?

~*~

Law supposed the beginning of the dinner could have been worse. He felt extremely awkward,
sitting by the table opposite Luffy, and on top of that, Sanji had lit some candles on the table,
probably just to be as much of a jerk as possible. The first candlelight dinner in Law's life, ironically
with a person who cared of this kind of sentimentality as little as he did. It kind of made sense, for
irony clearly loved him as much as he loved it.

It was almost enough to force a smile out of him.

They weren't talking much during the first course – clam chowder – because Luffy was too busy
eating. Law had time to hope the whole dinner would go like that and he would manage in slipping
off without needing to really go through issues, but Sanji seemed to have some secret hellish plan to
prevent a trick like that. Waiting for the next course took so long he couldn't bear it without breaking
the silence.

Luffy didn't seem the least bit bothered by silence, he was serenely leaning back on his chair, hands
behind his head, not even trying to pretend he was doing anything else than looking at Law. Curious.
Thoughtful. The dim lighting in the kitchen made his eyes look really dark, the color of coffee.

Law couldn't remember having been the object of such overt interest in a situation that wasn't
downright sexual. It was awkward but not completely unpleasant; it made him feel alive like
situations where he was constantly pondering whether to draw his sword or not. Except that being in
mortal danger didn't have him swallowing this much.
He needed to say something half sensible before he snapped and asked dryly if Luffy was seeing something he liked. Or if there was something on his face. Any opening for a conversation would be better than *those* ones.

"Did you find anything interesting in that city?" he asked. As the group had came back from below the surface, he had been lost in a book in the infirmary, and hadn't asked about their findings later, either.

"Yeah!" Luffy straightened himself immediately, starting to gesticulate animatedly while telling about a ten meters long sea serpent that had seemed 'tasty', but for some reason Nami and Robin hadn't wanted to catch it.

As Law was prodding the explanation to the right direction with little questions he found out that the trip had been pretty peaceful. Robin had been explaining all kinds of things considering the buildings, it had gone over Luffy's ears immediately; and Nami had found a tiny chest and a couple of old vases. "They're really ugly," Luffy informed.

"They can be valuable if they're in good condition and old enough," Law said.

"That's what Nami was saying too."

"Did Robin have any guess about when the place has sunken?"

Luffy frowned as he was thinking, then suddenly his forehead unwrinkled again. "Yeah, maybe something like three hundred years ago?" He shrugged indifferently. "Were there tons of octopuses yesterday, too? We caught pretty much and put them into the aquarium. I hope Sanji's gonna make some takoyakis..."

Law sighed. If he wanted any kind of essential information, apparently he needed to ask the women and not Luffy, who considered the creatures of the sea much more interesting. There was something very childish but pretty cute in the attitude.

He wanted to pull his hair, having realized what he had been thinking. Luffy was *not* cute! Not at all. "Sounds like you had a nice trip."

"It was." Luffy was silent for a long time, staring at Law, frowning. "I still would've wanted to go with you yesterday."

Law was forced to change his position as on object of that stare. He had imagined that event was set aside now, as also Luffy had made it to his desired trip below the surface, but it had been a stupid thing to think. Today's trip didn't nullify the fact that Law had behaved crassly and hadn't even apologized.

"I apologize," he said, having stared at his fingers for at least half a minute. "I had no right to take your submarine but I needed some space."

"There's more space aboard the ship than in the submarine."

Law pressed his hand onto his face. This kind of simplicity sometimes was too much for him, but he reined in his need to gnaw the table because of despair, searching for some other words. "I mean I needed to distance myself a bit. I hate being pushed."

"Of course." Luffy nodded, serious. "We're pirates."

Law had to think for a moment before catching if the statement somehow was relevant regarding
their actual topic. Perhaps it was if Luffy intended to say that the oppressive rules of legal society didn't reach them and it was quite understandable to hate those. Or, the logic aside, he thought he somehow understood the core of the issue subconsciously.

"If you understand, don't do it yourself, then," he said.

"I haven't –" Luffy went silent in the middle of his sentence, blinking. "Am I doing it?"

"Yes."

An oppressive silence hung between them, which was mercifully broken by Sanji bringing the next course at last. It was even more merciful that Sanji restrained from commenting the awful atmosphere, being perfectly professional before disappearing behind the kitchen island again, taking the empty plates with him.

Law would have greatly appreciated it if Sanji had not worn an apron with a heart design. A pink one. It felt needlessly suggestive.

For a while the clinking of their cutleries was the only sound to be heard, until Luffy got out, "Sorry." His demeanor was reminding Law of a puppy who had happened to spill his water bowl while being too eager to play, and realized it himself, too.

Apologizing didn't lighten the atmosphere at all, Law was only feeling growing pressure to say something. And all he felt capable of doing was scrubbling his hair and sighing heavily.

He didn't even know if Luffy really had any reason to apologize. In fact, Luffy wasn't guilty of anything else than being incomprehensible and overly eager as a person, and there clearly was no helping it, for Luffy just was like that. It only became a problem at that point when it collided with Law's personality, which in turn was reclusive and slow to warm up. Whose problem that was, they could fight about that question to the end of the time and still not reach any solution.

An intimate relationship between them would really be the worst idea in the world.

"I just don't know what to do, for real," Law finally said.

"That's fine." Luffy was gesticulating like sweeping the whole problem aside. "I won't ask you to marry me anymore."

That sentence made the bottom of Law's stomach drop. His mouth fell open and all he could do was staring in front of him, completely petrified.

He should have been incredibly relieved. This was what he had wanted, wasn't it? The whole thing had been insane from the beginning and he had wanted an out. So, why was he suddenly feeling like Luffy had torn his heart out of his chest and stepped on it?

He tried to give a light laugh. "It's great that you came to see reason so quickly. We really wouldn't be a good match and I really wouldn't make a good –"

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, of course about you realizing we wouldn't be a –"

"That wasn't what I said!" Luffy emphasized his words by slamming the table so that the vessels were clinking.
"A-ha. Would you please deign to enlighten me; what the hell you were meaning?"

The air between them was about to blaze with a sudden tension, but after a short moment of glaring both of them were leaning back on their chairs. Shaking each other by their collars wouldn't improve the situation, but damn were Law's fingers itching to do just that.

"Was thinking stuff and talking with Robin yesterday," Luffy said. "It might be too early to think about getting married."

"Oh, tell me about it."

"I still want to, sure... But it's fine if you don't know. Robin suggested we could, like, just... be together?"

Law was frozen in his place again, trying to take in the new information. It was clear that Robin had succeeded in pounding some sense into Luffy's head, and Law didn't know how to deal with it. This thing starting to make sense meant that he had to take this seriously.

It was kind of soothing that Luffy wasn't demanding an unambiguous 'yes' or 'no' answer anymore. Both of them were problematic options, because the instinct lurking somewhere inside Law wasn't accepting the refusal and his reason definitely wasn't accepting consent.

Suddenly 'maybe' had turned into an acceptable option. He could try what it would be like, if he wanted to.

If he dared...

Even that wasn't so simple.

"I... need to think of it." Law couldn't give any other answer, no matter how frustrated Luffy surely was because of it.

~*~

Think, think, think. It sounded like it was everything Law ever thought of. Luffy thought that Law should rather stop thinking than do it even more, but he remembered the conversation with Robin yesterday, restraining himself with great effort.

He didn't want to push anyone, no matter how frustrating it was to wait. Sometimes adventures had points where you needed to wait, too. But those never were his favourite points.

"All right," he said. "Tell me as soon as you know, okay?"

Law nodded. He seemed really tense up to his expression and posture, and like he was facing some really big and difficult choice. At least as big as deciding if you should get a new ship to replace the irreparable one, even though everyone loved the old one.

How long time a smart person could use before reaching the conclusion that they liked Luffy? Law's face had shown it quite clearly as he had thought Luffy had abandoned the idea of them being together.

Law wasn't doing what he wanted to do, and that was stupid. But smart ones often were pretty stupid – it was like their thoughts took so many useless turns that you would have reached the conclusion already had you taken the straightest path.
On top of all that, thinking seemed to be contagious. Luffy realized he had emptied his plate already without noticing, just because he had tried understanding why Law was being difficult. Usually there was some reason... or at least some thing you thought was some kind of a reason... some of them were good while most were not. Luffy respected promises binding somewhere else, those needed to be kept. Not doing something you wanted to do because it was a custom or because some stupid people said you're not allowed to do it, though – he was quite ready to tear the world apart to make those kind of excuses crumble to dust; people should do what they wanted to. Law, too.

Luffy was ruefully looking at his empty plate. This was a new evidence of thinking being harmful, because it was a crime to eat so good food without enjoying it at all. He was determined to rectify that during the next course, but it didn't seem like Sanji was about to serve it just yet. So he settled more comfortably, just watching Law.

Law was leaning his chin on his palm as he was stabbing the last pieces of tomatoes with his fork. There was a deep frown on his face, like he was lost in some angry thoughts, making him look bad. He looked really nice like that, but Luffy wanted to make him smile, too.

"You remember when we were on Sabaody?" Luffy asked.

"It'd be pretty hard to forget the day I saw a Celestial Dragon get thrashed."

"You were smiling when I stroke him."

Law shrugged. "Might be. It wasn't a sight you see every day."

"And now you're smiling again." Luffy definitely wanted to see more of that look. Law's features were strangely softened by the corners of his mouth quirking slightly upwards, and Luffy wanted to stretch his arm over the table to feel Law's hair, ruffled in every direction, but apparently that wasn't suitable before Law made his decision. What a bore.

"What about Sabaody?"

"Don't know, it just came to mind. It was the first time we ever met."

Luffy was stunned by Law bursting into a dry fit of laugh, stifled as quickly as possible. "That's true. A pretty damn romantic first meeting. Should we consider it as a good sign for our potential relationship, perhaps?"

It was humour, Luffy picked it up from Law's tone. The kind that was biting enough to grind even rocks, and was never understood by him. He realized something was meant to be funny, but he never got where the joke itself was supposed to be.

"I think it would be a pretty good sign," he said, shrugging. "It'd be great to kick asses of Celestial Dragons with you, Traffy."

Law snorted, but the corners of his mouth were twitching fractionally upwards. "You're right, it does sound pretty fun."

After seeing that little smile it felt comfortable to just be silent, letting Law think if it was so terribly important. Luffy concentrated on memories about how fun it had been on Sabaody – well, it had been fun before Kizaru had arrived – and watching.

Sanji brought them some curry shark, deserving all of Luffy's attention. It was silent at the table for so long, it was a surprise to hear Law suddenly speaking.
"Straw Hat... why on earth me?"

Luffy lifted his gaze up from his plate, noticing that Law was watching him in turn. Law seemed so serious, clearly waiting for his answer. And that gaze was making his heart do somersaults in his chest and his skin tingle in a nice way.

Why Law...? He didn't have any idea. Law just felt right. Was the first and only person he had ever wanted, so he couldn't say he understood the feeling very well.

"No idea," Luffy answered. Smiling. "Do you need a reason for that kind of thing? I just love you."

~*~

Love?

The confession hit Law with the power and pleasingness of a cannonball fired straight into his chest at close quarters. He pushed his empty plate aside, slumping down onto the table, burying his head into his hands.

"Don't say that. Don't you ever say that," he said.

And Luffy had the gall to stretch his arm over the table, petting his hair carefully. The touch was very light, like Luffy was worried of breaking him. Which was way too late, because Luffy had already broken him with mere words.

"Traffy?" Luffy asked quietly.

Law was squeezing and pulling his hair with his fists, and Luffy's fingers were softly touching his own at times. There was something inside him that was curled up into a very small, pressing and aching lump, and he couldn't help thinking the last time he had heard those words, where and when it had been, and who had said them.

He needed to be alone to get a grip of himself but was so upset he didn't dare to use his Power to make an escape. It would have been his luck, accidentally teleporting outside of the ship into the ocean and drown. So he was just slumping by the table for a while that felt like an eternity, with Luffy petting his head like he was a frightened animal.

"Hey, what's wrong with you?" Luffy asked.

It might be that Law owed an explanation. Luffy had made a bold move by confessing his feelings straightforwardly – way too straightforwardly, and too soon, if you asked Law, but bold it was nonetheless. It wasn't fair to just collapse without explaining the reason.

He propped himself up on his elbows to be able to speak, but kept his eyes strictly at the tablecloth. And Luffy didn't pull his hand off his hair, it actually was pretty soothing in all of its warm steadiness.

"The last person who said..." Was it really necessary for his voice to sound this strained and ready to break? This was hurting too much. "Said that they loved me... died. Right after that."

Law remembered it like it had happened five minutes ago. Corazon ready to close the lid of the treasure chest but looking at Law for the last time, a stupidly wide smile on his face, saying he loved him. And then that lid had slammed shut and Law had been alone in darkness, without being able to get out; hearing how that fool got himself killed outside.
He had heard every word that had been exchanged, and every gunshot, and couldn't do anything despite hammering the wall of the chest hard enough to hurt his fists. That might have been the most traumatic thing – being unable to do anything at all. Extreme feeling of helplessness combined with overwhelming sadness and fear.

After that he had never been able to stand closed and tight places.

Apart from everything else, did Luffy really need to smile like Corazon while saying those same words? So widely and candidly that he looked like an idiot.

Luffy made a thoughtful noise before speaking. "So that's what you're scared of."

Law didn't answer. Nor was he scared. He was in state of total panic.

"I won't die," Luffy said. "Won't die and leave you alone."

An insanity of that calibre finally made Law raise his head, looking at Luffy. "You're not immortal, Straw Hat."

Luffy was crossing his arms, staring at him resolutely, standing behind his words and refusing to admit reality.

"You've almost died in my hands once already," Law snapped, leaning over the table towards his infuriating interlocutor. "So do not think I'm going to buy that shit."

"But I didn't die! Because you were there!"

"But that was just a coincidence –"

"Was it?" Luffy was silent for a long time, giving Law a very meaningful look. "Been wondering that for a long time – why did you save me?"

And there was the question Law had been repeating by himself for the last two years, but he never dared to think of it too carefully. He had a feeling the answer would be something too substantial and meaningful.

"You were injured," he said, trying to sound light. Even if 'injured' was one hell of an understatement. 'Practically dead' would have been closer to the truth. "And I am a doctor."

"Don't bullshit me, Traffy. I'm not that stupid."

"You're not stupid at all." Law wished he could distract the conversation to a side track, and he wasn't lying, either. Luffy was pretty simply and instinctively keyed, damn peculiar, quite childish, completely unable to concentrate on things he didn't find interesting... but definitely not stupid. When it came to the most essential things, there was surprising depth in him.

Luffy nodded emphatically. "Why then?"

Law was leaning his forehead on his hand, sighing very heavily and massaging his hairline while thinking. Why he had gone to Marineford at all was a good question in itself. So far he had justified his actions with some kind of macabre curiosity, because how often it happened that you got to see a war that would turn the whole world to a new track and would be considered as a historical moment afterwards? He had been near, so he just couldn't miss it... right?

No, it was nothing of that kind. It had been a perfectly instinctive move; a compelling, pulling
sensation somewhere deep inside of him. Understanding subconsciously that he would be regretting it if he neglected to go, even if he didn't know why.

And in a similar state of mind he had made saving Luffy from there his business. Reason and logic didn't have anything to do with that, even though afterwards he had come up with countless excuses for and against doing it. Like, perhaps he had already considered Luffy as a potential ally at that time, having seen him earlier on Sabaody. In the light of that excuse you might see the rescue as a certain kind of intelligent investment for the future.

But it was bullshit.

He had done it because he couldn't not do it, because he wouldn't have been able to stand himself if he hadn't even tried, because it had felt like the right thing to do.

He didn't like the way his instinct sometimes took reins, running over his reason and forcing him to make a totally irrational move. On top of it, it had a nasty habit of being right. Perhaps it was some undefined, fundamental type of Haki you couldn't control, something that everyone had, some weaker and some stronger. It was stupid to fight that, but he still preferred trusting his brain if it was possible.

Luffy was his blatant opposite when it came to that – that, too. Noticing how perfectly they were interlocking was actually a scary thing.

He realized Luffy was still waiting for his answer.

"I don't know, perhaps it was destiny?" He wanted to bang his head against the table because of such an idiotic blurt, he couldn't even start thinking where it had leapt from.

"Perhaps," Luffy said. Sounding like he thought the answer was completely reasonable.

There was a very deep silence. Law noticed one presence was missing, glancing around. "Where's the cook?"

"He left the desserts over there –" Luffy was pointing at the end of the table, where two bowls were waiting full of something pale, with some strawberries on top "– and left."

Didn't want to see any more awkwardness, then.

Sanji had had to leave while Law had concentrated on being a mess, aching inside. Well, at least they could finish their conversation in complete privacy. He appreciated it.

"I guess I've been liking you since then," Luffy said.

"Since when?"

"You treating my injuries."

Law shook his head. "You can't have any memories of it, you were totally out."

"Wasn't."

Something very cold and unpleasant settled on the bottom of Law's stomach, it couldn't be true. Couldn't.

"I mean, I think I woke up for a moment," Luffy clarified.
Huh. Perhaps Law needed to consider using anesthesia next time he had to perform a hasty emergency operation, but there truly hadn't been time for that, plus, Luffy had been in such a deep shock and unconscious that Law hadn't believed him waking up for several days. If Luffy really had been awake and not only having a dream of being awake.

"Your eyes looked really intent."

Law swallowed, but the awkward lump in his throat didn't disappear. "I apologize. It must have been a really unpleasant experience." That was put mildly.

"Nah, I guess I'm alive because it happened." It was uncomprehensible how Luffy was able to flash a wide smile.

"What do you mean?"

"After Ace..." Luffy's hand tightened into a fist as he kept talking quietly. "Everything just... went black. And it felt like I didn't wanna come out of it."

"It was so upsetting and painful your conscious shut itself down as a defensive mechanism. It's not unusual."

"Whatever." The base of the phenomenon didn't seem to interest Luffy at all. "But, when I came to, you were there."

"What was I doing?" Law needed to know if this had happened for real or if it was only a delirious dream.

"Hmm..." Luffy closed his eyes, looking back. "You were wearing really bloody gloves, and on the other hand you had a knife and a heart on the other. It was mine, wasn't it? You looked at it really intently. You looked like you'll kick my ass if I dare to die."

That logic made Law snort helplessly. And if Luffy was meaning a scalpel when saying 'a knife', the moment really had happened. Shit.

"Then I blacked out again. But maybe I got better 'cause I saw that. Someone I didn't even know very well wanted me to live, really badly..."

Law was breathing very deeply a few times; arduous, shaky breaths. He had no idea what to say or even feel.

His gaze was wandering at the cross-shaped scar on Luffy's chest. It was impossible to miss, what with Luffy strolling around with his shirt open; it was spreading across his whole chest, clearly more reddish than his skin in other places. It was quite a wonder it wasn't even more visible than that. Even with the help of Law's Ope Ope Powers it had taken painfully long to patch Luffy up, magma had caused burns reaching deep as hell. Law had needed to dig every single organ out, fixing them one after another, and then putting the whole mess back together as beautifully as he was capable.

There were times when he wanted to reach out with his hand and have a feel of that scar, just because of medical interest to examine healing, of course.

"Well, I'm glad that you made it," he managed to get out.

"Yup, me too!"

Weren't Luffy's cheeks ever hurting because of all of that smiling?
"We can eat these 'cause we're alive." Luffy reached out to grab the dessert bowls and pushing one of them in front of Law.

"That's true."

They took their spoons, glancing at each other, but that glance turned into a look longer than intended. A slight warm feeling was spreading inside Law's chest, forcing a small smile out of him, too, until they attacked their desserts.

The dessert didn't resemble anything Law had tasted in his life; it was like solidified cloud with a taste of lemons. It was delicious enough to be addictive.

This dinner had given him more to think than he had thought possible. He already knew what he needed to do in order to rearrange his thoughts and feelings, going through all of that new information that had been poured into his mind. He had a hunch of what he would do after that, but he had time to return to that later.

Now that he had a chance, asking for more questions felt essential. The topic was already on the table in a handy way and Luffy didn't seem the least bit reluctant to give answers, so Law could drag all of it out at once, dealing with the answers later in privacy.

"If you've been... liking... me for that long, why didn't you say anything sooner?" No matter how you looked at it, treating the object of your affection like a buddy and then suddenly blurting out you wanted to get married was really weird behaviour. They might have been somewhere groping each other already, if Luffy had approached the matter like any normal person instead of throwing Law into the deepest pit of absurdism, setting off every possible backlash.

The question turned Luffy's smile a bit sheepish. "I guess I was a bit slow in realizing it. Been feeling funny since we met again."

"Funny?"

"Yeah, funny." Luffy nodded as if he had given a perfectly understandable explanation.

"What kind of funny?" Law asked. Knowing what kind of feelings Luffy exactly had would definitely be beneficial.

Luffy shrugged. "Hard to explain. My heart suddenly starts pounding or I feel really warm or... tingly if I'm near you. And I want to be with you. I'm even thinking of you."

All right. That truly was sounding at least like being interested in him, and having a crush. "So why didn't you bring it up in a bit more... normal way?" Law asked. It wasn't because of being shy, that much was sure.

"I said I was being slow, okay? I've never felt anything like this so how am I supposed to know?"

The outburst got Law blinking, dumbfounded. "You haven't?"

"Nope."

Law was mulling over this information, scooping the last of his lemon-fluff-whateveritwas-thing from the bottom of his bowl.

"Didn't get what I should think of it. Then everyone started talking about marriages and it felt like a totally great idea. Like, it was the right thing to do."
"Ah." Law slowly started to see the whole picture. It kind of made sense, even if he had great
difficulties with following up Luffy's logic at times.

Luffy was clearly waiting for him to say something.

"Um... yeah. I get it," he said. "I still need to do a bit of thinking."

"If you have to."

"I do, I'm sorry."

The silence didn't have time to stretch very awkward before Luffy got up from his chair, coming
around the table to stand beside Law. Law didn't know what to expect – a touch on his shoulder, a
hug, something like that?

At least he wasn't expecting Luffy putting his hat on his head, saying, "Think about it, then."

"I try to be fast." Law didn't want to ruminate this for too long either, but he had realized it was
always a bad idea to make big decisions while something was happening. If possible, he went
through everything in his mind alone before making crucial decisions, thus gaining at least some kind
of distance and perspective. That going through his thoughts could happen pretty quickly sometimes,
but it had to be done, otherwise he wasn't capable of trusting his decision.

Luffy turned in order to exit the kitchen.

"Thanks for the company, Straw Hat. This was... nice." Partly, at least. And damn confusing and
enlightening at the same time.

"Yeah. I wanna spend more time with you," Luffy said. Then the door of the kitchen was shut after
him.

Law was left sitting by the table, fiddling with the brim of the straw hat pressed on his head.
The sun had already started setting when Sanji had finally finished washing the dishes and cleaning up the kitchen. It had been a very busy day and he hadn't even had time to smoke as much as he wanted to, so the first thing he did after stepping to the deck was lighting a cigarette.

Robin waved her hand at him by the helm, otherwise there was no one to be seen on the deck. Nami had closed herself up to count pearls found in a chest in the sunken city, images of berries flashing in her eyes, and didn't let anyone interfere; after the date Luffy had been dragged off by Usopp, Chopper and others, undoubtedly in order to bombard him with questions; and Law was probably sulking somewhere, glued to some macabre book.

Curiosity was killing Sanji; what had happened during the dinner after he had deduced that some privacy was necessary? He really would have wanted to be a part of that group interrogation waiting for Luffy, but it wouldn't have done to let dirt get stuck to the dishes.

Oh well, what had transpired on the date really wasn't any of Sanji's problem. Cooking for hungry people and other forms of life was the cook's job, and apparently he had done excellently in that, because there wasn't even a crumb left. He would have been deeply wounded if there had been leftovers after Luffy had finished eating.

After a hard day simply leaning against the railing and admiring the way Robin's lithe and curvy body was seen against the sunset was the best thing ever. Wind was toying with her long wisps of hair like it was madly in love with them, and Sanji perfectly understood that.

A door slammed somewhere behind him. He didn't know who it was he expected to see as he turned to look, but it definitely wasn't Law. At least not looking like that.

Law was wearing a long black and tattered coat, and there was Luffy's hat on his head. It looked goofy, because he had also pulled his hood over the hat. Seeing that hat on anybody else's head than Luffy's was really strange as it was.

"I was wishing to see you," Law said.

"Oh?" Sanji didn't have a faintest idea of what Law could want of him. "Want to complain about the food?" If it was something like that, he would kick. It already was tiresome enough to take Law's constant pickiness with bread into account while planning menus. One day Sanji was going to snap and ask what had been the terrible way Law had been violated by bread in order to earn that kind of revulsion.

"No, it was really delicious."

Suddenly Sanji was much more favorable for whatever this was about. Perhaps he was a bit too easy
to please, but he never got enough of people liking his cookings. "What is it then?"

"Perhaps you could give me a couple of cigarettes?"

Sanji was so surprised he almost dropped the one he was smoking. "You don't smoke."

"I might have spent a week with your crew but that doesn't mean you know everything about me."

"Whatever..." He dug the pack out of his pocket, noticing it was almost empty, there were only three cigarettes left. He handed the whole pack. "Need a lighter?"

"Yes, thanks."

"This is some exemplary habit for a doctor."

Law smiled dryly. "You're right, I don't actually smoke. Probably I'm just going to cough and feel like an idiot, but I'm going to do it nonetheless."

"Well, have fun with it." It wasn't Sanji's problem either. "That's my favourite lighter, so if you drop it into the sea I'm going to kick your teeth in."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Why are you wearing Luffy's hat?" Sanji wished his favor was worth one answer, because curiosity really was killing him.

"Absolutely no idea. He just slammed it on my head." Law touched the brim, seeming to get lost in his thoughts for a moment.

"Interesting."

"Is it? Is there some meaning or something like that?"

In his mind Sanji went through those very few times when Luffy had trusted his hat to someone; they could be counted with fingers in one hand. Nami had been the first one, that was a day he would never forget. As the Arlong Park had been crumbling he had started to really get what kind of captain he had chosen to follow; and he would gladly cook some surprising romantic dinners with blisters in his fingers and give his cigarettes to some cold assholes, if it was for Luffy.

"I'm not sure what it is he really is thinking, but I've interpreted it as his weird way to reassure the other one that everything is going to be all right. That he's going to make it right," Sanji said.

And huh, when you counted in the fact that Law just happened to be the object of Luffy's romantic interest, and the way the confession Sanji had accidentally heard had made Law to collapse on the table, the lending of the headwear started to get some really interesting and meaningful touches.

Law didn't say anything but seemed to be lost in deep thoughts.

This didn't seem to be a favorable situation to ask more about Luffy and the date. Sanji tossed his butt into the sea, turning to leave.

"You think he's going to throw a fit if I go and sit on his special seat?" Law nodded towards the bow. "It looks like a good place to think."

Sanji's gaze was forcibly drawn to the straw hat peeking under the hood. "I don't think so, right now at least. But it's not like he's quite... logical, all the time."
"Ever."

"That's true, ever."

Without further ado Law started towards the bow, the hem of his tattered coat fluttering in the gust of the wind. How on earth that or smoking some cigarettes was going to help him think was a mystery to Sanji, but he supposed people had more bizarre quirks than that.

He was about to go and find Luffy, until remembering it was his turn to deal with Caesar. They needed to have a meeting considering that problem soon, but right now it seemed that Luffy and Law had their hands full of other kind of problems, and there was still a long way to go to Zou. The hostage could wait a bit more.

~*~

Law didn't know what kind of expression he had as he was striding by the helm towards the figurehead, but Robin didn't comment on his strange gear even though it would have been a very easy target for some gentle needling. That in itself told much.

He climbed on the tasteless lionhead – Franky-design seemed to strike his sense of irony in a sick way, it was so terribly endearing – and sat down, leaning his back against one of those things trying to portray the mane of the lion. It was handy that it was also hiding him from Robin's view, so he got to think in apparent privacy. He placed his sword sideways on his lap. He had tried leaving it in the infirmary, but just couldn't be without it.

He was sitting in Luffy's favourite place at sunset, wearing Luffy's hat, and his Corazon-coat still stained with his own blood. He was going to smoke because Corazon had been a chain-smoker. And he was going to think of Luffy while doing it.

He really felt like that chill and rational person he liked pretending to be... Yeah, right.

This was just so fucking ridiculous, he spent the first couple of minutes with his face buried into his hands.

Finally he got a grip of himself, enough to put a cigarette between his lips and light it. He was coughing a bit, sighing heavily, feeling like an utter idiot... but there was something in the setting and props that felt like it was right.

He didn't have energy to blame himself for his tendency to cling to nostalgia when it came to certain things. Perhaps it had always been a part of his personality, or it might be due to him not getting any concrete keepsakes with him when escaping from Flevance, not even a photo of his family, nothing at all – he had needed to burn even the clothes he had been wearing, after hiding in that pile of corpses.

When his birthplace, his family, the whole first decade of his life could be wiped into nothingness so that he had nothing to cling to after that, like nothing had even existed in the first place...

It wasn't an experience he wanted to go through ever again. Perhaps he had started liking tattoos because there was no way you could lose them. And if someone wanted to fuck with him because he thought it was necessary to have a coat made for him in Corazon's memory for the moment he was going to face Doflamingo again, he would gladly cut the mocker in two.

It was pretty much fine like this; wrapped in that coat, wearing Luffy's hat, and a cigarette between his fingers.
And now he needed to do some thinking.

The first question, the fundamental starting point for everything, was: did he like Luffy enough and in the right way to even consider a relationship with him? Or did he assume he could like, if he gave the thing some time to develop? Did he suppose he could enjoy Luffy's company?

It was stupid to even think of this. With their personalities there wasn't any hope of –

He realized he was circling around the issue; all of his million complexes were shouting objections before he even had time to get to the right point in his agenda.

*Trafalgar D. Water Law, get a grip and answer the question, do not explain why it's not worthy of answering.*

Admitting that the answer was a yes was a scary thing.

His sense still hadn't accepted it. But when he had thought that Luffy had taken back his feelings, it had been like the ground had suddenly sunken under his feet, throwing him off into the sea, or something even worse – that feeling was strongly indicating that he wanted it despite everything.

Luffy had his charm which was difficult to define, tons of it actually, despite all of his shortcomings. Law had already noticed it was the kind he was able to appreciate. And he couldn't leave out the fact that it was easy for him to be in Luffy's company; for some reason he didn't feel like it was necessary to guard his normal boundaries, instead he was allowing Luffy some things he wouldn't have tolerated from anyone else. That probably told that for some reason his instinct thought Luffy was right.

Or it might be just him understanding how hopeless it would be to argue about such things with Luffy. It was easiest if he just surrendered to his fate... but that absolutely wasn't the whole truth.

Well, fine, so he liked or at least believed that he could like Luffy in that way. It was best not to ponder how much, because he was going to prevent himself from doing anything to it in any case. There was no use in thinking of something he wouldn't get, but apparently he wanted it so much that he needed to go through the mess in his head.

It was a circle making absolutely no sense and he was well aware of it himself.

Well, in any case he had admitted that he was a bit interested in Luffy. If not for any other reason than the kind of twisted curiosity that made you read the next page of an incomprehensibly bad novel as well – when the plot was absurdly unbelievable enough, you kind of had to see what the fuck was going to happen next. Because common sense just wasn't capable of imagining where the thing was going.

His next little self-deception might be trying to make himself believe this was only about that curiosity and nothing more.

And now it was the time to think of his million reasons for why he definitely shouldn't start a relationship, because it was the worst idea in the world.

He didn't do relationships and was heavily doubting his skill to maintain one. The one and only time he had even considered anything resembling a relationship had been awful.

He had meant it to be just an ordinary one-night stand, but somehow they had ended up talking more than usually and the girl had partly managed in slithering under his skin. Law was stuck on an island because the weather was so bad he couldn't leave, and so he just... ended up spending the whole
week in a shaggy guesthouse room with the girl. The third day he had imagined developing a crush, almost toying with the idea of taking her to the sea with them. Somewhere around the fifth day he had already been damn fed up with her constant clinging, which didn't give him any chance to get some space. And there had been only one guesthouse on that wretched island, so he had no way to accommodate somewhere else. The storm had finally deigned to subside after a week, and he had set sail as quickly as possible.

At that time he had had a small sailship, and there had been all three human beings and a polar bear in his crew. It felt like it had happened a lifetime ago, but in reality it had only been eight years.

Nostalgic, but it wasn't any help in solving his current problem. The fact: his dating history wasn't promising any enormous success for anything serious.

Probably starting to deepen his relationship with someone he already liked as a person was a completely different thing than starting to try liking someone with whom he had only meant to get his dick wet, though.

Actually Law didn't believe that his relationship with Luffy would change very much even if it got somewhat romantic. They would still have their own things to take care of, and they would be independent and stubborn. Probably it would be pretty much like it was now, just more time spent together and maybe a couple of promises for future.

It didn't sound like an unpleasant option.

He realized he had just explained away one of the excuses supposed to prevent him from doing anything stupid. This was not the way this thinking session was supposed to go.

He guessed it was best to descend to the bottom of this pit, to the core of the reason he felt like preventing himself was necessary. It was the real reason.

He was scared.

He was frightened. In panic. Petrified. Extremely reluctant to get vulnerable to the pain of loss, which was sure to come at some point and for some reason.

First it had been his family. Then Corazon. He wouldn't have strenght to collect his shards and put them together for the third time anymore. Every time he had done it, the new version of Law had been more crooked than the previous one. He had a feeling that if something managed to break him one more time, there wouldn't be enough of 'Law' left to fix. He had already wound himself up too tightly as it was.

"I won't die and leave you alone."

As if he could believe something like that. Taking into account what kind of life they were leading, no one in their right mind tried to make promises like that. Besides, there were other ways to end a relationship than by dying, too, and maybe they were equally painful. Maybe there were even more painful ways than that.

If Law let Luffy closer, he might open his eyes at some point, noticing how unpleasant person Law actually was. Starting to hate him. He wasn't willing to take that risk, it was too nice to cherish the illusion that someone might be capable of liking him.

On the other hand it felt really stupid to push the offered chance aside because of mere fear. He didn't avoid gambles and risks of any other kind, he was ready to risk even his life if that was what it took to get what he wanted. Why would this be different?
This fear was as irrational as his claustrophobia. There was no way closed spaces could hurt him for real, he had explained it to himself a million times and he knew it logically, but he still didn't believe himself. The trauma had given him a lesson that tight and closed places were definitely bad and he needed to avoid them with all of his might. As well as caring about anyone more deeply. In fact those fears were irreversibly twined together.

— saying that he loved him, hiding him in the treasure chest and DYING —

Ah, it was a real pleasure to be a doctor. He was well aware what was the matter and why, but he still wasn't able to fix it. The patient wasn't cooperative.

He gave a heavy sigh once again, twisting into a bit more comfortable position and lighting another cigarette, hoping it would grant him some great brainstorm. It tasted even worse than the first one and gave him headache. He was never going understand how Corazon had smoked two packs of these per day.

With his other hand he was fiddling with the straw hat Luffy had put on his head. For some kind of... assurance, apparently, if Sanji's interpretation was any good. That it was going to be all right.

"I just love you."

Fuck, he hadn't asked for anyone to love him. Why the fuck some widely smiling idiots saw fit to grab him with their consent and love him? It was becoming a habit. Right now he felt pretty much like he had been feeling when Corazon had grabbed him on his arm like some petulant pet dog, dragging him from one hospital to another trying to get him cured.

It was easy to imagine Luffy doing exactly the same thing. He remembered that moment shackled to the Heart seat again, and how Luffy had charged in to save him, even though he hadn't wanted to be saved. Idiot, run away, don't mess the plan for something as worthless as ME, I don't want you to get into that much of danger, he had been thinking. 'I'll kill you if you set me free', he had been saying.

Luffy had told him to shut up, continuing with the rescue operation.

Yeah, just like Corazon.

It was almost creepy.

The sun had set even lower, it was noticeably more dim and the sky seemed to be burning over the horizon. It started to get cold, too; Law wrapped the coat full of bullet holes more tightly around him, desperately trying to develop some insight of what Corazon would have wanted him to do.

Corazon had wanted him to live, and he had lived. And to stop Doflamingo. It was also done now, more because of Luffy than Law, but well.

Now he had a chance to do something else than plotting for revenge. Perhaps he could actually try being happy, even if the thought was terrifying – he was sure Corazon would have wanted that, despite not getting a chance to say it aloud.

A long time ago he had been told that someone was going to offer a helping hand to him. Afterwards he had considered those words as one of those sick jokes life kept throwing on his face, and he had learned to laugh at them because otherwise he would have gone crazy, but...

Was it this?

Was that mentioned hand stretchy in a rubbery way and attached to a sincerely smiling fool who just
loved him for some reason?

He just didn't know.

He stared at his last cigarette but couldn't bring himself to smoke it. His throat was so parched he felt like dying because of thirst, but he didn't want to move just yet. Thus he was just sitting there, hugging his knees. A dull pressing ache was throbbing in his chest in the same rhythm as his heart.

He tried to live in a way he wouldn't be downright miserable, but it felt like he didn't succeed very excellently. That wasn't a good way to go. He needed to do something to himself and his life.

This situation could be compared to someone quite suddenly wanting to offer him a cup of coffee. He could accept it gratefully and enjoy it. Or he could refuse the offer, because the coffee had been brought to him before he had time to order, the cup was the wrong color, and it was probably poisoned anyway.

He was trying to do the latter now, but there were times when he was tired of being so fucking cynical. The biggest question probably was: did he have enough courage to take a sip of the cup offered to him. Could he call himself a man if he hadn't?

He had anticipated this end result. It felt like his reason was currently pounding the inside of his skull with its fists, throwing a very elegant tantrum when it didn't get its way, but perhaps it was time to try following his instinct for a change. If the remedy didn't work you needed to try another one. And sometimes the shock treatment was a considerable option too.

Now, if he only managed to say it aloud.

Law had been sitting still for so long that his limbs felt stiff as he was scrambling down from the figurehead, with a surprising fit of coughing. The steering shift hadn't changed yet, though, because it was still Robin who was handling the helm.

"How was it, if I may ask?" Robin asked.

"What?"

"The date, of course. Luffy didn't say much, and that was strange."

"It was not a date, I've said it a thousand times," Law sighed.

"A meeting then, if that's considered better. You're wearing his hat."

"I guess it was fine." Law shrugged.

Robin was smiling in a way that wasn't giving any indication to what she was thinking. "I hope he didn't steal too much of your food?"

"Only a couple of times." It had been one of those things Law had tried to ignore for the sake of his own peace of mind. He had been surprised to realize he didn't mind much. There had been more than enough to eat, and so it had been only one of Luffy's peculiarities, cute in a weird way.

... If he considered a thing like that as cute he was more messed up than he had thought. He really had only one option.

"Were you thinking of him a moment ago?" Robin asked.

"I had to. And excuse me, but I'm not in the mood for small talk, even if it's with you."
"The last addition sounded like a compliment."

"That it was." However, right now Law wanted to find Luffy in order to give his hat back and say something incredibly stupid he undoubtedly was going to regret. He stepped closer to the stairs leading to the main deck.

"Trafalgar," Robin said before Law had time to set his foot on the stairs.

He stopped.

"I'll skip the small talk if you're busy. Want to hear how I ended up joining Luffy's crew?"

Law had been wondering about that a couple of times, because Robin seemed too sensible for this company. He couldn't imagine why Robin suddenly started talking about it, but he had to admit being curious. And he might secretly hope for an excuse to procrastinate, because he was nervous. "If you want to tell I'm listening."

"We met in Arabasta, at the time we were on different sides," Robin started, in a calm and emphatic tone. "A lot of things happened... to make it short, he pummeled Crocodile, my boss of that time, through the bedrock and put an end to a civil war."

Law had no difficulties to believe it was true. He saw a very heartwarming image of Doflamingo, lying on the ground so beaten he couldn't move, and was taken in custody by marines. Bruised all over and undoubtedly suffering also some severe internal damage. For once Law's doctor part hadn't felt any need to start taking care of the injured.

He had wanted to kill the bastard, to finish his life once and for all. But he hadn't had a chance for that.

Robin continued, shaking Law from his vengeful thoughts. "I felt like being in a hopeless dead end, without any hope of fulfilling my dream. I just wanted to die."

That made Law wince sympathetically, but it wasn't a surprising thing to hear. It felt like Robin had her own dark shadow despite how much she was smiling. That enigmatic, small, feminine smile that was quite charming, but Law was intelligent enough to keep a suitable distance to it.

He also started to get where Robin's story was going. "Let me take a guess. He didn't let you?"

"No, he didn't. He threw me onto his shoulder like some luggage, carrying me out of the collapsing tomb, despite me pleading him to leave me there. *Why should I listen to you?* he asked, and kept running."

Law knew exactly how Robin had been feeling at the moment.

"Later I asked for being allowed to stay aboard his ship, because I had no other place to go. And he accepted me immediately, even though we had started as enemies."

Luffy surely had accepted, the naive fool who was enough of a dolt to claim that Law was a good person.

"But I didn't feel like I deserved it," Robin continued. She was sounding even more serious now. "I was afraid that they would abandon me after getting to know everything about me. I tried sacrificing myself for them – that lead to the events on Enies Lobby."

"There was an article about it in the newspaper," Law said. "I thought he's crazy."
"He is. But I like crazy ones like that." Robin was smiling softly.

It seemed that Law had a soft spot for them, too, but he wasn't ready to admit it aloud.

"He declared a war to the whole world in order to save just one person... That kind of man wants you."

"I get your point." Law gave a heavy sigh.

There weren't any excuses for not living and trying that would be accepted by Luffy, he simply didn't listen to them. And there clearly was no way to intimidate Luffy with visions of awful disasters that would undoubtedly follow if they were to start dating. Luffy wasn't afraid of difficulties to come, he declared a war to them. Probably he took them as some huge and challenging adventure, which definitely needed to involve a lunchbox.

Law might think that he didn't deserve this – he was aware that he was a very unlovable person – and be scared of being abandoned as the truth was revealed bit by bit. Luffy probably didn't agree, ready to go through the bedrock in order to save him from himself.

To drink the coffee or not?

"I guess I was about to accept anyway," he revealed. "But thanks for the story anyway."

"That's nice to hear. I haven't regretted deciding to join him. Or being alive after all."

The silence was stretching, but it was comfortable. Robin seemed to be lost in her memories and a small smile was playing on her lips. Law tried to keep the corners of his own mouth unmovable, but he felt a bit lighter for some reason, and there was no pressure on his chest.

"What are you waiting for?" Robin asked. "Go and tell him."

Law stepped on the stairs.
Heart Attack

Chapter Notes

I had a pretty rough week, but eventually got this done. Thank you for all the readers, you've been very inspiring. <3

A tiny chest, almost decayed because of salty water, had been sitting on a table covered by molluscs in a collapsed building in the sunken city. It had felt like it was screaming at Nami as soon as she had laid her eyes on it. Her treasure instinct had been right – she was having a really good time while counting and sorting out the haul of pearls on her bed.

She took a pearl after another from the chest, inspecting each of them carefully and dividing them into five heaps on the grounds of their colour and perfection. She knew exactly what was valuable and was delighted when about half of the pearls proved to be perfectly flawless. Furthermore, most of them were of extraordinary fine pink color; they could be sold for good price.

There were also some totally worthless, and she slipped them into a different pouch. Perhaps she could invent some use for them despite them being elliptical. That kind of thing might be kind of cute in certain type of accessories and arrangements, but they would never fetch a satisfying price.

After sorting the pearls Nami took her time, just laying next to them admiring their silky luster. Finding that city had been quite a stroke of luck. It might be that she owed one for Franky and Law because of that, but she truly wasn't going to share the treasure with anyone.

Perhaps on the next suitable island she would take everyone to some restaurant and pay for them all, if she was in an especially good mood.

Thinking of the next island made her glance at the log pose. The needle they were following, pointing to Zou, was soothingly steady, and even the right-hand needle had stopped its crazy spinning. Now it was only fluctuating in such a wide arc that it was impossible to say where it was trying to point to. It had started to slow down right after they had left the sunken city.

She had never heard of a needle acting like this. It was fascinating her as a navigator, she was supposed to understand phenomenons like this in order to surely take the ship where the captain happened to want to go. Had there been some weird metal under the city, or something like that? They didn't have time to linger and inspect it closer, however, and there hadn't been anything else of value than the artifacts she had already taken to the ship.

Even if she finished her map one day, it seemed that the New World was going to keep a part of its secrets.

Like there would have been a lack of surprises if the environment wasn't offering more of them constantly. She still hadn't recovered Luffy's surprising fascination upon Law, and the thing seemed to get weirder all the time. Apparently Law was seriously giving it some thought, and even seemed like he might warm up.

If that happened, it wouldn't be a bad thing, strategically speaking. In that case she supposed that they would be allied for a long time, because Luffy and Law probably wouldn't want to fight each
other for One Piece. That would mean they had one powerful rival less.

Well, there was no way to know. Men could be unbelievably obstinate when it came to some things, and Luffy and Law were definitely some of the worst ones. If they decided that there was something like ‘manly pride and honor’ involved, they could very well be ready to thrash each other even if they were practically married.

Nami couldn't even imagine how their relationship might work, if the thing went so far at some point. Trying to guess was a pretty good way to pass time, nonetheless.

Finally she forced herself to get up from the bed and gather the most valuable pearls into a small box in order to put them into her safe. As she opened the safe, she happened to see another box, pushed onto the top shelf.

Law had asker her what was the safest place to keep something aboard the ship. Nami had consented to place the box in her safe, mercifully not even making Law pay anything for keeping it...

Perhaps, because of that, she could take a peek and see what on earth was in that box? No one needed to know that she had slightly lifted the lid and then closed it again carefully. There was no treasure that would spoil because of a little peek.

Nami took the box from the shelf. It was made of undecorated dark wood, almost perfect cube, and its edges were about the same length as her palm. And it was securely locked, a thing you could expect of that mistrustful icicle.

The lock only made Nami more interested in the contents of the box. Luckily she knew how to pick whatever kind of lock, and thus searched for her tools, attacking the box about to explode with curiosity. The second try in lock picking made it give a satisfying click, and she was holding her breath as she was carefully lifting the lid.

She stared at the heart laying in the box for a second before realizing what it was. It was in such a wrong place that understanding the shape took some time, even though she clearly saw the coronary arteries on the surface of the organ, as well as the arteries leading to the heart, cleanly cut. Law probably remembered the names of all of them.

Nami wondered what else she had been expecting. Gold? Jewels? A treasure map? An eternal pose pointing to some secret destination?

Hardly. Cut off organs were more of that creep's style.

The heart throbbed.

~*~

"LAAAAAAAAAWWWWW!"

A shrill shriek was echoing through the ship, so surprising that Law was about to trip down the stairs he had been descending. Luckily his going had been very slow, as he was mildly reluctant to find Luffy and speak with him – he was hoping that his bout of insanity would stop before he really agreed to starting a relationship, but he didn't actually believe in such luck. Had he been walking more busily, he would surely have tripped, landing on his face onto the deck. Then a fussing Chopper would have attacked him and put a full-body cast on him before even making sure if anything was broken.

"What have you done to Nami?" Robin asked by the helm.
"As far as I know, nothing at all." Law quickly descended onto the main deck before a storm would break out even worse than this, making him really stumble in his own feet.

"It sounds like you just got caught red-handed peeping at her while bathing. But that can't be the case because you've been here. If you would be interested in a thing like that anyway?" Robin lifted her eyebrow curiously.

There was an image of bathing Nami flashing in Law's mind, and it didn't have any effect on him. He was ready to admit that the image of her curvy body caressed by suds of soap was beautiful, but that was all there was to it. He didn't find it attractive or interesting if someone was aware of their own beauty in a too visible and highlighted way.

"Not very interested." Law was much more interested in getting to know why Nami sounded so fucking pissed. He looked at Robin. "Which one would be wiser; searching her and seeing what this is about, or running away?"

"I guess it's too late for either of those," Robin murmured.

The door of the girls' quarters flew open, revealing Nami, who was leaning against the doorframe and breathing heavily like she was totally upset and had just been screaming from the bottom of her lungs. There was a heart in her hand, and that made Law alert, ready to act at any second.

"Law!" Nami slammed the door shut after her, marching the stairs down until stopping a few steps away from Law, stretching her hand to show the heart more clearly. "Would you perhaps care to explain what is this?"

"Of course. It's very apparent that it is a human heart."

Law's helpful answer had Nami bristling with anger even more, and she dug her strange weapon out from under her skirt. Nami attached the parts of the staff together, leaning on it and looking like she was ready to use it if she had to. "I can see that! Why was that thing in my safe?"

Nami's loud voice and her earlier shriek drew the whole crew to the deck to see what was happening and take part in the quarrel. Sanji was the first one to charge there, of course, the knight always ready to defend a damsel in distress. Then Zoro, who had been napping against the railing, opened his eye, ready to burst into action like a tense bow; and finally all the others dashed out of the door of the aquarium bar.

"Oi what's going on here?" Luffy asked, stretching his hand upwards to grab the rig and swinging himself across the deck, landing almost beside Law. Others hurried to come closer, finally forming some kind of half-circle with Law unpleasantly as a center point.

Absolutely great. There clearly was no way to take this discussion to a bit more private place, if everyone's curiosity had awakened like this. Law's privacy was vanishing with an alarming speed in every way, like his love life being the official entertainment aboard the ship wasn't bad enough.

He gave a heavy sigh before answering Nami's question. "You put it there yourself, right after I had asked where the safest place is."

"You could have warned what it was!" Nami snapped. "It's too creepy to suddenly see a severed, throbbing heart. Don't leave organs laying around like some cat is leaving dead mice all around –"

"Yeah, you should think of a sensitive lady –" Sanji started.

"I was under impression it was in a locked box," Law said. "That fact was meant to tell that opening
it is not suitable. Thus it didn't matter if anyone knew what was inside or not."

Nami didn't comment her rummaging without permission, continuing instead. "Why on earth you even want to keep something like this severed?" She was waving her hand holding the heart in a way that seemed pretty dangerous.

It was more than Law’s nerves could take at the moment. He created a Room big enough to enclose Nami, yanking the heart quickly onto his own palm with his Power. When it gave a beat against his palm, he could downright feel his shoulders dropping at least ten centimeters as they relaxed. "I think I take it back right now, thank you very much."

"Isn't that Caesar's?" Franky asked.

"It's mine."

"Where's Caesar's, then? It sure as hell isn't in his chest." Having asked the question Sanji took a cigarette out of a new pack, putting it between his lips and starting to pat his pockets, searching for something.

Law hurried to give the lighter and the almost empty pack of cigarettes back to their owner. "Thanks for lending."

Sanji arched his brow as he noticed there still was one cigarette left. "Didn't like them?"

"They're terrible."

Apparently Sanji didn't agree, because he lit the cigarette.

"Oi, there's seriously something wrong with this conversation!" Usopp said. "It was about where Caesar's heart is."

Everyone on the deck was staring at Law questioningly. He probably couldn't help submitting to his destiny and explaining everything. He raised his free hand to his chest, feeling the even pulse that wasn't quite right, not his own. "I thought it would be wise to keep it easily available in case he somehow succeeded in escaping his handcuffs. And having to carry it in my pocket all the time would be annoying."

Too many irritated and incredulous voices were heard at once, Law didn't have time to comprehend who was saying what.

"So you were storing it *in your own chest*?"

"Easily available for *who*?"

"And you didn't think it was necessary to tell us, what if one of us would have needed —"

"— just how fucking creepy is your Power —"

"My safe!"

"— could have told us —"

"— forgetting again that we're supposed to be *allies* —"

"Woah, that's so awesome, Traffy!"
The last sentence was uttered by Luffy, that was one hundred percent sure, and it was surprising enough to silence everyone. Everyone's gaze was wandering at Luffy, who had his arms crossed in a relaxed manner, grin splitting his face. It took some time for Law to realize why Luffy looked so strange, and after getting it he took the straw hat off his head, handing it to its rightful owner.

"What's supposedly so awesome in this?" Nami asked.

Law couldn't help wondering exactly the same thing.

"The way you think all kinds of smart things!" Luffy took a step closer, positively beaming at Law with his eyes and smile both. "And that's one of the coolest Powers I've ever seen."

"I don't get why anyone would want a Power seeming like it's meant for mutilating people while they're still alive," Usopp said.

"It's not like eating the Devil's Fruit was something I wanted," Law sighed. "It was forced down my throat."

Sure, Corazon had only done it in order to save his life, and probably he would have eaten it by himself if only he had gotten some time to gather himself – what other alternatives there supposedly had been, except dying? But a luxury like some time to think wasn't available at that moment, and thus Corazon had simply wrenched his jaws open, stuffing the Devil's Fruit in.

Despite the good meaning it was one of the most terrible moments in Law's life, full of helpless feeling of suffocation, forcing tears out of his eyes. And then there had been that taste – nothing had ever tasted so horrid, it was worse than bread. Realizing that his life was going to change irreversibly wasn't much help in controlling his rising panic.

It wasn't an event he liked to remember. But he seemed to like tossing unpleasant facts at people who were poking him with questions too much and making very unsensitive comments. He was a prick who wanted the other one feeling at least as bad as he himself.

"Usopp." Robin's silent voice from the stairs got immediately Usopp's and everyone else's attention. "You're talking too much of things you know nothing about, again. It isn't a polite thing to do."

Usopp seemed to have realized it himself, too. He had been awkwardly shifting his weight from one leg to another since Law had corrected him, and Robin's words made him visibly flinch. When Law turned to face him directly, he hastily retreated behind Franky's back, peeking from behind a massive arm. "S-sorry! A bad habit to babble just anything when the atmosphere is uncomfortable, please just don't cut me with that creepy – no that was wrong, I mean, I'm sorry!"

Law covered his face with his palm, sighing with all of his being. He was starting to get fed up with Usopp apparently still thinking that sharpshooter soup was his favourite dish. "I'm just fed up with constantly hearing that I'm a 'monster' or 'creep' because of something I didn't even get to choose. I'd appreciate it if we could just drop this issue."

He couldn't help feeling a gloomy and ironic kind of amusement because of ending up giving that speech while holding his own beating heart in his hand. Several Straw Hats were still nodding as a response.

Luffy seemed to be lost in deep thoughts. Law expected him to say something surprisingly deep, but as Luffy finally spoke, what came out was, "Did that Devil's Fruit you ate taste really bad, too?"

"Yeah. It was the most repulsive thing I've ever tasted." Law had to smile a bit at the things Luffy saw worthy of speaking about.
"Good."

"Good? What's good in that?"

"I'd be pissed if everyone else had eaten a tasty one and I was the only one whose Fruit tasted horrible," Luffy said.

The corner's of Robin's mouth twitched into a smile. "No worries, Luffy. As far as I have heard, all of them are awful. At least mine was."

"And mine," Chopper said.

"Mine, too," Brook said.

Luffy was laughing happily and the atmosphere on the deck got lighter.

"All right, that's really great and all," Nami said, sounding really fed up. She was pointing at Law with her finger. "We were talking about you hogging our hostage's heart without bothering to inform your allies of what's going on. And to make some room for it you put your own heart into my safe, almost scaring me out of my mind --"

"The box was locked, so its contents wasn't supposed to bother anyone," Law interrupted. "But it looks like you've earned your moniker, 'Cat Burglar'."

"Of course she has," Luffy put in, proud. "There's nothing Nami can't steal. If she wanted to have your underpants she would snatch them while you're wearing them and you wouldn't even notice!"

"Thank you for this mental imagery..." Law mumbled from behind his palm, covering his face.

Usopp, Franky, Brook and Chopper were laughing so hard they had difficulties to stand. Sanji seemed to consider the idea very insulting, snarling.

"Shut up, Luffy!" Nami swang her weapon towards Luffy's head with a force that had Law imagining the treatment of the coming skull fracture. But Luffy was just leaning backwards, back arching, and the strike went harmlessly over him without touching him at all. "I would never sink low enough to steal some underwear! And you --" Nami seemed to consider whacking Law with her weapon next. "When it comes to fitting monikers, I don't want to hear a word of them from you, you esteemed 'Surgeon of Death'."

"Both are just as fitting," Usopp pointed out in the middle of his laughing.

"What's supposed to be wrong with that?" Luffy asked. "I like mine."

"I don't doubt that, Straw Hat," Law said.

"What if you would finally explain --" Nami started.

"I'm not willing to explain anything for anyone snooping without permission and threatening with a staff --" Law started.

"Luffy."

Zoro's voice was demanding attention so efficiently that everyone turned immediately. He was still leaning against the railing, hands behind his head and looking relaxed except his expression. It was serious and annoyed. "Luffy. You're supposed to be the captain aboard this ship, so get a grip and stop talking of bad-tasting Devil's Fruits and Law's underwear. I want to continue napping."
Law didn't miss the way many onlookers were sighing in relief, and how Nami stopped leaning angrily forward, taking a more relaxed stance. He understood, because suddenly his own stupid need to argue with Nami had disappeared, and just because he was waiting for Luffy to clear this mess.

He was immediately hating himself because of such a thought, because since when hadn't he been able to solve his own issues, and felt a need to lean on a naive idiot like Luffy?

But Luffy was a good captain, if someone first managed to grab his shoulders, shaking him so as to make him serious for a moment. And it seemed like his right hand man was very apt in doing that at the very right moment.

"Yeah, you're right." Luffy straightened his hat, which had gotten lopsided as he had evaded Nami's strike. "Sorry, Zoro. You can go back to sleep now."

Zoro didn't say anything to it, just shutting his eye and starting to snore right away. Law felt his jaw drop – apparently Zoro was one hundred percent confident that getting involved in the argument wouldn't be necessary anymore, as Luffy had now become aware of the situation.

It would be interesting to see this. In the end Law had almost decided to accept a relationship with Luffy, but following carefully how he would handle the situation wouldn't hurt. Just in case that Law still managed to change his mind and take back his will to put his head through a hangman's noose.

"Okay... so what's the problem?" Luffy asked.

Nami was pulling her hair. "Don't sound so convincing if you haven't even been listening a word! I told that he took Caesar's –"

"I did listen," Luffy said. "But what's wrong with that? Seems like a smart idea to me. It wouldn't have ever occurred to me."

"Certainly not." Nami rolled her eyes. "Fine, it was smart, but he should have told us! Being allied with someone who's just acting by himself and apparently not trusting the others at all is really difficult and dangerous."

"Nami-swan is perfectly right," Sanji agreed, looking like he was ready to crawl on the deck in front of his goddess's feet.

"I agree," Usopp said. He was again using Franky as a human shield; it was good to shout anything from behind him.

Law kind of understood why they were so mad. He hadn't thought their side of things while acting, but he didn't know if he could get a turn to speak from the Straw Hat pirates backing each other up.

Luffy turned to look at him. "You don't trust us, Traffy? You should."

"That's not what this is about..." Law wasn't willing to say anything more in front of so many people, but there was no helping it if he wanted to properly clear this misunderstanding. "I trust you so much that putting my life into your hands on Dressrosa wasn't totally awful." He had had a weird feeling that things might go right, he had probably gotten infected with positivity by Luffy – and that had been a scary thing, not agreeing with his reason at all. "When it comes to your crew, you have chosen them; so they have to be decent persons, meaning I trust them, too."

Luffy flashed a wide smile, looking perfectly satisfied with the answer.

"That doesn't explain you not telling us," Nami said.
"I guess it's mostly a deep-rooted habit," Law said. "After spending too much time on Punk Hazard, having to keep everything secret from everyone... I just can't get used to doing things in some other way."

"You will," Robin said. "But it'll take some time."

"But do you really think I would have let you take care of that box if I didn't trust you?" Law asked Nami. "My heart was in it, so I wanted it to be in the safest place, and as far as I know, nothing is capable of taking valuables from your possession, so..."

Nami's mouth was hanging open.

"You thought picking the lock and waving the contents on the deck was suitable," Law continued. "You have to forgive me if your words about trusting and reliability sound hypocritical to me."

"I love beautiful things! I was just going to take a peek and then shut it again. I haven't even asked you to pay rent for using the safe, so just a little peek to satisfy my curiosity... Fine, that was wrong and sorry about that, but finding that thing was just a too creepy surprise, I just couldn't stay silent!"

Law didn't need apologies but he supposed it was best if he accepted it, in this situation it wouldn't be good to seem like... the person he really was. "No harm done. I didn't mean to scare anyone, sorry about that. And I try to be a bit more open about my plans in future."

Law was stunned by Franky starting to cry because of being so affected, even though he was claiming he wasn't crying. None of the Straw Hats cared or seemed the least bit surprised, Chopper was just presenting Franky with a handkerchief.

After this event Law actually wanted to switch the hearts, he didn't know if he was capable of shutting his own into the safe so soon. He didn't know how to explain it, nor did he know if the act would be seen as a new sign of distrust. That it would be, honestly speaking.

"Speaking of plans," he said, "we need to talk about Caesar. Is tomorrow a good time for that?" He looked at Luffy.

"Yeah."

After a small conversation they had agreed to have a meeting right after the breakfast. Law still didn't know what to do with the hearts, so he was just holding his own in his hand, wishing for the Straw Hat crew to scatter. But no one was leaving. At least Zoro was still snoring and thus wasn't staring at Law like the others.

He startled when Luffy carefully put his hand on his heart so that their fingers were touching. It might be the most intimate thing anyone had ever done to him, frightening and mesmerizing at the same time. He couldn't pull his hand away.

"Change it back, Traffy?"

"Why?" That was exactly what Law wanted to do, but he was interested in getting to know why on earth Luffy suggested it. Was Luffy guessing his thoughts or was there some other reason for the suggestion, something peculiarly Luffy-like?

"It would be weird."

"What would be weird?" Law was slowly starting to get used to having to ask a thousand clarifying questions, otherwise Luffy's disjointed answers didn't make any sense, randomly hopping from one
thing to another. Sometimes it still got annoying.

"I don't wanna listen to Caesar's heart. It would be weird."

... Ah. Luffy sounded pretty sure that Law was going to say 'yes'. Law imagined a situation with someone gently pressing their head against his chest – well, that really was no place for some enemy's organs, because that would be weird.

"Actually I was going to do it anyways," he said silently. "Caesar's feels so venomous I'm starting to get fed up with it. Even if it's available in a very handy way like this."

He pushed his free hand under the hem of his hoodie, trying not to care how Luffy's – and many other's, too - eyes were wandering at his exposed stomach. There was nothing wrong with his abs and a little bit of staring wasn't going to break them, so it was not a big deal. There was absolutely no reason for him to feel so impossibly embarrassed.

As his hand reached the place of his heart he didn't have time to notice his surroundings anymore. He hated the feeling of the operation cutting the heart out of his chest, plopping it into his hand. It wasn't actual physical pain, but it simply felt... bad. Wrong. Empty. It also tended to make him dizzy for a while.

He didn't want to flop onto his knees while someone was watching, but it was a better alternative than trying to stand stubbornly and then fall in an even more embarrassing way as he ran out of strength. Thus he was settling on the deck, hanging his head while trying to breath evenly.

A hand settled on his shoulder, undoubtedly Luffy's. "You okay?"

"Hah... why the fuck I wouldn't be, I just pulled the heart out of my chest?" Law pulled his hand out from under his shirt, presenting the heart he was holding to anyone agreeing to take it. "This is Caesar's. Are we going to lock it into the safe? No matter what happens, he can't get his hands to it easily if it's there."

"I guess." Nami picked the organ into her hands. "Yuck, this is still so revolting."

"Oh, I meant to say something!" Luffy sounded like he had remembered something. "Now that everything's clear, there's still one more thing."

Law didn't pay much attention to the way the crew turned to Luffy, asking what this was about. He concentrated on shaking Luffy's hand off his own heart in order to put the organ back to its right place.

He immediately felt it was the right one. After a short dizzy moment it felt like the world was kind of settling in the right way, like the last piece of a puzzle had seamlessly snapped into its place. However, he knew better than trying to stand up for a moment, this kind of operation drained his Power for a while, leaving him feeling groggy.

"He's gonna be my boyfriend." Luffy squeezed Law's shoulder gently.

"Oi, I haven't said it yet –" Law voiced.

"So. If he doesn't wanna be called creepy or something like that, I don't wanna hear anyone saying that either."

... Awesome. Of course he needed to get overprotective right now. No one is going to respect me ever again.
"I appreciate your gesture, but I'm fully capable of defending myself," Law said.

"No one's doubting that," Robin pointed out. "But realizing that someone's caring enough to stand by you isn't such a bad thing."

Law wanted to teleport away, but didn't give in to the temptation. It felt like he was doing it too much anyway, and now he didn't have enough energy for a stunt like that.

"We get your point, Luffy," Usopp said. "But we just saw him exchange a heart, isn't that a bit... exceptional?"

"I'd be dead if Trafy didn't have this Power. Isn't that right?" Luffy squeezed Law's shoulder again. Law was totally stupefied by Luffy talking about his own injury. So far he had been under impression that Luffy never wanted to make anyone worried, never admitting the seriousness of his wounds, laughing in a seemingly carefree manner no matter what. This had to mean that Luffy really wanted to make his point.

He startled to answer the question. "Undoubtedly. The operation was difficult even while using my Power. I don't understand how anyone could have pulled it off using only traditional methods."

No one said anything to it, blinking and looking like they were dumbfounded.

Law got onto his feet carefully, dusting the little rubbish off his pants before straightening himself. "Many of the most important ways to use the Ope Ope Fruit have to do with medicine, by the way, requiring large-scale knowledge of the field so as to apply them," he said, watching Usopp and Nami especially. "But I think I've creeped you out enough for this day. I'm tired." He turned to go to the infirmary to rest and sulk.

Robin stopped him. "Trafalgar!"

"What is it?"

"Didn't you have something else to say?" Robin's eyes were flashing at Luffy, who only had a questioning expression.

"I did. But I'm not in the mood after this incident. I'll say it in the morning... maybe." Law was marching in, letting the door slam shut after him.
Chapter Notes

I really don't know what to say about this one, but here it is.

Law was floating in warm, light blue water, and there were some cans of paint drifting around him; somehow he knew that they were his classmates from Flevance. They were drawing bright colored lines into the water; yellow, purple, green... That kind of surrealism continued for a long time, and the atmosphere was actually pretty peaceful.

Suddenly he was captured by numerous strings finer than silk, preventing him from moving even his fingers. At the same moment he also realized being naked, so he couldn't have felt more startled, vulnerable, and embarrassed as Doflamingo appeared in front of him, holding Law's heart in his hand.

"You've gotten yourself in pretty deep water, haven't you... Law?" The words could be heard clearly despite them being under the surface of the water. Doflamingo emphasized his words by squeezing the heart, and the lack of crushing physical pain mangling him made Law realize he was dreaming. The feeling of paralyzing fear remained despite the realization; he was struggling to wake up.

"Giving this to Straw Hat would have been beneficial to you, but you kept hesitating for too long." Another squeezing of the heart was almost caressing, but even more distressing because of the disgusting gentleness of the act. "But I'm glad – I've always wanted to control your heart... Law..."

And then Doflamingo burst into his insane laughter, until starting to lick Law's heart all over, swirling his tongue along the coronary arteries as lewdly as possible, sucking the stump of aorta between his lips –

Law startled awake, and for a moment everything was completely frozen, he couldn't even breathe. After a while that felt like it was slowed up the world was twisting into its right place – he realized where he was, that he was awake now, that the previous thing had been a dream.

That he was hard as rock.

He wanted to throw up. His chest was feeling tight once again, like someone had left an anchor of a warship laying on it; he could imagine his sternum creaking under the pressure and his ribs soon breaking inside, puncturing his lungs. The nausea was violently swelling in the bottom of this stomach, awakened by the omnipotent feeling of wrongness. And still he had a hard-on. A resilient one. It was so severe he was downright aching.

He hated the way his subconscious and imagination kept mixing and combining things. This was anything but the first time when some really morbid thing was seen strangely erotic in a dream, and the worst thing was, it was really hard to get rid of the image after waking up. He knew better than to jerk off while being in this mental state, because that would probably just make his imagination rev up; and he would end up cumming while thinking something he really didn't want to think, hating himself even more.

Like an image where he was fucking some cut off bottom... or where he dismembered himself,
letting several people use his pieces... or –

He shuddered. It had happened too many times already, he didn't need one more. The least of all he needed an image of Doflamingo sucking his heart.

His cock twitched even more upwards.

Could he please just die right now? He pulled his knees against his chest, hugging them tightly, but getting a grip of his thoughts was more difficult.

Him being messed up was nothing new. That had been the case since he was ten years old, and you kind of got used to it; he had analyzed and diagnosed himself, and knew the ways he was able to function. After turning twenty he had finally gotten the contents of his head arranged somehow, learning to live in a way his twistedness didn't bother him much – there had been several pretty balanced years after that, at least according to his own yardstick.

After them the tailspin downwards felt even more bitchy. And now seeing Doflamingo after so many years had set off every single one of his dammed traumas at the same time.

Combined with Luffy... who was making other kind of painful feelings surface, in his part.

But this wasn't the worst case scenario yet. Law was well aware that his brain had potential to get even more crooked. And that was something he really didn't want to experience.

If he managed to break himself once more – perhaps by starting a relationship with Luffy and having to experience its ending in some really ugly way... Every time he had picked up his shards, putting them together again, the end result had always been even more twisted. The next version of Law might be very liable to be deranged enough to act according to the sick ideas going through his mind. Possibly giggling madly by himself while arranging some body parts on a table, chatting to them.

There were moments like this, when he felt like he wasn't very far from that.

He was still sane enough to be scared of that scenario, and thinking of it made him sick and nauseous. But the breakdown was a realistic possibility.

If it happened, would it bother him anymore; or would he be so crazy he wouldn't be aware of it anymore? When it got bad enough, the illness sensor stopped functioning.

The fear of losing it; that was one of his most common anxiety symptoms. Combined with the inability to properly breathe. And it felt like this fit wouldn't pass at all.

Out. That was his only option. This room was strangling him to death.

Law got up from the bed, pulling his clothes on. Cramming the boner into fitting jeans was always as unpleasant; and as he needed to grab his shaft in order to adjust it in some tolerable way, he didn't want to let go anymore. Its insistent throbbing told that it would have been beneficial to masturbate recently instead of just sulking and reading. You've made your bed and now it's time to lie in it, flashed in his mind, in an irritating know-it-all tone.

His hand moved on the shaft involuntarily, and he couldn't keep his hips from thrusting forward. The pressure was so good, maybe –

– his heart was pulsing frantically on Doflamingo's palm; the man's eyes were not seen behind his sunglasses and Law had no way of guessing if he was going to take a bite of the organ –
... Maybe not, seriously. Any other moment that kind of mental imagery should have been enough to make him soft in a second, but right now, after the dream, it felt like having a direct connection to his nether regions; and he refused to give in to it.

These compulsive thoughts existing and popping out uncontrollably was bad enough. There was no need to act according to them. They were symptoms of anxiety and stress.

*It's just a symptom. I'm not that crazy. I'm not that sick. It's only a symptom.*

He succeeded in closing his zipper, grunting as the pants flattened the stubborn body part against his stomach. At least they were tight enough, so that his state couldn't be seen by anyone; especially after he pulled the hem of his shirt as low as possible. Besides, there was no way it would stay hard eternally, at least priapism was one of the ailments he didn't have.

As soon as he would be in control of himself again, perhaps coming day, he needed to take some time for a thorough jerk off session. This kind of frustration clearly was not good for him right now.

His took his hat and sword, marching to the deck – well, *tried* marching, but walking was unpleasant as hell and he ended up stepping pretty rigidly. After getting out he tried taking deep breaths of fresh air. It still felt like he could suffocate, like his lungs didn't remember how to inflate. He pretty much was ready to lean over the railing and puke just because of feeling so sick.

Not quite ready to jump himself.

He desperately needed to concentrate on something else than the way he was feeling. Probably just stopping to think how terrible he was feeling would make it better.

The sail was flapping in the wind above him. The flags fluttering in the masts were only seen as black holes in the sky, covering the stars.

They were sailing even though it was night – in other words, there was someone steering. Someone with whom he could exchange some words. Law admitted being somewhat antisocial, and thinking that trivial conversing just because of keeping company was pointless if there was nothing of worth to say; but right now the idea felt very tempting. It would force him to concentrate on something else than himself.

He glanced at the bow, delighted for a moment as he saw a silhouette of a woman with long hair against the light of the lantern. Robin would be a really good option for company – but then she shifted her weight from one leg to another with a much sharper move than Robin used to. And the reddish golden glow crowning her hair wasn't caused only by the golden light of the lantern showing through the locks; it actually was the color of her hair.

Fuck. Nami was probably the last person aboard this ship Law wished to talk to right now. And that feeling probably was mutual.

Well, at least a feeling being mutual was always a beautiful thing.

Perhaps he would prefer going to the aquarium bar after all, staring at the octopi waiting in the tank and imagining being in his own submarine again. That sounded like a good idea. He turned to go back in.

"Law, wait," Nami called.

Law stopped, cursing silently. He hadn't known that Nami had had time to notice him. "What is it?"
Nami was just pointing at the stairs. Law sighed, starting to climb to the bow, because shouting from the main deck with his head tilted backwards would feel too stupid, if they ended up saying a word to each other for some reason.

Even a little exertion like climbing the stairs felt bad with his chest feeling so tight. Law tried comforting himself with the fact that at least his cock slowly started submitting to its fate, softening. He stopped the suitable distance away from Nami, starting to stare at desolate, dark sea while trying not to play with his sword.

"Caesar's heart is now closed into the box and into the safe," Nami said. Her tone was to the point, downright polite.

"That's good." Law supposed that leaving it be and not talking about it ever again would be a wise thing to do, but apparently he wasn't in the mood for wise. "Apparently you had no need for the key of that box." There were only one of them, and it was securely in his possession.

Nami bit her lip, but didn't say anything. Even if she was feeling guilty because of her illicit lock picking, she probably thought that there had been enough of apologizing in the evening.

Law was actually agreeing and didn't need more apologies. He didn't even know what exactly he was missing or why he was being so rude. Except that he was feeling so absolutely miserable.

There was a very awkward silence. Law wanted to leave but supposed Nami had something more to say. Making him climb to the bow just to tell where Caesar's heart currently was would have been ridiculous, but now it seemed like even Nami had lost her words despite being a quick-witted woman with a sharp tongue.

Law was swirling the rope decorating the scabbard of Kikoku around his finger, so tightly it was blocking the circulation. He could clearly feel his pulse throbbing in that place, and at least it was his own. He had missed this feeling of being whole, experienced after getting his own heart back, but it was always short-lived. After a couple of days he wouldn't remember appreciating it anymore, because you got used to it so quickly.

You get used to having your own heart in your chest?

He was about to laugh aloud – probably in a very insane way – after noticing what exactly he was thinking. No one should ever have a need to get used to such a thing, they shouldn't even have experience of anything else.

Nami, Usopp and all the others were right. He was just too fucking creepy. And the others didn't even know everything, not even closely, not the worst things of all. The things going through his mind.

– Doflamingo's hand was so big, his heart was drowning into it almost totally –

Law took a few deep breaths, trying to calm down. His hand wandered at his chest, feeling his heartbeat as he kept repeating in his mind that Doflamingo had never really touched it.

Luffy had.

That thought had his heart racing for completely other reasons than disgust or fear. It was difficult to believe how light and gentle Luffy's touch had been while settling on his heart, and still not hesitant at all. It was just –

Despite that Law hadn't been able to say his decision aloud in the middle of everything else, giving
in to his childish urge of slamming the doors instead. Perhaps he deserved some creepy nightmares because of being so spineless.

"Has that log needle settled already?" He blurted out the first question he could come up with, just to get out of his own head.

Nami pulled her hand off the helm, stretching it out to show the contraption around her wrist. Now the right-hand needle had slowed down much, it was only drawing a lazy half-circle back and forth, and finally would settle pointing to some nearby island.

"At some point I'd like getting to know what was causing this," Nami said.

"Mh."

"But it seems that the New World surprises us once in a while."

"Indeed. How long we have to go to Zou?"

"With this wind, perhaps six days if there are no surprises and if the maps I have are correct."

Law nodded, but also sighed. It felt like a really long time. On the other hand, if some of his messes started getting solved against all of his expectations, it might also feel like a really short time, and that didn't sound particularly pleasant either.

Nami was watching the log for a moment, frowning, until straightening her posture and pointing at Law with her finger.

Whatever this was about, it was coming now. The reason for Nami wanting to speak with him.

"What was I interrupting as I came to the deck and that argument happened?" Nami asked. "After you had left it felt like Robin was trying to murder me with her gaze."

"Ask her. How could I know her reasons for acting like that?" Law didn't want to talk of this.

"Already did. She said it's not her business to tell. Thus it has to be yours."

"Zoro was on the deck, too –"

"– and sleeping like a log. It can't be about him."

The nocturnal sea was a very fascinating thing to look at, also above the surface. The lantern was casting some golden glow on the black waves, and there could be just anything outside the circle of light. The darkness felt like pressing the borders of the light, infinite and heavy.

"Law! Don't try ignoring me." Nami didn't sound angry as much as frustrated. "I got that you had meant to say something, but skipped it because of getting in a bad mood – what was it? I'm not asking this merely out of curiosity. If it was something important – probably was, that's how angry Robin was – I don't want you to leave it be... It would partly be my fault."

Law pulled the bill of his hat downwards, shading his eyes a bit more as he was thinking what to say. Not a proper explanation anyway, that much was sure. "It's none of your business."

"Woah! You're a real charmer. No wonder Luffy's so entranced."

"There's no doubt he has terrible taste when it comes to guys," Law admitted. Still the thought of someone possibly being able of liking him... he had to smile a bit, there was no helping it.
Nami was staring at him for a good while, eyes wide. "Hm, perhaps you're not quite as bad after all... You're going to start dating him, aren't you?"

"What the heck is giving that kind of impression?"

"You didn't throw a fit when he was touching your heart. And you started smiling as I mentioned his name."

He had to admit that those facts were pretty convincing indicators.

"Did you have an intention to tell him?" Nami asked.

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it does! You know, Luffy tries not to show it so as to not be irritating, but he's on pins and needles, he hates waiting –"

"That's no news," Law interrupted.

"– and if you leave him hanging for a long time because of a stupid reason like we happening to have an argument, I'll make a lightning strike your balls."

"Ow," escaped from Law. He didn't doubt Nami's capability of making her threat come true.

It seemed neither of them had anything to add, but as the silence fell, it didn't feel as awkward as before. Law noticed feeling much more normal already than right after waking up, at least this discussion had managed in getting him back to reality. That was something to be grateful of.

"I'm still thinking of it, it's my intention to tell him in the morning," he said after a long while. Perhaps Nami deserved to know that much because she had banished the dream. "I'm wide awake now anyways, so I could steer the ship if you want to go and sleep?"

"Thanks, but I'm quite alert too."

"By the way, it seems like Luffy's never steering, why's that?" Law remembered seeing all of the Straw Hats by the helm except Luffy, Zoro and Sanji. It was understandable that Sanji's days were mostly spent in the kitchen and that's why he wasn't expected to take steering turns as well. And there was no way Zoro could be allowed anywhere near the helm if they wanted to stay in route; Law had a hard time even believing anyone could be so badly directionally challenged.

But he didn't undestand why Luffy wouldn't steer sometimes. Being a captain was no reason. Law himself pretty much enjoyed steering his submarine, especially at night, when it was silent and he couldn't sleep – there was something almost therapeutic in it.

"He's too prone to changing the route in the spur of the moment, suddenly coming up with a random idea that it would be fun to go here or there or chase some school of dolphins or anything like that."

Ah. Law could imagine that. "I suppose you've had some experiences."

"Some bitter experiences. After the last one we convinced him that captains are not supposed to do things like steering."

"That idiot."

"Okay, that really was creepy." Nami shuddered. "That sounded almost tender."
Law would have objected, if he hadn't been so startled by his strange tone, too. He had no words to utter, so he became very interested in time, checking what it was. It was going to be at least three hours until the breakfast.

Awesome. He couldn't get any sleep, he didn't feel like enjoying Nami's company more than this, and actually he didn't want to be alone, either. Being accompanied by his own thoughts would be the worst thing right now; the obsessions might still come back with some reinforcements if given a chance.

"You look like you could use some sleep," Nami pointed out.

"That's what I always look like."

"I've noticed. Did you sleep at all?"

"A bit." That had been a surprise. Law had expected staying up all night, after forcing himself to sleep for so long the previous night; especially considering how cranky he had been in the evening. He had imagined his thoughts would just keep running in circles. "I wish I hadn't."

"Nightmares?"

"The worst ones."

Nami wasn't asking what kind of nightmares, or commenting in any other way, just watching the sea with her lips pressed into a thoughtful line. Law had a feeling she had her own nightmares, for the atmosphere was almost understanding.

"What if you accepted Luffy's proposition?" Nami finally asked.

"I already told I'm thin-"

"Not that! The one about sleeping in the mens' quarters with the others."

The suggestion sounded much more appealing than it had any right. The company of the sleeping people wouldn't be too bothersome or intrusive but it would probably prevent his thoughts from getting too nasty.

"There's something really soothing in Luffy's presence," Nami said. "It's like... making you think that perhaps it's going to be all right in the end."

Law was aware of it, but didn't much like what Nami was implying. "Am I supposedly looking like I need some comforting?"

Nami was scrutinizing him for a moment, her head tilted to the side, and undoubtedly noticed his slumped posture, the restless fingers squeezing his sword, tenseness around the corners of his mouth, and those constant shadows under his eyes. "Yes, you are," Nami said with an emphasizing nod. "And a tight hug."

Law snorted, like this was the most absurd idea he had ever heard. He was a Warlord and 'the Surgeon of Death', and it wasn't beneficial for his image that people thought he was in need of a tight hug. He did quite well without a thing like that. Had done since the government had considered destroying the whole of Flevance and his family with it as a suitable action.

After that no one had hugged him even once, no one dared and he didn't allow it. Corazon had been patting his head, and sometimes pulled a blanket to better cover him if he had kicked it off during the
night – and carried him from one hospital to another, of course – but that was all there was to it.

And of course you couldn't count some pointless one-night-stand's arms wrapping around you, there was nothing resembling that gesture and feeling Nami was meaning.

As Law imagined what it would be like, after so long time; someone just holding him because they wanted to do it and cared about him... He started aching inside with mere desperate longing; hollow, ragged pain, totally different from the oppressive anxiety he had been experiencing only a little while ago. The previous anxiety had made him need some vast space around him so as to not suffocate. Now he wanted someone's arms squeezing him into a small heap and not letting go for a long time.

Geez, this was the most ludicrous idea he had gotten for some time. He didn't need any kind of gentle stuff.

"Sometimes the thing you don't even dare to wish for is given to you out of the blue."

And Robin was one frighteningly wise woman, who understood Law way too well even though they hadn't known each other for a long time. But he supposed there was nothing weird in knowing your mirror image. From the beginning Law had had a feeling they were very much alike in many things.

"If you imagine I'm going to crawl next to him just like that because of a nightmare –" Law started.

Nami sweeped the objection aside with a nonchalant move of her hand. "There's a couch in the room, too."

There probably was no better way for him to pass time than laying on that couch, watching the ceiling. It sounded more tolerable than any other option. "I guess so. But I can imagine what some of them are going to say then they see me in the morning."

"Do you care?"

"A bit." Law shrugged. "I might be a prick, but not emotionless."

How he had wanted to be totally emotionless as a child, so that nothing could hurt him like the destruction of Flevance ever again. He had tried becoming like Doflamingo, he supposed he had really admired the man at that time – now the thought was enough to make his stomach turn upwards down, the bile rising up his throat.

In the end he hadn't been able of becoming like that, despite trying. There was always too much pain and rage in him, and finally something good had grown out of them, because of Corazon. After that he hadn't been hurting less, but even more. As the years had gone by, he had managed in growing a thick layer of ice to cover the sea of painful feelings churning inside him, but it was still there.

And there were times when the ice gave way for a moment, dropping him into the freezing, endless sea, and he was forced to realize that his inability to swim was reaching even the mental, symbolic level.

He gave a heavy sigh, rubbing his eyes to shake the thoughts drifting to a dangerous path back to the corner of his subconscious again. Nami glanced at him, and he hurried to wish her good night. It was best to go before Nami had time to urge him going to sleep. He hated being told to do something, and it didn't feel like this was a good moment to start arguing about a thing like that.

He descended the stairs slowly, stopping in the toilet briefly mostly because it gave him an opportunity for procrastinating more. At least splashing his face with some cold water made him get
some kind of grip of himself, for he soon found himself standing by the door of the mens' quarters.

If he were to go in, it would be like admitting some things to himself. Like, there were moments when it was hard to stand being alone. And, at moments like that, Luffy's presence really was pretty soothing. Plus, he was dangerously close to saying 'yes' for real.

He turned in order to stride across the deck back to the infirmary, because there was no way in hell he was ready for this kind of transition.

The lawn deck in front of him was absolutely deserted, the darkness was lurking on the other side of the railings, and the sails were creaking. It felt metaphorical.

"Giving this to Straw Hat would have been beneficial to you, but you kept hesitating for too long."

No. No more flashbacks from that nightmare, he couldn't take them. But if these were the options he had – Luffy behind this door and his own thoughts in the infirmary – he really knew which one of them was better.

He opened the door.

The room felt inhabited immediately, it was full of living presences. Luffy had showed the whole ship to Law after his boarding, but after that little peek he hadn't stepped into this room even once, there just had been no reason to. According to the dim memory he realized stepping in from the wrong door, if the shortest route to the couch was what he wanted.

Three double bunk beds were hanging from the ceiling in front of him. He wondered briefly in which of them Luffy was sleeping, and was ready to wager it was an upper bed. Possibly the one in the middle; wanting to be as close to all of his friends as possible felt Luffy-like somehow.

He went a bit closer, driven by pure curiosity, perhaps just a little peek to see if he had gotten it right. A careless step had him tripping on a very suspicious looking pile of dirty laundry on the floor.

"Traffy?" A whisper was heard from the upper bed in the middle, Luffy probably imagined it had been quiet.

Law was windmilling, finally regaining his balance despite standing in the pile of clothes, feeling like they were getting stuck to his feet. "I'm sorry, didn't mean to wake you up."

"Nah, wasn't sleeping. Come here."

A definitely bad idea. Law was just trying to get to the couch, but he had been attacked by laundry on the way. He definitely was not going to climb into Luffy's bed. "No, I –"

Apparently Luffy's suggestion hadn't been a suggestion after all but a demand, for suddenly there were two lengthening arms wrapping around Law like some tentacles of an octopus, and they were simply dragging him off the floor. With a pretty bad coordination, on top of that; he hit his thigh against the side of the bed and his sword was about to get tangled with the ropes keeping the bunk suspended. Finally he ended up prostrate across the bed, with his head and legs hanging from both sides.

"Straw Hat. One of these days I'm really going to kill you," he grumbled, massaging his bruised thigh.

Luffy was just laughing, overjoyed by the way his yank had gotten the whole bunk swaying.
"Oi." Sanji's voice sounded from below them, grouchy in a way typical for people just woken up. "If you shitty bastards really need to get the bed rocking in the middle of the night, do it in the infirmary."

Law's face was heating with embarrassment as he thought of doing anything in these circumstances, ever. And he wasn't going to think of it in more detail, and not doing anything with Luffy in the first place. But it was damn difficult while being in Luffy's bed at the moment.

"Sorry, Sanji. We'll be quiet." There was nothing in Luffy's tone hinting that he had gotten Sanji's innuendo.

Law sat up, carefully, trying to get more comfortable because he happened to be here now. He doubted Luffy would let him go to the couch without making a fuss, so he supposed it was best to accept his fate. At least till Luffy fell asleep, perhaps he could slip off after that.

He placed his sword against the side of the bed so that it wouldn't take much space. He tried dropping his shoes onto the floor as quietly as possible, but two thumps still sounded so loud in the sleepy quarters, he was sure someone was going to wake up.

There wasn't any grumpy order to keep silent, just the sound of breathing, and snoring.

They were looking at each other in the dim room. Luffy was wearing a way too big t-shirt, looking so cute it didn't make any sense. That was all Law could see, because Luffy had pulled his blanket up to his waist. The straw hat in its part was placed hanging off a peg attached to the side of the bed, probably meant for that kind of use.

"Why weren't you sleeping?" Law asked, very quietly. It had been a surprise. So far he had been under impression Luffy slept like a log in any place and at any time.

"Couldn't."

Actually, Law didn't have any right to be wondering about that, when you took into account his own sleeping problems. "Oh," he said. It felt like a pretty lame thing to say.

"You were hurting so much, I got stomach ache."

Oh shit. Fucking Haki. Fucking Luffy being so fucking powerful in it.

Law had heard that some of the best were able to feel some feelings in addition to presences, if they were powerful enough, but this was the first time he had countered the phenomenon in such an unpleasant way. He didn't want anyone else suffering because of his sickening angst churning uncontrollably; and it had been precisely the kind making your stomach turn upside down. He felt guilty and humiliated at the same time. "Sorry about that."

"There's no helping it, right?"

He shook his head.

"Why are you saying you're sorry, then?"

That... Actually that was a good question. Law didn't have the answer.

Luffy shifted a bit closer to the side, placing his hand on the empty space next to him. The gesture was enough to hint that Law should crawl into the space in question. "It's better now, right? Let's get some sleep."
The space seemed really narrow. Not like you couldn't fit in relatively comfortably if you were ready to tolerate touching the other one in some place, but there was no way to leave any kind of distance between them. However, just doing like urged was probably the easiest thing to do, lying down and pretending to sleep. Law was strongly doubting his ability to fall asleep during the rest of the night, but at least he could be still and quiet, not disturbing the others.

He placed his hat in the corner of the bed, straightening himself carefully. Knowing that each of his movements made also the lower bed sway was awkward – how the fuck anyone was sleeping in these things? – but finally he managed in finding a position where he didn't feel the need to twist away immediately.

He was lying on his side, back facing Luffy, which actually wasn't half bad. He could take the possibility of getting hit by an elbow across his back, or his feet getting kicked sometime during the night, which was more than likely while being in such a narrow space. He had succeeded in settling himself so that they were not touching at the moment, but that would certainly be changed by the first movement while sleeping.

Perhaps Law probably not getting any sleep was a good thing. He was often really restless after falling asleep, and used to wake up in totally strange positions. Like curled into a small ball at the foot of the bed, or his head tucked under the pillow, or with his hands behind his back, awkwardly twisted. None of them was a very recommendable option in a space like this.

Even worse scenario was the one where he decided to cuddle Luffy while sleeping, waking up spooning him, and hard. That wasn't impossible, either.

He had been very sexually frustrated since waking up. And fuck, thinking of it didn't make it any better.

Luffy pulled the blanket partly over Law, too. "Good night."

Law managed to reply in kind, pulling the blanket more securely over himself, squeezing its edge in his fist. His nerves were tingling with weirdly nervous excitement, despite him being sure that nothing was going to happen. His body had more difficulties in believing that – he just never went to bed with someone without having sex with them.

When a hand settled onto his upper arm, he twitched with surprise, hitting his knee against the side of the bed. He concentrated on not cursing aloud because of his aching kneecap, and not hyperventilating because he was strained to wait what exactly that hand was going to do. Luffy was impossible to predict, even if the idea of any more groping in this kind of situation didn't feel likely.

But Luffy was just squeezing his arm lightly, and then kept his hand completely still; and finally Law remembered how to breathe. It was just an upper arm, it was pretty neutral zone. After recovering the first shock he had to admit the hand being actually pretty soothing.

If Luffy's breathing was any indication, he fell asleep quickly, his hand getting more limp and heavy, but staying in its place.

Law was laying awake for a long time, thinking of everything that had transpired, and Nami's words. And finally, was it possible that it was going to be all right in the end, after all.
It was still very dark when Brook was scrambling out of his bed in order to take the last turn in steering this night. Moving in familiar place was easy despite the darkness, and he carefully avoided the area where everyone used to throw their dirty laundry. It wouldn't do to stumble on the pile of laundry, and wake everyone up by making a racket.

Instead of the laundry, he was stumbling on something that shouldn't have been on the safe way by the foot end of the beds. The unexpected contact between the thing and his toes startled him, making him lose his balance. After a little windmill imitation he ended up clinging on a rope of the nearest bunk, until managing to calm down.

It didn't sound like anyone had woken up. Brook bended down, searching the object that wasn't supposed to be there; then he held it against the light coming from the window, succeeding in identifying its shape.

It was a shoe. An ankle boot made out of leather, with pointy tip and plenty of heel, to be precise. The only person living in this room who could own that style of footwear was Brook himself, and he knew this wasn't one of his.

Thus it had to be Law's.

Law probably wasn't very far from his shoes himself, so Brook was watching around, trying to find some signs of a guest in their sleeping quarters. Soon he spotted a shin hanging over the side of Luffy's bed. It couldn't be Luffy's, who was never wearing socks or pants with long legs.

Brook didn't even try resisting the urge to peek into Luffy's bed. Law was lying on his back, leg hanging over the edge and his hand was thrown over his eyes. It seemed like Luffy's back was pressed snugly against his side. Both seemed to be in a deep sleep.

_Yo ho ho, perhaps we'll end up arranging the wedding after all?_

He pushed Law's boots properly under Sanji's bed, so that no one else wouldn't stumble on them, and finally got to his wardrobe, pulling his daytime clothes on. He also grabbed his violin before marching out, like he used to do if the last steering turn of the night happened to be his. Then he had a wonderful opportunity to wake everyone up with a cheery tune.

Those used to be the same mornings when everyone seemed to be unusually feisty at the breakfast, threatening to force the violin down his throat.

Nami was yawning by the helm in the slowly brightening darkness, the sun hadn't risen over the horizon yet.

"It's still pretty dark, but it seems like one ray of sunlight has already fallen onto the deck," Brook greeted.
“Morning, or something like that,” Nami answered. “You're worse than Sanji sometimes.”

“Finding suitable lyrics for every situation is the musician's job. And I am keyed to romantical mood today – I might compose a love song.”

“Really.” Nami stepped away from the helm, stretching her arms so that her breasts were about to pop out of her scanty blouse. Too bad that it didn't quite happen. "Why such an inspiration today?"

“Ah, that was a funny story. I couldn't believe my eyes!” Brook paused for a moment to increase the dramatics. "Even though I have no eyes!"

Nami gave a heavy sigh. "What did you see?"

"Mr. Trafalgar is sleeping in Luffy's bed."

“What? Seriously?"

Brook nodded. "Plus, Luffy's sleeping right next to him."

"Whoa. I wasn't expecting that, despite seeing Law earlier. He looked terrible."

"I'm so glad that we share that opinion! He's not my type either. Yo ho ho."

Nami wasn't laughing at the joke, instead she looked like the next one might make her kick. Brook sighed – it felt like no one ever considered his jokes funny.

"I meant he looked haunted," Nami corrected herself. "It's surprising that he's sleeping at all after that."

"Seemed to be sleeping pretty soundly. That was pretty sweet, truly warmed my bones."

"Well, that's good... I guess. Perhaps they're not quite as bad idea as I was thinking first. Actually they might do some good to each other."

It was easy to agree with that opinion. It was clear as water that Law could use a little bit of positivity. Luffy, in his part, had been a bit more considerate for the past few days, skipping the worst of his escapades, perhaps because he tried not to irritate Law while he was thinking. It might work, like some old-time ‘opposites complement each other’ kind of romance.

"Love is always good for people," Brook said. "Makes you feel alive. Even though I'm –"

He was interrupted by a sole of a sandal smacking his cheekbone, so Nami's patience had apparently run out. And he hadn’t even had time to ask about her panties. Damn.

"I'm going to get a bit of rest before breakfast. There are some tricky currents to be expected, so make sure you steer carefully, Brook."

"Roger!"

Having been left alone, Brook started humming while thinking what kind of fluffy ballad he could create by using the romance of two captains. At times he was rubbing his cheek, on which he could still feel a womanly vigorous kick. It had definitely woken him up to the new day if nothing else.

~*~

As Law woke up he was unusually calm, and pretty surprised by the fact that he had fallen asleep
before the morning at all. He had to have been asleep, for he had had a dream, plus he and Luffy had ended up in a position that wouldn't have happened had he been awake to prevent it.

He was lying on his stomach, and Luffy was using his shoulder blade as a pillow that had to be the most uncomfortable one in the world. Luffy was tightly pressed against his side, arm wrapped around his back, and one of Luffy's legs was lifted over Law's. Like he was some damn body pillow. He was slowly boiling in this hold and mostly under the blanket – when he had dressed up earlier in the night, it had been his intention to go out to the deck, not ending up squeezed like this; and he was wearing way too much.

Law moved a bit in order to find out how tightly he was trapped, and became aware of something pressing his hip. He shifted again to make sure – yes, that was a genuine morning wood. How awesome.

It wasn't the erection itself that was bothering him. That was a perfectly normal physiological phenomenon, and as a doctor he knew pretty much of it. He also happened to like Luffy, having succeeded in admitting it to himself, so Luffy was by all means welcome to press as many morning woods against him as he pleased.

What was bothering Law was that he couldn't imagine what Luffy would think if he woke up like this. Would he be embarrassed for no real reason? Or laughing and sweeping the whole occurrence aside? Both options sounded just as possible. It was also possible that the reaction would be something a lot weirder, something Law couldn't even imagine. That was always a completely plausible option when it came to Luffy.

Besides, this made him remember that he had already been in desperate need of a handjob last night, but his subconscious messing with him had prevented him. Now he needed to think unpleasant things in order to prevent his own cock from following suit and getting hard.

He was lying very still in hopes of Luffy turning onto his other side, and thus solving the problem. At the same time he kept reminding himself that this was the mens' quarters, meaning it was anything but a private place. Zoro, Usopp and Chopper were still sleeping, the others had probably gotten up because it felt like they weren't in the room.

How long it was until breakfast? At least it was pretty light already, but Law couldn't deduce much from that fact because he couldn't see the window and whether the sky was clear or cloudy.

Law tried relaxing while waiting for something to happen. This wasn't a bad place to be except sweltering hotness, especially after he turned his face to another side for a change, and his neck stopped complaining.

He tried sneaking the blanket off his feet in order to cool a bit. Luffy twitched, squeezing him tighter for a moment, until the hold loosened. Law could tell Luffy had woken up by the change in his breathing.

Still hard against his hip. Well, at least there would be no need for him to guess what kind of reaction Luffy would have anymore, he was going to find out very soon. He had to admit being so curious it wasn't healthy.

"Morning," he said, mostly to inform that he was also awake.

The silence was so long that he had time to suspect Luffy was still sleeping after all. Perhaps he had just drifted into another phase of sleep.
"Traffy?" Luffy was finally mumbling into Law's shoulder blade, shifting a bit. "Oh. You were there."

How was it possible to forget a thing like that? At least Luffy seemed to take the discovery with a pretty laid-back attitude, with all of its aspects and all; he clearly wasn't in any hurry to move away.

"Indeed I am," Law said. "And it's pretty warm here, so I'd appreciate it if you shifted a bit."

"But you're really comfy."

"Like a sofa, you mean?" He definitely was not, all there was to him was tallness and some sharp angles. There was no way he was comfy in psychological sense either.

"Yeah." Luffy sounded like he might fall asleep again.

Law took a deep breath, counting slowly to ten. The heat was getting more suffocating all the time, and he wasn't in the mood to deal with it and Luffy before getting some coffee, especially not after a night like the previous one. "Get off me right now."

Luffy was whining wordlessly, but started fumbling with his hand to find some support on the mattress. "What – is that your sword?"

"It is. It's there because last night you didn't give me a change to put it somewhere else as you dragged me here."

"Mm, sorry about that." Luffy was frozen while stretching his arm over Law, hand on Kikoku's scabbard. "Is it feeling like it's screaming all the time?"

"Yeah. It's cursed."

"Wow. I'd love to know how to use a sword, they're so cool."

Law had never seen someone reacting to Kikoku like that. Usually people were acting like they had accidentally grazed a venomous snake. That was actually pretty refreshing change, but it was hot like in hell and Law wanted some coffee. "Straw Hat, I told you to move. Or do you wish I'll use it on you?"

"But I wanna touch it some more. It... it feels like it has a presence, you know?"

"Yes, but that doesn't mean you can just start fingering it. It's pretty intrusive. And I'm boiling here, so let go now –"

"But it's –"

"– and don't squeeze –"

Law was interrupted by a suffering sigh from the bed next to theirs. "Do you realize how obscene that sounds?" Usopp asked before covering his head with a pillow.

Law repeated the last lines of their discussion in his mind, and wanted to put his head under the pillow, too. The only thing that was missing was an amazed, 'Oh, it's so big'. He was too tired and awkward to enjoy indecent humour. "Straw Hat. Move."

_Uh, that sounded bad, too..._

Luffy did, at last, rolling aside and sitting up. "I like my moniker and all, but sometimes you could
call me Luffy, too."

"I will, the day you're willing to call me Law instead of your awful nicknime. Straw Hat." Law was relieved when he got to shake the blanket off and sit up, too. It was much cooler immediately when he wasn't pressed against the heated mattress.

He tried not to stare the way Luffy's oversized shirt was about to fall off one of his shoulders. Luffy's upper body was pretty well on display all day long, what with him keeping his shirts or vests unbuttoned; so why the fuck Law suddenly got excited just because of seeing some bare shoulder? Like he had never seen it before. Geez, he really needed to jerk off.

"Naaaaa, but I like Traffy."

"In that case it seems like we've reached a stalemate. Straw Hat."

"Are you two quite sure you didn't get married ten years ago?" Usopp asked. "Sounds like your gentle marital war started sometimes in those days."

There was some overjoyed giggling from Chopper's bed, he was trying to smother it with a pillow. "A marital war!"

Apparently Zoro was awake too, because he snorted in a way that could be both amused or irritated, Law couldn't tell.

"We are not sounding like an old married couple," Law sighed. But who was he trying to trick – there were times when they sounded exactly like that, now that he came to think of it. It had started pretty much at the same second as the alliance.

He lifted his sword on his lap as some kind of shield between himself and the rest of the world, but the situation could have been much more awkward. If his unexpected ending up in Luffy's bed in the middle of the night didn't have more consequences than a little bit of teasing, he was getting away easily.

Luffy wasn't voicing his opinion on whether they sounded like an old married couple or not, instead he was yawning widely and rubbing his eyes. His hair was a mess, sticking out in every direction, and he brushed some off his eyes before looking at Law. "Got any sleep?"

"Yes, surprisingly. Some."

On top of that Law had had a dream that was neither a nightmare, a sex dream, nor a hellish mix of those two. That was a rare treat, usually his dreams tended to fall in one of those aforementioned three categories.

This time the dream had clearly been a metaphorical message from his own subconscious. There had been Corazon, offering him a mug full of coffee. The mug had been yellow with black spots, that detail had stood up absurdly clearly. Law had liked it.

"You see?" Luffy's smile was way too sunny this early in the morning. "Sleeping with other people is much better."

Law didn't feel like arguing about that. There were much else to think and say. He didn't need any dream messages to know what he had to say, and it was morning now.

This was going to be one of the most insane sentences he had ever said aloud.
Luffy had gotten serious, watching him closely like sensing something important was about to come.

"I –" Law swallowed. He realized he was fiddling with the decorative rope of the scabbard again. He needed to wean himself from this habit, it was giving away his restlessness too easily. There wasn't even a sound of anyone breathing, the whole room was waiting silently, lurking for his next words.

"– I'd like giving it a try," he said, looking Luffy in the eye. "Being together."

Luffy blinked. Law had expected another kind of reaction, perhaps a squeal and a jump onto his lap with a force that would make the bunk drop onto the floor, so it was a bit surprising to get an almost shy smile and a question, "So, you're like my boyfriend now?"

"... Yes." The word 'boyfriend' was making Law flinch, he had never wanted anyone calling him that, it felt anything but suitable; but arguing with Luffy about the right wording would have been a lost cause and total waste of energy. He could claim that he was something else, but Luffy would still use the word that had came to his mind first. Best to get used to it soon.

"And I'm your boyfriend?"

"Yes, it really tends to go both ways." Law was loading his voice with as heavy sarcasm as possible, but that was waste of energy too, when it came to Luffy. It felt like Luffy had no sense of irony at all, but at least Law was amusing himself.

Well, he had a 'boyfriend' now, so it seemed. At least the word suited better for Luffy than Law himself, younger as he was. Come to think again, he had no idea how old Luffy exactly was, thinking of it had never felt necessary. Barely of age would have been his guess, but Luffy was the type who might seem younger than his actual age.

"By the way, how old are you?" he asked.

"Nineteen." Luffy seemed to be lost in deep thoughts, hesitating in something.

Law was expecting Luffy to ask his age, when the topic had surfaced like this, but a dense silence fell instead. He thought of blurting the fact out just like that, just to say something, but it would have felt random and stupid.

"And how old are you, then?" Usopp asked. "Luffy might not care about minor points like that, but it would be pretty nice to know for us."

"I'm twenty-six," Law said, kind of relieved that some things – like Usopp – didn't change even though he had just turned his life upside down.

"Whatever. You heard that?" Luffy's voice rose with excitement so that not hearing it would have been impossible. "I did say Traffy's gonna be my boyfriend!"

"Congrats," Usopp muttered.

"I hope you're going to be really happy!" Chopper said.

"Good luck. You're going to need it," Zoro said.

The congratulations had Luffy laughing merrily, but his cautiously hopeful expression came back as he turned back to Law. "Does this mean I can touch you now?"
"You're asking that now?" Law was staring at Luffy, disbelieving. "After you've been dragging me here and there, and using me as a pillow?"

"It's different."

Was it? Law really didn't know. No one else wouldn't have been allowed to handle him like Luffy already had, and if it had been fine even though they hadn't been dating yet... asking about it now just was absurd.

"Traffy?"

"Yeah, why not." Law tried to not reveal how badly the thought had his nerves tingling.

Usopp, Chopper and Zoro decided right then and there that stopping their lazing and getting up was a great idea. They changed their clothes in an amazing speed, and left; Usopp and Chopper seemed to be downright making an escape, stumbling on each other's feet as they were charging out of the door. Zoro followed them more slowly, turning to look back by the door. "Play nicely, it's time to eat soon."

Law was left in the sleeping quarters alone with his new boyfriend, and they were sitting on Luffy's bed. The situation awakened loads of dirty images, and his lower head considered them very interesting. His pulse accelerated two-fold, which was insane, so he did his best trying to mentally throw a bucketful of cold water on himself. Preferably sea water, it was damn effective as it drained all of his energy.

He reminded himself that there was no way Luffy had any kind of experience in sex if he had never even been interested in anyone except Law. Another fact that Law reminded himself of was that Luffy definitely wouldn't hesitate to kick his ass if he did something unwanted.

One plus one equaled him not taking the first step to such a risky area, instead he would see how things proceeded if he left setting the pace to Luffy. That was a rational way to go about it anyways, because he would be fine with anything. As far as Law was concerned they could have sex tonight – he had done it with persons much more unknown to him than Luffy, after all – but if it was going to take a much longer time... Well, he didn't do it much in the first place, except masturbating, so abstinence definitely wasn't going to kill him. Anything would be fine.

Another bucketful of sea water poured on him was a strict reminder that seven people accommodated in this room, and any of the six others could come in whenever they pleased. Never ever do anything intimate in this room, period.

Luffy shifted closer, until he was sitting right in front of Law and their legs were leaning against each other lightly. Law had no idea what Luffy was going to do, it was nerve-wracking. According to his experiences you could expect just about anything from Luffy; what with him being a guy who was spontaneously almost launching himself into the sea, declaring his willingness to get married in front of his crew out of the blue, and kept changing his plans in a second even though they had agreed on something else altogether.

He was definitely the worst possible partner for Law, and still they were here.

Luffy took his hands, holding them between his own.

Law stopped breathing for a while just because of being so stupefied. The situation was what it was, they really were alone together and Luffy had asked very seriously if he could touch him – and then Luffy wanted to hold his hands?
Remember: do not even try understanding him, ever. EVER. Past attempts turned out hopeless and headache-inducing.

Luffy's hands were warm. And firm. But their touch was light, as Luffy was tracing with his finger the tattoos on back of Law's hands and fingers.

"Why do you have same things in both hands?" Luffy asked.

"Why wouldn't I?" Law had never even considered anything else, the idea felt really weird.

"If I could have some tattoos, each would be totally different. That would look fun."

"I can imagine." Law had to smile as he imagined what a mess of patterns that would be. Luffy's stretchy body probably was a nightmare of tattoo artists and that might be a good thing, preventing a scenario like that. "I remember already telling that I'm no fun, though. And I guess symmetry appeals to me."

"You should smile more. It looks nice."

Law tried not to smile more at those words, but he was feeling oddly warm and comfortable. He tried hiding it by concentrating on Luffy's hands in turn, which was quite a pleasant thing to do, for he thought hands were a fascinating part of a body. They told much.

The skin covering Luffy's knuckles was rough and thick, revealing clearly how much he was using his fists. It seemed he also kept his nails as short as was humanly possible, so that cutting them almost had to hurt; perhaps they would have been tearing because of his constant climbing and hanging off of things and playing around, otherwise. Law found an old dot-like scar next to the knuckle, and after turning the hand around also the spot where the thing leaving that scar had come out.

"What happened to this?" he asked.

"Oh, that one? Needed to strike one guy wearing a spiked cape."

Mere thought had Law shuddering. He had imagined that perhaps someone had tried to nail Luffy's hand to the wall or something like that, he could have understood that. That you decided to strike consciously despite spikes, though...

Luffy pressed their palms together, and commented that Law's fingers were long after comparing them to his own.

"I guess they are." Changing the topic was welcome, Law didn't want to imagine spikes forcing their way through the hand. His imagination had plenty of sick nightmare material even without some new additions. "I'm pretty tall otherwise, too."

"Yup. But my fingers can be longer than yours!" To prove this, Luffy grabbed the fingers of his one hand, stretching them until they were as long as his arm.

"I know. I've seen that before." Which didn't mean that Law was used to it or could help staring. Absurd things were absurd.

Like he himself had any right to say anything about absurd Devil's Fruit Powers... His own was both absurd and creepy.

Luffy took his hands again before he had time to get lost in his thoughts, and their fingers were interlocking in a way that felt pretty natural. Then they were just sitting there. He could feel Luffy's
pulse throbbing against his fingers, and was feverishly thinking of something to say, because this was damn confusing and he didn't quite know if he was doing this right. Sex was something he was able to understand, it was a clear cut act aiming at orgasm, progressing from start to finish; but something like this... This was pretty nice and had him melting in a weird way, but where this was going... he had absolutely no idea.

Little by little Law started accepting that perhaps there was no need for him to do anything at all, just being there was enough. They kept glancing at each other, and Law didn't have energy to care about his hair undoubtedly being a disaster, and his goatee could use some trimming, too. If Luffy's expression was any indication, he looked good enough like this.

He found himself wondering if Luffy's hair felt like he imagined. It didn't look very sleek or soft, so perhaps it was of slightly coarse quality; the mental image felt pretty fitting in respect of Luffy's nature. However, he wasn't in any hurry to find out, because actually he didn't want to stop holding hands with Luffy.

He was really starting to learn how to appreciate the atmosphere when it was broken by the most godawful noise one could produce with a violin. As the shock effect of the first aggressive notes started fading, Brook started singing very loudly, and it sounded like the little song told about handkerchiefs. Black and white ones.

Law tried accepting the fact that he had irrevocably left his brain on Punk Hazard as he had decided to board this ship. And getting it back, ever, didn't feel likely.

"Breakfast!" Luffy squeezed Law's hands tighter for a moment, then letting go and jumping onto the floor without bothering to use the ladder.

A sudden change of center of gravity had the bed swaying in nauseating way. Law stayed still until it settled, and then he got off the bed, too. Using the ladder. It took him some time to find out where his shoes had been put by someone.

Luffy had already slipped into his daytime clothes, and Law hadn't even had time to take a peek at his dressing before he was charging out. The commotion on the deck had also Law hurrying his steps, because it sounded like something was happening. It might be important.

"Traffy! Look!"

The newspaper was pushed into Law's face the moment he opened the door. He grabbed it, moving it some distance away so as to actually see the page. The headline of the first page was about the size of a cat.

'Trafalgar Law Dismissed From Being A Warlord'

And under the header there was a very unelegant picture of him, apparently taken on Dressrosa, because he was wearing his tattered Corazon coat. Open. And without a shirt.

How awesome. He really had wanted the whole world seeing his abs.

He gave a heavy sigh, letting he newspaper drop lower, and that's when a stack of new wanted posters fell from between it. Everyone on the deck hurried to pick them up and see if there were some familiar faces to be seen.

There were. Several.

The first ones to be found were posters of Law and Luffy, with their new bounties, and it was about
time to have that strategical meeting now.

Sanji opened the door of the kitchen, about to call everyone to eat, but he didn't even have time to open his mouth before Luffy shouted, "Food!" and run into the kitchen with his hands gleefully raised up in the air.

The strategical meeting... right after the more important things, so it seemed.
They decided to have the strategical meeting on the foredeck, because Nami was worried about unpredictable sea currents, claiming that someone needed to be by the helm all the time. Franky settled to steer, Sanji carried a small table and two chairs for Nami and Robin – while Zoro was needling him about being a slave – and the rest did their best to make themselves comfortable.

Law sat down onto the deck, leaning his back against the railing, his sword and a thermos full of coffee next to him. He couldn't wait to start, so that this would be over as soon as possible; but the new wanted posters had Luffy, Zoro, Usopp and Chopper so enthusiastic they seemed to have forgotten everything else.

"Look!" Usopp was waving his own like he hadn't already pushed it into everyone's face at breakfast. "There's a decent picture at last! Seventy million berries!"

"Great! Well done!" Luffy pounded Usopp's back so that he staggered forward, about to hit his nose to the deck. "And mine –"

Law coughed very loudly, managing to get everyone's attention for a moment.

"Are you getting sick?" Luffy asked. "I'm sure Chopper has something for a cough –"

The Straw Hats were howling with laughter, some of them couldn't even stand, especially after looking at Law's face.

"I'm not getting sick," Law said. "I'd like you to notice that we have some very important things to discuss, so what if –"

"Oh, yeah! I really wanna say something important." Luffy hurried next to Law, placing his hand on Law's shoulder. There was a small silence, during which Luffy probably was confirming he had everyone's attention. "We're boyfriends now!"

Law buried his face into his hands. After the breakfast there was no way this was news to anyone, and he couldn't imagine a way to make this even more awkward. Too bad that he definitely had faith in Luffy's capability to invent some way, and put it into practise during the next minute or so.

"Congratulations, one more time," Robin said with a little laugh. "I'm quite happy for both of you."

"That was quicker than I had expected." Sanji blew out a heart-shaped smoke ring again, that jerk. Law resisted the urge to give him the finger.

"Perfectly true," Brook echoed. "Mr. Trafalgar's resistance lasted – wait a minute, what was it – all three days?"

"That's only telling how much charm our captain has," Robin said.
"Shut up," Law said. In addition to being embarrassed, it also felt like he was easy and that wasn't a word he had ever associated with himself in any situation. He didn't like it much, even if being difficult also was pretty... difficult. "The first thing we should –"

"Sanji, snacks?" Luffy asked.

"It's not a snack time yet!" Sanji was ambivalently serving Robin and Nami something looking like milk-shake.

"But I wanna have some too –"

Law grasped the wrist of the hand resting on his shoulder, giving it a harsh pull and effectively stopping Luffy's whining as he fell on his ass next to Law. "The meeting. Now."

Nami nodded emphatically. "Luffy, now that you have a boyfriend who has more brains than you do, you could listen what he has to say."

Luffy was considering the idea for a moment; saying jovially, "Okay" and making himself comfortable. This meant him throwing himself lying on his back and leaning his head on Law's thigh, hands behind his nape in a relaxed way.

... All right. It seems like I'm his new favourite pillow.

At least it seemed like Luffy had settled down, and might actually be silent for a little while. Law used his Power to pull the wanted posters lying on the deck to himself, and poured himself a cup of coffee. Having taken a few sips of it he gave a deep sigh, feeling that perhaps life wasn't so totally terrible after all.

"That's so super cute you're gonna make us envious," Franky said, watching them. He flashed a shameless grin, pressing his nose, and a new hairstyle popped out. The peculiar tuft seemed like it was forming a big heart, and you couldn't call it anything else than the apex of tastelessness. Usopp and Chopper were noisily clapping their hands, howling with laughter.

Law tried keeping his face blank, taking another sip of his coffee. Being close to someone in front of an audience was strange and awkward enough even without someone making comments about it, but it was best if he got used to it soon because Luffy was Luffy. He would have loved to appear as dignified, or at least relatively dignified, but was heavily doubting his capability to pound this fact into Luffy's head.

"All right, firstly there are the news and the wanted posters," he started. Perhaps not the most important topic, but an important one nonetheless, and he thought it would get everyone's attention. The Straw Hats had been so enthusiastic because of those posters, they clearly had their interest. "It's clear that the government and marines have finally decided what they think of the incidence on Dressrosa."

Some quiet words were exchanged, but everyone was listening to him surprisingly well, for now. Keeping their attention was no problem to Law now, as Luffy didn't try talking at the same time as him, instead concentrating only on lazing and watching the clouds.

"As to the reason Fujitora didn't try arresting us, I have no idea. But it's clear that Akainu didn't like it much, because everyone who was on Dressrosa has their bounties remarkably raised." Whether it made any difference anymore was questionable, though. Those bounties had already been high enough, so that anyone who was powerful or stupid enough wanted to have their heads in hopes of the money. Inadvertently they served more as status symbols.
Law waved the stack of wanted posters, placing the first of them in front of him. "Usopp – seventy millions." Usopp was puffing his chest, looking like he would start some conceited, preposterous blabbering at any second; so Law hurried to go on and slammed the next poster on top of it. "Franky – one hundred millions."

"The destruction of that factory was super spectacular –" Franky started.

"Nico Robin – one hundred and nine millions." Law wondered it hadn't gone up more than that, but the numbers were ridiculously random at times.

"Roronoa Zoro – two hundred and fifty millions", Law continued. That was quite a bounty for a pirate who wasn't the captain of his crew, but it was anything but exaggerated, Law had seen that much. He was also congratulating himself for realizing how to utilize these posters, going through them one by one, because it seemed like his audience's interest was just growing as he was approaching the most essential point. Someone might accidentally listen to him at this rate.

"Monkey D. Luffy – five hundred millions."

"You said my name," Luffy said, smile reaching to his ears.

Law silently cursed his careless slip, and his explaining tactic that had been working awesomely being suddenly ruined. "I only did it because the name was printed in the poster. I guarantee it won't happen again, Straw Hat."

"Naaaa, but Traffy –"

"All right, save that lovers spat for a later time," Franky suggested.

"We're not –" Law interrupted himself because what the hell – actually they were, it was just that he wasn't used to it yet. He might have gotten used to the idea of Luffy as his partner quicker if they had kissed even once, or something like that, but now it felt like so little had changed; he couldn't quite get his head around the fact.

He still felt like Luffy leaning on him was something totally improper, and he should try ignoring it. At least there was no way he should enjoy it, and he definitely couldn't let his hands wander. That probably wasn't the way starting a relationship should feel, but on the other hand, it was serving the meeting quite well. Later, after Law had taken care of some important things, there would be time to sort out things and draw some lines.

One of those important things had to do with the last wanted poster in his hands. "Those bounties gone up haven't made any difference in your position in practise, even though the numbers are remarkable. This is the biggest problem." He slammed the poster on Luffy's poster.

"Trafalgar Law – five hundred and thirty million berries," Law read aloud. His backflip concerning cooperation with the government really seemed to be appreciated by Akainu, for the man had given his bounty a nice raise as a send-off gift.

"That really is a problem," Luffy said, unexpectedly serious.

"Yeah." Law was glad that Luffy got the seriousness of the situation, and they were on the same page for once. "Because my position –"

"Why yours is bigger than mine? I kicked Mingo's ass, it should be the other way round!"

*THAT is his problem!*
Law was wordlessly opening and closing his mouth for a moment before managing to say, "Well, mine was higher even before I became a –"

"But it shouldn't be!" Luffy suddenly lifted his head, almost hitting the coffee cup Law was holding with it.

Law was quick to place his hand on Luffy's shoulder, pushing him back down. "If you absolutely want to lean on me, stay still and don't make me spill my coffee."

"But it's –"

"I really don't care whose is the biggest and I haven't been the one deciding on my bounty, do you get –"

"– doesn't make sense –"

"Oi!" Usopp shouted. "We kind of have a meeting going on."

Law and Luffy stopped talking, and turned to look at the others.

"Get a room and go there to measure them if that size matters so much, but don't do it before the meeting has ended," Sanji said.

Law could have done without that mental image, thank you very much. He suddenly became extremely aware of his hand still being on Luffy's shoulder, and he could feel the warmth of his skin through the shirt. It seemed like Luffy had absolutely nothing against that hand being there, and it was apparently keeping Luffy still, so Law didn't move it away. Actually he didn't have anything against this, either.

"But Traffy –" Luffy started.

"Your bounty being a bit lower than your boyfriend's really is what you call a problem?" Sanji asked.

"Yup."

"That is not a problem! If you want to see what a problem is, look at me! Why I didn't get a new poster?"

Law tried saying that no one guarding the ship and Caesar had gotten a new poster, but Sanji was already going full-speed, ranting with flames of fury so that no one succeeded in saying anything.

"– still stuck with that shitty sketch, no one even recognizes me, and what about that bounty? Even the moss head is already worth two hundred and fifty mill-"

"What about me, then?" Chopped screamed. "I'm still worth fifty berries..."

Law tried not to smile at that, because the ridiculous bounty surely was damaging Chopper's pride, but he had never even imagined there was someone with even smaller bounty than Bepo. It was totally hysterical in its way.

"Law! Don't laugh, you – this is a serious matter – I'm a pirate, too – "

A miffed little reindeer stomping his foot was a sight forcing Law to bite the inside of his lip with quite a force, so as to keep his laughter as somewhat restrained shaking of his shoulders. He felt a bit less impolite when Luffy cracked up so badly he had to hold his sides.
Suddenly the ship lurched violently enough to make the last drop of Law's coffee jump into the air. Law tried holding his cup below the airborne liquid in order to catch it, while seeing Chopper rolling on the deck as a helpless ball of fur and several Straw Hats clinging to the railings with all of their might. Luffy stopped laughing, sitting up and watching around with huge eyes.

"It's a transverse current!" Nami shouted.

Law turned to look at the surface of the sea, where a more calm, flowing area was clearly seen. They had sailed into it just like that – Franky had been more concentrated on laughing than steering – the ship had turned along the current, and now the sails were catching wind so badly the ship would soon take in some water. He was cursing silently, and came to as the coffee he had forgotten splashed mostly on his wrist.

"Take in the sails!" Luffy shouted. "We'll use the paddles!"

Law considered whether he should help, but probably he would have been mostly in the way, he had never been particularly good with sail ships. He concentrated on taking care of the wanted posters so that they wouldn't get blown away, while Usopp and Zoro were running around pulling some ropes and Franky was turning the switch to get the paddles in use instead of the sails.

The ship soon straightened itself when the wind wasn't pushing it with too much force anymore. Chopper seemed to be a bit disoriented, having rolled to the other side of the deck. Sanji seemed triumphant, having succeeded in keeping Nami and Robin's drinks upright. Usopp was complaining. Brook told a bad joke of his heart being about to stop. Franky was bragging with the superity of the cola engine he had built. Zoro fell asleep as soon as he had sat down again.

In other words it was clear that everyone was fine, and the journey continued through the flowing water area.

"Okay, let's continue," Luffy said, flopping down to lean on Law again. During the ruckus he had moved closer, so that now his head was resting in the middle of Law's lap instead of just leaning on his thigh a bit. Law didn't think it was an accident.

Uh. He didn't know how to deal with this kind of thing, the least of all in public. He poured himself more coffee, for the sleeve of his hoodie had absorbed the remains of his previous fill. He placed his hand on Luffy's shoulder again to prevent him from making any sudden movements. It probably was time to continue the meeting, indeed.

"The size of my bounty aside, the biggest problem with it is the fact that it exists again in the first place." Law wasn't regretting the alliance, even though it had gotten him dismissed plus into this unpredictably absurd situation with Luffy. He had already done everything he had been aiming at when becoming a Warlord, and thus he didn't need the position anymore – and he hated the government bitterly in any case – but damn it all, he still had hoped reaching Zou before becoming wanted again.

But it seemed like things never went neatly or according to plans, at least not it there were Straw Hat pirates involved. The strategy he had spent several years polishing had been wrecked in a few moments, and they were fucked head over heels because of it. And he hadn't even taken into account the fact that Luffy had had time to pick a fight with Big Mom before their alliance had even began.

Sanji and the others had managed to shake Big Mom, returning to Dressrosa to fetch the rest of the group – once again against Law's orders, of course, it seemed like things just tended to go like that. Suddenly the whole meeting pissed Law off pretty royally, making plans they would never follow felt so useless.
"Ha, like I'd be capable of skipping the planning even if I wanted to."

Big Mom was still somewhere over there, and undoubtedly very angry. And then there was Kaidou. Law definitely understood why the samurais had changed their mind concerning whether travelling with them was a healthy idea.

This whole mess was just so fucking cute. And Law couldn't even concentrate on it as effectively as it demanded, because Luffy.

"Do you have some wanted members in your crew?" Robin asked.

"Yeah, several." Law wasn't surprised by Robin being the first one to understand what was bothering him. "Those bounties are suddenly active too, as my position as a Warlord isn't protecting them anymore."

"You're worried of them," Luffy stated, taking Law's hand.

"I am." There was no use trying to deny the fact, so Law just let Luffy squeeze his hand. Trying not to care about the amount of disbelieving looks their joined hands were gathering.

"But I suppose they realize to lie low, after reading the news?" Franky asked.

"Of course, if they happen to see the newspaper." But despite its many good points the submarine also had bad ones. For example, newspapers were usually unavailable, unless they happened to be surfaced right as a news coo was flying over. When it came to getting information, they depended more on eavesdropping. It could be beneficial because sometimes they heard things that weren't published in papers, but it depended on luck.

There was a small thoughtful silence, during which everyone seemed to think of the dilemma. It was broken by Law saying, "I need to call them."

"You have a snailphone in your vessel?" Sanji asked.

"Of course. You think it's some kind of a primitive bamboo raft?"

"At the same time you can ask if some marines or other kind of danger has been seen near Zou," Nami said.

Law nodded.

"And tell them to get loads of meat," Luffy said.

"Why?"

"Why?" Luffy stared at Law like he was an idiot. "For the party, of course."

"And why on earth would we have a party?"

"Because we're together, of course! I bet your friends are really happy for you. I wanna have a party at least thiiiiiiii big –" Luffy was spreading his arms, almost hitting Law's jaw.

Law tried imagining what kind of faces his crew would make if he demanded them to get loads of meat to wait for a party, to honor the relationship between him and Straw Hat.

"Oh, hell no..."
What the fuck was going on in his life?

~*~

Luffy thought it was really nice to lie with his head on Law's lap, listening to Law explaining something. The voice wasn't even making him sleepy even though he often dozed off during meetings like this one, if the others got fixated with some detail that just wasn't interesting or relevant to him. Besides, the plans tended to change on the way, so he never quite understood why bother with them at all.

This time he wasn't the least bit sleepy. He got to use his boyfriend as a pillow, how awesome was that? Plus one of Law's hands was still placed on his shoulder, which felt really nice. He wondered what would happen if he inched himself completely on Law's lap, but wasn't sure if it was a great idea. Even though Law had let Luffy hold his hands, it felt like he was damn slow and careful regarding this whole being boyfriends thing.

Having gotten to the point where they were together, Luffy didn't want to do anything that would cause Law to withdraw again, hesitating for an eternity. In other words he needed to avoid getting too enthusiastic, because that was when he started forgetting things and being 'pushy' and that probably was a bad thing in this case.

Thus he was lying still, squeezing the hand resting on his shoulder. Being like this was good, but he was strangely feeling calm and excited at the same time. He tilted his head backwards a bit, getting an excellent view to Law's throat and jaw moving as he kept talking.

Law was explaining something in detail, and his soft voice felt like tingling on Luffy's skin. Then Law got quiet, listening to the answer and taking a sip of the coffee cup he was holding in his other hand; and Luffy couldn't help staring at his Adam's apple jumping as he swallowed, it was downright demanding attention for some reason. Luffy wanted to spend the whole day staring at it. Perhaps touching it, even...

And then there was that goatee, was it more like rough, or tickly? He was already stretching out his arm when Law suddenly squeezed his shoulder tighter as a warning.

"I told you to stay still!"

"But Traffy –"

"I don't wish to spill coffee on my lap." Law paused for a moment, and then added, "Not on you, either."

Luffy huffed, but settled again because he would rather be here than anywhere else. The meeting went on. Usopp was talking for a long time, not stopping before it sounded like someone smacked him. Robin made some collected and serious remarks. Law finished his coffee, turning to face Franky who said something by the helm. Luffy was left staring at Law's earrings, making a firm decision that one day he was going to pull one of them just a little bit, because that felt like a fun idea. They looked like they existed for that purpose. Well, of course they were also looking cool.

Suddenly all of Luffy's attention snapped back to here and now, because Law grabbed his cheek, stretching it quite far and then suddenly letting go. That didn't feel particularly enjoyable, it was so unexpected that Luffy didn't have time to control his stretching.

"Ow! What is it?"

"I did ask if you're listening at all," Law said. "The answer was evidently negative."
"Don't even bother with explaining," said Nami's voice.

"It's quite a progress that he wasn't asleep," Sanji said. "Unlike some of us..."

Luffy didn't need to look who was the object of Sanji's glare. Zoro certainly was sleeping soundly, back against the railing and katanas on his lap.

Law raised his hand onto his eyes, sighing heavily. "How are you dealing with this?"

"We're not, that would be impossible," Usopp said.

"Talk briefly and straightforwardly, he may listen," Robin said.

"Hit him," Nami said.

"Bribe him with food," Sanji said.

"Just try to keep him out of the biggest problems," Franky said.

... Ah. They were talking about Luffy. There was no need to 'deal with him' in any way, even though bribing with food didn't sound bad at all. It had to be at least an hour since breakfast. He flashed a wide smile at Law, despite him not being quite sure if Law saw it through his fingers. "Don't worry so much. Everything always works out in one way or another."

"Why I'm not convinced at all?"

"Cause you're worrying too much."

"Indeed, I guess that's it. Why would that be, I wonder?" Law sounded like that biting humour again.

Luffy was going to answer, claiming that Law should be happier, but a hand pressed onto his mouth, preventing him.

"We were talking of what to do with Caesar. It seems like your input is asked for, so I needed to make you aware," Law said, freeing Luffy's mouth.

"Caesar." Luffy made a face. "I don't wanna think of him, he's evil."

"Your navigator wants to hand him over to marines, collecting his bounty."

"Three hundred million berriess!" Nami said.

"No," Luffy said.

"That's what I said, too," Law said. "But she stated I'm not her captain and wanted to have your opinion."

Luffy turned so as to see his crew instead of Law. The fabric of Law's jeans had a pleasantly rough feel against his cheek; he wanted to rub his face against it like a cat but he had captain things to do. Too bad. He looked seriously at Nami, who was sitting by a table. "We can't let the powers get their hands to him, making him do who knows what kinds of tests."

"Wouldn't he end up into the prison?" Nami asked.

"If you think the government wouldn't try to make use of his skills, you're naive," Law said.
"We can't let that happen," Luffy said.

"That's not our problem," Law said. "We can't be guarding him forever – handing him over just wouldn't benefit us enough – or actually, just forget that. Whatever... In any case we agree that the answer to that suggestion is no."

"Yup. No it is."

"All right then!" Nami looked sour in the way that always told she had just lost lots of money. "And who has a better idea?"

It felt like the meeting had gone on a really long time already, and all they had decided was some thing they would not do? Luffy was starting to grow impatient with all of this aimless hemming and hawing, not even Law kept him alert, being fully concentrated on speaking with the others as he was.

Perhaps Luffy would nap the rest of the time after all. That was never a bad idea.

~*~

As the meeting finally ended, Law couldn't say he was feeling well. Lengthy speculations and the tiresome way the discussion had been oscillating from serious to absurd had him absolutely drained mentally. Physically speaking... he had to admit that having Luffy lying, squirming and rubbing practically on his lap hadn't helped his frustrated, wound-up state in any way.

He would have gladly accepted some senseless fucking, but his new and confusing relationship definitely wasn't at that level yet, and wouldn't be for a while. A senseless jerk-off session would do pretty nicely, too.

Too bad that Luffy was dragging him towards the kitchen, their arms linked.

"Our snailphone is in the kitchen, you can call your crew there –"

Law knew it was in the kitchen, he was capable of noticing such details. Besides, he would have rather called a bit later, after having a moment for himself, but resisting would have felt pretty stupid as he was already being dragged in.

"Thank you, Straw Hat," he muttered, sitting down on a sofa by the kitchen wall, next to the snailphone. "But why did you need to come along? I thought dealing with these kind of things is boring to you."

"That's your crew." Luffy remained standing by the table, looking at Law like his explanation had been a sensible one. "Of course I'm interested, they're important to you, and by the way, my allies too."

All right, that kind of made sense.

"And I wanna hear if there's meat on Zou."

Law should have guessed.

Law took a few very deep breaths, trying to accept Luffy's priorities, because there clearly was nothing else he could do about it. Still, it was unbelievable that the Straw Hat crew allowed their captain to doze off during important meetings just like that. Even if the results of that discussion had been frustratingly scarce, and actually Law wished that also he was capable of snoring away past
torment like the meeting. With his brain and sleeping problems that just wasn't a possibility.

There had been several suggestions for their plan, but none of them had been as sensible as Law's own idea, which had been reluctantly admitted by the others. Law thought it was a shame, too, because the idea of setting some kind of trap for Kaidou, using Caesar as a bait, didn't sound like it was good for your health. So far they hadn't come up with anything better.

Well, 'everything always works out in one way or another', or whatever those words had exactly been.

He snorted bitterly before lifting the receiver and choosing the number of his crew’s snailphone.

A long time passed before someone answered. "Hello?"

"Is it you, Shachi?" Law asked. The connection wasn't very good, probably meaning his vessel was under the surface at the moment, plus he hadn't heard the voices of his crewmembers for a too long time – it was hard to be sure with whom he was speaking.

"Yes, it's me. Cap'n?"

"Yeah."

"We haven't heard of you for a really long time. We were so worr-"

There was an unpleasant stab in Law's conscience because of lousy communication, but the circumstances had been downright crappy. Stopping talking of this immediately felt like the easiest way nonetheless. "I apologize for that. I'm well." Just gone crazy once and for all, nothing more. "Go and get Bepo, Penguin, Jean Bart and Vince, I have something to say."

There was a silence as Shachi left to obey the order. Law looked at Luffy closely. Getting Luffy to stay silent during the whole call would probably be impossible, but if Law managed to prevent even the most embarrassing blurts... "Don't say anything of our relationship, please?"

"Why not?" Luffy asked.

"Don't you want to see their faces as we reveal it after getting to Zou?"

Luffy considered for a moment, his face splitting into a huge grin as he nodded. "Yeah, I wanna see it! So it's like a surprise, then?"

"Precisely." Plus, it felt pretty plausible that they would end up having a massive argument before reaching Zou, or just noticed this wasn't going to work, and decided to break up. In that case Law's crew could remain blissfully ignorant of the whole mess.

If that didn't happen and they really were going to do this... Law wouldn't have missed his crews expressions for any price, for they definitely would be memorable. The amusement would be worth it, even if he himself was going to be so embarrassed he wanted to crawl into some hole and die there.

His thoughts were interrupted by a voice from the snailphone, "Here we are, cap'n!" There was at least ten voices talking at the same time, apparently Shachi had brought everyone who had happened to hear of Law's call. It sounded like they were fighting for the receiver and who got to speak first.

Perhaps Luffy wasn't the only one with a bit colourful and childish crew...
Luffy was staying still, listening with his arms crossed in a relaxed way as the most important news were exchanged.

Yes, his crew had seen the newspaper and was aware of the change in their position. Some members had disguised themselves and went to the island in the morning, getting some news, and after that they had stayed under the surface. Two marine ships had been spotted, but from afar, and it seemed like they were only passing by, not searching for anything in particular. Not a trace of Kaidou had been seen. The ventilation of the submarine was out of order again, and Bepo was complaining about stuffy, moist air.

Law missed them. The feeling hit him with full power now, as he heard their voices after such a long time. Luffy placed his hand on his shoulder, or nape, actually, making him shiver.

"Where are you at the moment?" Penguin asked. At some point of the conversation he had ended up being the crew's spokesperson.

"I'm coming there with the Straw Hat crew. I suppose we have about five or six days to go if everything goes fine, so probably it'll take longer. Don't do anything stupid while waiting, and lie low."

"Aye-aye, cap'n!"

Luffy snatched the receiver out of Law's hand and chimed, "And get as much meat as you possibly can!"

Law slammed his hand onto his face. He should have known there was no way Luffy would stay quiet endlessly, but this was a really weird moment to jump into the discussion. The snailphone was very silent for some time, downright radiating confusion.

"Who's speaking?" Penguin finally asked.

"Monkey D. Luffy! The man who's gonna be the pirate king!"

The corners of Law's mouth quirked up, hidden by his palm. For some reason hearing that confident declaration wasn't getting old, even though he had heard it several times already. It was one of the first things he had considered fascinating in Luffy on Sabaody – in addition to Luffy really having enough courage and gall to kick that Celestial Dragon's ass, delivering one of the most handsome blows Law had ever seen.

"Ah, the alliance captain." Penguin went silent for a while, then continued, hesitant. "Should we do like he says, cap'n?"

Luffy handed the receiver back to Law so that he could answer. "I guess. Yeah. Try to get some other kind of food and beverages too, for a small party, if you can manage that without drawing unwanted attention."

"Are we going to have a party, then? Why?"

"Why not?" Law asked. "Since when you have needed some kind of an excuse?"

"It's a surprise!" Luffy put in.

"All right then. We're going to get you a tasty sandwich cake as a specialty."

Law let out a long-suffering groan, and Luffy burst into such a laughter he had to hold his sides.
"Go fuck yourselves, all of you," Law muttered. "Yes, I hate bread. That's not funny!"

"It so is."

Teasing went on for some time, not irritating Law nearly as much as he pretended. As the call ended, he was grinning stupidly and Luffy was wheezing in an almost painful-sounding way while trying to breathe, whining that laughing had made his abs sore.

"Your crew sounds great," Luffy said, getting up from the floor. He had been rolling on it holding his sides a moment ago. "I like them already."

Law hmm'd ambiguously, changing the topic. "If you're going to be the pirate king, what does that make of me?"

"You're gonna be my boyfriend, of course."

"I really am against that word, it doesn't feel suitable at all." Despite his grumbling Law was relieved that at least Luffy didn't try making jokes like, if they were together then of course Law would be the pirate queen.

Luffy seemed a bit hesitant. "If you don't wanna be my 'boyfriend', you can always be my spouse."

Oh, there came this topic once again, even if Luffy wasn't going to insist more this time. That was a relief. And for some incomprehensible reason hearing that Luffy still liked the idea was a relief, too; but Law suspected that Luffy had never thought of getting married logically.

"That's a matter still requiring a lot of consideration," he said. "Besides, have you given any thought to how difficult it would be for us to get married? Both of us are male, plus pirates to add insult to injury, that's a combination that's never going to be accepted in any institution."

"So you think we can't be married if our names aren't written in some dull piece of paper?"

Law's jaw dropped, because these kind of moments just took him by surprise every time. The way Luffy sometimes succeeded in seeing right through things in spite of outward appearances made the rest of the world seem foolish and false. Having such a change of perspective required imitating some fish out of water. "Well, I don't truly think like that either, but officially speaking -"

"Isn't there some custom that a captain can wed aboard their ship?"

"That's true." Law was a bit surprised by Luffy knowing it.

"And we're both captains." Luffy gave Law a very challenging look. "If we decide we're married, who's gonna say that can't be?"

It was such a glaringly valid point that Law felt downright dizzy. Being pirates was highlighting it for a good measure because those official systems didn't reach them anyways, and they didn't follow any other morals than their own. That pretty much meant they did what they wanted to do. And what felt like a right thing.

If Law happened to get his feelings in order some day, and it turned out he really wanted to have a serious and permanent bond with Luffy... there was absolutely nothing that could stop him from getting married. Because Luffy was right, and it was about something else than their names being written down in some dusty register with some official seals.

He felt sudden and absurd urge to do it right away, just to tell the world what they could do with all
of their official and false things, but he knew it was a really bad motive for making such an important
decision. He needed to be honest with himself, finding out what he really wanted to do.

What he really wanted...

He was still sitting on the sofa, and Luffy was standing in front of him, one step away, meaning he
had an excellent view to Luffy's abs and that scar in his chest. He wanted to reach out with his hand,
grabbing the yellow sash, whose end was teasingly hanging off Luffy's hip; use it to *yank* Luffy
closer, until he was close enough for Law to taste that bare skin.

He couldn't do anything like that out of the blue, of course, that would be way too unexpected and
aggressive. They were supposed to have a real relationship, and those didn't start with stumbling to
bed. At least not with Luffy. Unfortunately Law only had a very vague idea of how those real
relationships tended to progress, but he supposed there was some kind of hugging and kissing
involved before going further.

He imagined hugging Luffy, and the idea made him feel really clumsy and frustrated.

"Traffy?"

Law startled. Luffy had asked something ages ago, but he had forgotten the question, getting lost in
his thoughts that were making no sense at all. Again.

"You're really thinking too much," Luffy said.

"I'm aware of it. So far I haven't managed in finding a switch that could be used to turn my brain
off."

Luffy said nothing to it, just stood still, watching Law like expecting him to say or do something.
What exactly that would be, Law had no idea, but he also felt like something needed to happen. The
anticipation was so thick it was downright clinging to his skin.

It was intolerable, he wasn't able of analyzing the situation like this. It was time to take his leave. He
had already contacted his crew as had been his intention, so there was no reason to stay locked in this
awkward staring contest he couldn't understand at all.

He glanced at the clock as some kind of excuse – for what he didn't know – and got up. "I'm going
to rest for some time."

Luffy still didn't say anything. That was... unnatural.

Law was almost at the door when his wrist was suddenly grabbed. He turned to face Luffy who
hadn't moved from his spot, but his arm was now a couple of meters long so as to reach Law. "What
is it?" Law asked.

"You sure you want this at all?"

Law froze for a moment, his mind totally blank; then his thoughts deigned to snap the newest piece
of this puzzle into its place and the picture started to make sense.

Right now he was being so distant and inexplicable, it was making Luffy doubt his will to try having
this relationship. It was a pretty understandable interpretation, in principle, for he knew how much he
could look like a rejecting prick even without wanting to. The way he had let Luffy laze against him
during the meeting would have told much for someone who knew him well. Luffy probably failed to
see that aspect at all because easygoing closeness seemed to be so natural to him; it didn't even cross
his mind that Law could take it in a different way. Thus Luffy didn't get the importance of that incidence; getting it would have surely soothed his uncertainty.

Law took a proper hold of Luffy's hand, squeezing it. "I'm just really, really bad in things like this. It's not like I don't like you."

"Okay." The smile returned to Luffy's face, making Law feel so ridiculously warm and weak, like he was melting.

"See you at lunchtime." In a spur of the moment Law raised the hand he was holding, touching the rough knuckles with his lips before letting go.

Only after entering the infirmary it dawned to him what exactly he had done. Fuck, had he really kissed Luffy's hand like some damn romantic character out of some fairy tale? It wasn't even a good joke. He could just hope Luffy didn't take it the wrong way. It was one hundred percent sure that Luffy wasn't the type enjoying any kind of attention usually reserved for ladies or being treated in any effeminating way; he was unquestionably a Man, and that was very much fine with Law.

Law hadn't meant to hint anything, he had just... it had just felt like... fuck.

He had so known he would be terribly bad in dating. Now he was able of estimating how that being bad was going to manifest itself. He was hesitating and distancing himself when he should have acted, and after that he got frustrated with himself and did something even more stupid as a reaction. Charming.

He told himself to stop wallowing in it more, at least for now. There was also a problem he really could deal with, and he was sure he would feel better after doing so.

He locked both doors of the room, making sure every window was covered by curtains. After ensuring his privacy he took off his boots and his coffee-stained hoodie, opening his pants and lying down on the bed.

As graceless as it had been, he had kissed Luffy's hand in any case and remembered the feel of skin on his lips. Warm and dry, knuckles had been hard bulges under it. They reminded him of the chaos Luffy had left behind him using those fists, and still, Law already knew how very gentle Luffy's hands were capable of being, if that was what he wanted. Like when Luffy had kept his hand on Law's heart. Or a moment ago, when that hand had been almost on his nape.

Law touched his nape at that very same spot, letting his hand then slide to the frontside, to his neck stretching out. He closed his eyes, succumbing to a vivid fantasy where the hands caressing him were not his own, but a bit smaller in size. Warmer, no cold fingertips. With shorter nails. Their touch was confident, because these hands belonged to a person who wasn't shy and was very apt in reading body language, and that was why he knew exactly how to wrap his fingers around –

He was gasping as he thrust into his hand; this was feeling too good and too soon but he couldn't help his back arching. It still was more satisfactory to take his time, so he put one of his hands on his hip, imagining he was firmly pressed against the mattress. That got him to stay in place, but in other ways it mostly succeeded in turning him on even more.

The hands he was imagining were all over him, on his hips and stomach, on his chest above his heart, on his neck and nape and inner thighs, they were caressing his lower lip and pushing themselves into his mouth and between his buttocks. He was sucking on them and they were stretching him, holding his hips possessively, and all the time one of the hands was moving on his
painfully hard shaft; slowly, because he was so close that even a bit quicker pace would have made him explode.

Hands under his bottom, squeezing his buttocks, lifting him, invading everywhere, fiddling with his balls and pinching his nipples and wrapping around his throat and pulling his hair; there was nothing else he could do than surrendering to the hands and taking every touch –

When he started aching with intensive need he let himself gloriously thrust into his hand, dipping his thumb into the slit. And then he was coming with an almost painful spasm, biting his lip.

It took some time before he was capable of doing anything else than gasping for breath. Thoughts were lazy to come back.

It was delightful that his subconscious now saw fit to have fantasies of Luffy. Felt like it was right somehow.

Law might not know how to handle a relationship, but perhaps the situation wasn't so hopeless after all. Sure, he was a total jerk, but at least he had managed in telling it. Besides, it was pretty difficult to worry too much when he felt like his brain had shot itself out of his dick; and he had also convinced himself once and for all that yeah, he truly thought that his boyfriend was pretty attractive.

Now he only needed to learn how to be with him.

'Only'...

Yeah, right.
Ugh, this one was long. I just couldn't cut it in any place, so... well.

There's a new prequel also, that I published some days ago. Irony and Self-Acceptance was actually born because I mentioned something in this chapter and then I just had to write the whole incidence. Some type of readers might want to read it before this chapter, while others do not care much about the order. And well, reading the prequels isn't a must anyway in order to follow this, though they are referenced at times. I'm just trying to understand Law, I guess.

Thank you for the lovely feedback I've been getting. :)

Chopper knocked on the door of the infirmary. After waiting for a moment he heard the lock clicking, and then the door was opened. He couldn't imagine the reason for Law locking the door despite him not seeming to be in a bad mood today; on the contrary, actually.

"I hope I didn't wake you up?" he asked, because Law's hair was sticking out like he had just gotten up from the bed, and there was a stripe going across his cheek that seemed to be pressed by a wrinkle in a pillowcase.

"No, I was just resting a bit." Law was rubbing his eyes, cocking his head from side to side, perhaps in order to alleviate a stiff neck caused by lying in an unergonomic position. A few quiet pops were heard as his vertebra was adjusting. "Falling accidentally asleep for the third time during the same day would really be too much to hope for."

"You shouldn't be sleeping at daytime anyway if you have sleeping problems!"

"That's a constant argument offered by well-read persons with no real personal experience of the issue." Law huffed. "Did you have some other business here than lecturing me on healthy sleeping habits, doctor Chopper? If not, you can leave immediately. I assure that I already know everything there is to know of them, and I find getting some trivial gimmicks somewhat insulting."

Chopper was quick to apologize, explaining that he did have another reason for coming to the infirmary, and he truly didn't mean to be annoying. Offering some generally good advice for those who were wrestling with problems just kind of happened instinctively, like he also jumped to bandage the wound if someone cut their finger, without even thinking of it. First-aid.

"That's a doctor-like thing, I give." Law stepped aside, inviting Chopper in. "But if there's someone with a torn aorta, you don't even try fixing it with an ordinary band-aid; that would only be absolutely hopeless and pitiful."

"Then, is your sleeping problem on a par with that?"

"What was your reason for coming here?"

Chopper decided that they needed to return to the sleeping issue some time, but perhaps the best moment wasn't right now. Besides, Law happened to be standing, so this was a good moment for his
"Could you please open the upper cabinet and take the smaller of those boxes out?" Chopper kept some very rarely used equipment and materials in a small cabinet above his desk, and Law was tall enough to reach them without needing to step on a chair.

Law placed the box Chopper had asked for on the desk, and sat down on the edge of the bed, watching how Chopper started spreading the contents all over the desk. The box was full of instructional pamphlets of all kinds, because having all kinds of topics in a nutshell at hand could be useful for a doctor, if someone needed a crash course. Chopper kept dreaming that some day Sanji would realize he wanted to wean himself from nicotine, coming to ask for advice, for example. So far the pamphlets hadn’t been needed even once, but it seemed there was the first for everything.

An extremely weird first time at that.

It felt like finding the right pamphlet among numerous others took an eternity, and Law wasn't even trying to start any kind of conversation or ask what Chopper was doing. Thus Chopper returned to their previous topic, trying to organize the pamphlets into somewhat logical heaps at the same time.

"Have you always had troubles with sleeping?"

Law gave a heavy sigh, but answered anyway. "I wasn't particularly good at it even as a little kid. But then a lot of shit happened and it got exponentially worse still."

Chopper didn't say anything, because there was nothing you could say to that without ending up cut in two. If the seriousness of the problem was ‘an inborn trait plus some traumas added to top it off’, it would be no use for Chopper to suggest drinking some chamomile tea at evenings. That would work just as well as putting an ordinary band-aid to that torn aorta.

"Is this 'a lot of shit' connected to you having post-traumatic stress?" he asked.

"Yeah. But as much as I appreciate someone taking care of me, I really don't want to talk about this."

"Have you ever tried it? I mean talking about it, to someone?"

"No, I haven't. But I got interested in psychiatry for personal reasons, despite it not particularly being my field, so I've been... dealing with it."

Chopper wasn't so sure he was convinced. Self-diagnosing and self-help were good tools, but no one should depend solely on them. Law supposedly thought he was intelligent, analytical and objective enough to pull it off, and perhaps he was for the most part, but still he was only one person, therefore in the need of another viewpoint. If you spend too long time looking only at yourself, you could lose your understanding of what was normal, and kind of get lost in your own head.

However, pushing was not a way to get results in these kind of things, mostly it was just counterproductive. Even with patients who didn't loathe being ordered around as pathologically as Law. It was more constructive to offer some options and leave them pondering in peace whether they wanted to try them.

"I haven't had much time to learn psychiatry, but if you some day want to talk of your traumas, I'll listen to you whenever." Doctorine had been teaching Chopper everything there was to know of physiology and medicine, but not so much of psyche, even though she had remembered to tell there was a strong connection between body and mind. He was very willing to try it nonetheless, perhaps learning something new as a doctor.
"You'd have a pleasant personality for a therapist." Law continued before Chopper had time to start prancing in joy. "Perhaps a bit too pleasant, even. In such a role it's easy to burden yourself too much if you can't distance yourself."

Chopper couldn't argue with that point, no matter how much he wanted to. He just wanted to help, and it was difficult to not take personally that he couldn't for one reason or another. Besides, Law was impossible, reflecting all attempts back like he was encased in some impenetrable shell.

Perhaps it was a good thing that he finally found the pamphlet he had been looking for, lifting it out of the box and letting out a little triumphant noise.

"Do I even want to know why you've been looking for The ABC of Gay Sex?" Law sounded amused.

"You should, because I'm pretty sure it has to do with you." Chopper sat down on his chair, turning it around to face Law in order to have a talk with him. He would have preferred being almost anywhere else, but hiding behind his professional role was easier now as he had found what he had been looking for, and the pamphlet lent him some confidence.

"What? Because of Luffy, you mean?" Law raised a hand onto his eyes, sighing again. "I do understand that you're worried of him, and that I probably seem like a really shady kind of guy, but I assure you that sex education isn't one of the things I need. Besides, I'm already familiar with that particular leaflet and I find it downright disturbingly fluffy —"

"I didn't mean it's for you to read." Chopper wasn't going to guess if Law had any practical experience, but as a doctor he had to at least know how it worked in theory, and also be capable of applying things he had read of in the real world.

Law stared at him, his face completely disbelieving. "You can't possibly mean that..."

"I do." Chopper was relieved as he finally got to the topic he had wanted to talk about. In addition to grabbing the pamphlet. "I had a really strange experience a moment ago."

"Sounds frightening already, but do continue."

Sharing this might stretch the boundaries of professional confidentiality a bit, but on the other hand, Chopper hadn't walked into the situation as a doctor, only as a crewmember, and he hadn't been told to keep his mouth shut. Plus, Law needed to get some warning, for the sake of being humane. "I went to the library room to return the book I had read, and to grab the next one. Luffy was there."

"In the library? Luffy? For real?"

"That wasn't the strange part yet." Luffy being in the library was a rare occurrence, but sometimes he ended up there if he was keeping someone company; usually he was a bother or just admired Nami's maps before growing deadly bored, escaping out again. "But this time he was there alone, leafing through a book."

"That, I don't believe," Law said quietly.

"I was taken by such a huge surprise, I dropped The Great Book of Poxes onto my hooves by accident."

"Ow."

"That kind of convinced me of being awake." Chopper rubbed his foot absent-mindedly. They might
not be as sensitive to pain as human toes, but The Great Book of Poxes weighed over a kilogram and it had hit him corner first. That wasn't fun.

"Dare I ask what he was reading?" Law asked.

"No. It was Everything You Want To Know About Sex."

Law almost seemed to collapse, letting out a pained groan; like reality had suddenly become a too terrifying place. "That book is worse than that awful pamphlet you're holding. Every copy of it should be burned in a bonfire. Why the fuck your materials dealing with sexuality are so pathetic even though you're such an excellent doctor otherwise?"

"He didn't find it from my bookshelf!" Chopper was so insulted by this presumption that not even the praise he had gotten made him happy. Sexuality and reproduction of human beings was a field he found so unfamiliar and incomprehensible that he at least tried to get his hands to first-rate materials, so that he could somehow trust the books whenever he needed that kind of information. So far all he had needed to do was easing some menstrual pains – which was a very important skill, because a cranky Nami in pain was a serious risk for everyone's health – but you could never be too well prepared. "I believe it might be Franky's."

"That makes more sense, he might think it's good joke."

"Well, then. Luffy didn't seem to be impressed by the book either, as soon as he spotted me he started whining that the title was lying." Chopper had hoped he would manage to sneak out of the library without Luffy noticing him, but it had been too late. And he really hadn't wanted to ask the question, but he was both a doctor and Luffy's friend, so it had kind of been his obligation. "I asked him what it was that he wanted to know, then. Something about how guys do it together," Chopper had hoped he would manage to sneak out of the library without Luffy noticing him, but it had been too late. And he really hadn't wanted to ask the question, but he was both a doctor and Luffy's friend, so it had kind of been his obligation. "I asked him what it was that he wanted to know, then. Something about how guys do it together," he said.

Law didn't look at him, instead he was leaning his elbows on his knees, starting to massage his temples, visibly suffering. "Why. Doesn't. He. Ask. Me?"

That had been the first question Chopper had asked Luffy. "He said he doesn't get you. But that there's no need for you to worry."

"Now I really am starting to worry." Law gave an even heavier sigh, which shouldn't have been possible anymore. "And yeah, of course he doesn't get me... Even I don't get myself, someone else succeeding in it can't be expected."

"I could try my skills in psychiatry –"

"No, but thanks for offering."

"Anyways... I didn't want to lecture him about the topic –" That would have been too weird. "– and any source is better than Everything You Want To Know About Sex, and then I remembered having these pamphlets, so." He had known they would come in handy some day!

"I don't want him reading that and trying to apply it with me."

Chopper didn't quite understand what was supposed to be wrong with that. The pamphlet was simple and positive and had pictures, so it should do well enough if Luffy wanted to enlighten himself for once. "There's nothing harmful in reading."

"There might be, if the reader in question hasn't any kind of source criticism or filter in their brain. I'm serious – tell him you couldn't find it."
"No. I'm not going to lie!" That Law could even suggest such a thing was shocking. "If anyone in this crew wants any information I'm capable of providing, I try to answer them as well as I can! That's part of my job! You should know that!" Chopper stared at Law as strictly as possible, but was aware that his strict stares weren't usually particularly scary. Law looked back, deadpan.

Chopper decided it was time to escape. He hopped down from his chair, the pamphlet held tightly in his hoof; but Law didn't seem to be inclined to move or speak, was just leaning on his knees, shoulders slumped. It was easy to remember that the man had at least a mountain-sized pile of problems, and being forced to increase them, even indirectly, felt bad.

"Can I help you in any way?" he asked.

Law claimed wanting some cyanide.

~*~

In the afternoon Law found himself on the upper deck, conversing with Chopper. The weather was sunny but pleasantly cool. They were using Robin's flower planter as a backrest, and there was A Study of Cardiac Surgery by doctor Xendar spread between them.

"– and I've never understood why anyone wanted to cut the incision that way," Chopper said, pointing at a sketch. "It looks like it'll heal slower like that... Is there really some use in doing it like that?"

Law explained. His explanation was uncharacteristically lengthy and thorough, because the topic was genuinely fascinating, and he really knew what he was talking about, and also because his audience was visibly ravenous for every word. This was a stimulating conversation. It would have been even better, if he had known whether Chopper just wanted to broaden his knowledge when he had a chance, or if this was some kind of a peace offering because The ABC of Gay Sex might result in Law suffering. And there wasn't even a tad of cyanide aboard the ship.

Whichever it was, surgery was a great topic in any case.

"You should write your own study," Chopper said.

"Why the fuck? I don't even have a license."

"Still and all. Having a license doesn't have anything to do with actual skills, does it? You're probably the best surgeon in the world at the moment, so I'd reckon you have something to say?"

"Not really. It's mostly just because of my Devil's Fruit."

Law startled, as some drops of cold water hit his nape. Having lifted his gaze, he saw Robin, holding a watering can in her hand. He found the fact that he hadn't noticed her climbing onto the deck a bit disturbing – apparently he had started feeling so safe aboard Sunny that there was no need to be on guard all the time, plus his attention had fully been on Chopper.

He rubbed his nape, irritated, but there had only been a couple of drops of water and his hoodie wasn't in danger of getting wet. Mostly he was irritated by someone having the gall to sprinkle water on him.

"You're not seeing your worth, Trafalgar." Robin continued watering her flowers serenely.

"I don't think that's the case... It's only a fact." Law was very well aware of what he was capable of doing in an operating theatre – and that was quite much – so he wasn't underestimating himself, or
trying to be modest. It was just the case of him being also aware that he couldn't do nearly as much without his Ope Ope Power.

"Please do correct if I've gotten it wrong," Robin started, "but I'm under impression that you need to both know the conventional field of surgery really well and master your Power perfectly, and on top of that, come up with a way to apply it? Sounds more difficult than just being a good surgeon to me."

"I guess."

"I heard your lecture a moment ago, it was quite an impressive one and –"

"You were listening?" Law wasn't particularly delighted by his unexpected audience. It almost felt like she had been eavesdropping, even though the topic wasn't private in any way and the upper deck couldn't be considered a private place; anyone could come there any time.

"Of course." Robin winked. "What else there supposedly is to do than listening, as I come to water my flowers and notice two cute doctors talking of operations?"

"Chopper's cute, I'm not," Law said. 'Cute' was possibly one of the very last words he would have used to describe himself to begin with, and the style he had chosen wasn't exactly highlighting such a feature.

Chopper blushed.

"I could ask Luffy's opinion of that matter," Robin suggested.

"Please don't." It was embarrassing to even think of such a thing, it made Law want to bury his face into his hands.

"And that is cute indeed," Robin said.

Awesome, he had apparently fallen into a trap. This was one of the most important reasons for him never sleeping with intelligent women. Exposing himself in such an intimate way was never particularly easy to him, and at moments like that feeling ridiculous because of some little manipulation, witty in a feminine way, wasn't exactly something he needed. Secondly, intelligent women tended to be downright dangerous if they were enraged, and Law was very talented at making people enraged even without wanting to, so. Self-preservation instinct. Males were not cunning in the same way, so smart ones were fine, too.

He was more than ready to change the topic. "Speaking of Luffy, where is that straw-hat-wearing pest? I haven't seen him since lunch." They hadn't spoken to each other by the table, either. Luffy had mostly concentrated on insisting that Sanji should finally use the octopi waiting in the aquarium to make some takoyakis to snack on. Law had been watching that childish behaviour, imagining the way Luffy might try applying The ABC of Gay Sex, and the rest of the meal had been spent with him pondering whether it would be possible to drown himself into the water jar. Theoretically there would have been enough water to fill his lungs, but the feat would have been quite tricky to pull off because the jar was so narrow.

"He was in the kitchen a moment ago," Robin said. She was picking dry leaves out of her flower planter while speaking. "Watching how the takoyakis are cooked, and undoubtedly also driving Sanji crazy."

"Sticking his fingers onto the pan and getting kicked around the kitchen for his efforts?" Law guessed.
"You understand him well, clearly."

"When it comes to some things, I do. Others, though..." Law sighed. When it come to some other things, he couldn't even start imagining what was going on in Luffy's mind. What on earth had suddenly inspired Luffy to look for information about sex? Well, the reason for that apparently was Law himself, and Luffy being curious was understandable as he was experiencing new kind of feelings now; but why to look for that information from books even though reading clearly wasn't Luffy's thing? Asking Law would have been the easiest and most logical way to satisfy his thirst for knowledge, and Luffy certainly was point-blank enough to do that if he wanted to.

But it seemed that wasn't what Luffy wanted. And Law had totally lost any understanding of what was going on in their relationship.

Come to thing again, and honestly speaking... it felt like he and Luffy were both trying to understand it, sure, but neither of them had really succeeded even for a moment.

The discussion died. Robin had sat down on the edge of the planter, looking like she was about to stay there for some time, picking out the dry leaves. Law was thinking of Luffy, feeling his slight headache worsening merely because of feeling so helplessly out.

Chopper turned the page of the study, presenting an opinion about using clamps. Law was quick to answer, that was something he understood much better than Luffy.

"You really should write your own study," Chopper said, after they had been debating for a good while.

"Why? Only the user of the Ope Ope Fruit would be able of applying it." And Law had no intention of leaving documents of that particular topic after, ever. His life would have been easier, if Doflamingo had never read anything of it, figuring it would be nice to be immortal. Generally speaking, Law was strongly standing for preserving knowledge, but there was a limit to everything; he didn't want anyone else ending up in a similar situation than he himself.

If Luffy hadn't rushed to save him, he would truly have been in shit up to his ears.

Ever since Dressrosa he had tried with all of his might to not think of what could have happened. There clearly was no sense in wallowing in it, because it hadn't happened; therefore tormenting himself with mental imagery was pointless. Besides, it would be extremely unpleasant – but now he wasn't capable of keeping it dammed anymore, as documentation had so suddenly been brought up, and his thoughts had leapt into things that could lead at its worst. Wrong kind of people getting wrong kind of ideas after reading wrong kind of texts.

He knew Doflamingo well enough to imagine how far the man would have been willing to go in order to force Law into operating.

Law supposed he would have been able to take physical torture, even if it was inventive. During his life he had felt so much pain that he knew what it was, and it had never broken him, so that wasn't what he was scared of. Sure, he preferred spending his time in some other way than getting needles pushed under his nails, or hanging off a hook in a ceiling, suspended from his wrists and every joint screaming with pain; but that kind of treatment was far from his worst fears.

Imagining how Doflamingo could have controlled him with his own ability was much more frightening. Forcing his body moving against his will, doing things he would never do willingly; like some doll who was aware of the situation all the time but without free will. A marionette yanked around using strings, literally.
His hands sliding on Doflamingo's skin, no matter how his mind screamed them to stop; placing themselves on the button of those indescribably tasteless pants.

Stop. Stop. Just please stop. I don't want this don't want don't want don't want don't want –

Fingers digging into his shoulders. "Is it so terrible it makes you want to die? Don't you worry. I'll give you a chance to die for me... Law..."

He was surprised to realize he could move, so he yanked himself out of the grasp holding his shoulders, activating his Room right away. He was going to cut that man in so many tiny bits they would never be found, he swore –

Suddenly his fingers were hurting so much, it forced him to let go of his sword. It only made him growl with frustrated rage. They were still in his Room, he did have other means to attack, perhaps a counterstrike –

All of a sudden he was hit by copious amount of cold water.

Law shook his head, blinking. He was standing on the upper deck of the Thousand Sunny. Luffy was standing in front of him, holding the watering can and looking very serious. Kikoku was lying by his feet, drawn, its long blade was gleaming absurdly brightly in the sunlight. There were two extra arms growing out of his own arm, they had a very unpleasant hold of his hand, twisting his fingers. Chopper was peeking from behind A Study of Cardiac Surgery like the book was a protective barrier of kind, eyes wide.

"What..." His voice sounded like it had been rubbed with a grater. "What happened?"

"You can let go," Chopper said.

The extra arms disappeared. Only then Law realized that Chopper had meant his words to Robin, who had freed him from her grasp.

He was massaging his fingers, they were throbbing but otherwise they seemed to be quite all right. "What happened?" he asked again. "I mean, I get that I was dissociating pretty badly, but what else happened?"

"You're apparently fine, if you're able of using words like 'dissociate'," Robin said.

"You're shivering," Luffy said.

Law realized that really was the case. He was feeling very unstable and groggy otherwise, too, so he sat down onto the deck without caring of the puddle of water. His shivering intensified even more as he started to get the situation, and his nerves caught on. The combination of cool weather and wearing wet clothes wasn't any help.

"Was it you throwing that water on me?" he asked Luffy.

"Yeah. Sorry? Needed to do something. It worked, right?"

"So it seems. Could someone please finally tell me what the fuck happened?"

"Can you remember anything?" Chopper asked. "Of your thoughts? Or is it like a part of your memory has been totally removed?"

"... I can." Yes. As Law was thinking about it now, he did remember. They had been talking of
medical documents, and that had made him think of Doflamingo; then he had slipped into thinking of the worst possible scenario, which had lead to him flipping totally out of the reality. "It seems like we found a foolproof trigger. How interesting and lovely. Perhaps I'll write a study of it, if I should write one."

Chopper huddled lower behind the book, a kind of sniffling squeak escaping him.

"Trafalgar..." Robin sighed. "This is going to sound really hypocritical when coming from me, but... there should be some limit to irony, too, and that's starting to sound downright cruel."

"Don't listen to me, then! Right now it just happens to be the only way to deal with this that I'm capable of using, my deepest apologies for that. Or should I go hugging Nami's tangerine trees? Perhaps that would give me some positive energies, ha, yeah right –" Fuck. This was bad. He was so unbalanced that he was saying whatever crossed his mind, without any filter between his brain and his mouth. He realized it because it felt like a part of his mind was always some kind of objective onlooker, informing him about the situation in a very bitchy tone, but he still couldn't keep his mouth shut.

Why they couldn't just go away and leave him to get his bearings in peace? He didn't want to be seen like this by anyone, he wanted to push them away; well aware that right now he was resembling a sea urchin with very long and venomous stings. Plus, he didn't care who he was needling with them. Each and everyone would be a preferable option.

Not that it's very different from my normal state.

"Hugging might be a good idea," he could hear Chopper saying.

Ha. Like there was anyone in this world who was crazy enough to grab a lapful of stings. But Law supposed he shouldn't expect anything else of Chopper than this kind of naive, positive attitude; what else could be expected of someone who considered The ABC of Gay Sex anything else than so fluffy it was gross?

Why was he thinking of it suddenly? Perhaps he was a bit hysterical – perhaps even a lot – because his thoughts kept jumping around, totally out of control, and he wanted to laugh. He also wanted to take a hot shower and wear some dry clothes, and take a sedative flushed down with some alcohol; he wanted to have Bepo as a calming backrest; to be left alone; he wished for never needing to deal with this shit again, why couldn't he just get a break? He didn't want to deal with this, any part of this, he was feeling tired and unbalanced and desperate, and nothing was going to be fine ever again.

He closed his eyes, wishing childishly that the world would take the hint and just disappear.

A hand settled onto his shoulder. He tensed for a moment; then understanding that the hand belonged to Luffy, managing to continue breathing. Luffy was possibly the only human being whose touch he found tolerable right now. A slow stroking from his shoulder to upper arm and back again was actually... soothing, even though it felt so distinctly caring that it might break him. He kept his eyes shut, concentrating only on feeling the petting, and taking even breaths.

Luffy circled in front of him, kneeling carefully and avoiding jerky movements, like approaching a skittish animal – the comparison made Law's irritation increase two-fold because it was too fitting right now – and placed his other hand on Law's other shoulder. The hands travelled down to stroke Law's back, managing to melt his tenseness little by little. The strain was lessening so that he could feel his shoulders dropping much lower.

As he was gently pulled towards Luffy, he thought that why the hell not, leaning forward until he
could bury his face into Luffy's chest. After some awkward twisting they even had gotten their arms around each other pretty comfortably. Not really the way Law would have wanted to embrace his boyfriend for the first time, but he wasn't going to complain – for it felt like Chopper was right, after all, and hugging might be a good idea. Felt like it was satisfying some deep-buried need for having comfort, and assuring he didn't need to take everything alone.

He wished being capable of forgetting the presence of Chopper and Robin.

"Are you okay?" Luffy asked.

Law nodded, turning his head so that his cheek settled a little more comfortably against Luffy's chest, which was warm, strong and... slick? That's right. There was some dark liquid on Luffy's skin, trying to trickle into Law's eye after he had opened them. It smelled like something edible. In any case the substance had already stuck to him, too, and he was curious, so he licked his lips to taste it, without caring how dirty it might be.

"Why are you drenched in soy?" he asked.

Luffy froze for a moment, giving a somewhat uneasy laugh. "Uh. I already had time to forget it, as you... Sorry about that."

"That wasn't what I asked, I wanted to know why you're soaked in it in the first place."

"That's kinda long story."

"I'm not going anywhere." Except to take a hot shower, as soon as he got a better grip of himself. There were even more reasons to go washing now, for he wasn't a piece of meat needing to be marinaded.

"Was in the kitchen," Luffy began. "And Sanji was there, making sauces for the takoyakis, and – dammit!"

"What is it?"

"I bet he's not gonna let me near the table before I wash. Naaaaah...."

Why anyone would want to sit eating while being covered in soy in the first place, it was a total mystery to Law. But there was no doubt that Luffy was right, what with Sanji being more than obsessed with tablemanners. He would probably kick his captain into the bathroom if Luffy wasn't going by himself willingly.

Into the bathroom that Law would have wanted to use soon, too. Fuck. He supposed he could wait for his turn. At least this conversation was so absurd it left no room for being anxious, thus making him feel considerably more normal. "And what happened in the kitchen, then?"

"I just wanted to help! He had these two different kind of soy sauces, and he was kind of just thinking which one to use. So I was gonna do a taste test and help him out. I was just about to pour one into my mouth –"

Law didn't want to imagine it, but couldn't help an image of Luffy, holding the bottle of soy, ready to pour a hefty amount into his gaping mouth. He shuddered.

"– you... were feeling bad things out of the blue, and suddenly that bottle just was broken 'cause I had squeezed –"
Bottles were made of glass, and this wasn't sounding good in the least. Law moved away from Luffy's hug, making use of his momentary confusion to grasp both of his hands in order to have a good look at them.

Law wasn't surprised to find out that one of Luffy's palms was entirely red with blood, despite it clearly having been rubbed against something a moment ago. His hoodie, come to think again. There were several jagged wounds made by shards of glass, but no shards gotten stuck into the flesh were seen, at least. It was hard to be sure because all of that blood, though, and Law didn't want to know how much the soy must be smarting.

"Squeeze your hand into a fist, and then open it again. Straighten the fingers properly. Again."

Luffy did like he was told to. He didn't seem to have trouble with controlling the movements, all of his fingers kept straightening and curling quite normally.

"Well, there's nothing essential cut in two," Law said. "Might need a couple of stitches, though."

"Let me see, too, is it bad?" Chopper squeezed himself almost on Law's lap so as to have a look, taking Luffy's hand. "Let's take him to the infirmary immediately –"

"Nope," Law said.

"The quicker it's stitched –"

"That's true, but he also needs to shower, and then the bandage would get wet; we'd need to change it again after that, it wouldn't make any sense. A quick shower first, and stitching then."

"But –"

"He's clearly not going to bleed to death, and hygiene is also important, so a little delay is quite acceptable."

Chopper didn't seem convinced yet. Robin was following their argument, a somewhat gently amused expression on her face.

"It's not a big deal, it's gonna stop by itself," Luffy tried saying.

"No," Law and Chopper said in unison. They glanced at each other, surprised, then Law continued. "It will be treated, unquestionably, probably stitched too, but we're not quite sharing the opinion of the order. Spraying it with cold water might reduce the bleeding, making it easier to stitch after that..."

"All right. The shower it is." Chopper sounded a bit reluctant. "He's going to need help –"

"I won't!" Luffy said.

"I believe Trafalgar wants to get rid of that soy..." The only word suitable to describe Robin's smile was sly.

Law glared at Robin. He wasn't the least bit prepared to take a shower with Luffy, all of a sudden. That would be really awkward, as their relationship still was so tentative, but on the other hand... this might be the way to do it with minimum amount of embarrassment, because he would have a clear task to concentrate on, and they couldn't linger.

Honestly speaking, he also wanted to see Luffy naked. No matter how terrible it was to admit such a
thing in a situation like this, as he should have been thinking different kind of things than nicely proportionate bodies altogether.

"Oh." Luffy seemed sheepish as the soy was mentioned again. "Yeah, we can go together. I guess that was my fault..."

Law neglected to say aloud that it really wasn't. The bottle would surely have stayed intact, if he hadn't been radiating such a shitload of angst all around him, but on the other hand he couldn't help it, either.

He felt much better, having something sensible to concentrate on. He hoped that Chopper would let him do the stitching, that would be some good occupational therapy to him, but Chopper was the doctor of the Straw Hat crew and Law, in turn, only a guest aboard the ship. Come to think again, he had been intruding on Chopper's territory too much already; despite Luffy happening to be his boyfriend.

He wasn't even close to getting used to that situation.

It was best if he started getting used to it right now, so it seemed. He stood up carefully, finding out that a part of the hem of his hoodie was dry enough for him to wipe away the water droplets sprinkled on his sword. It felt like Kikoku wasn't the least bit satisfied with the way it was handled – if it was drawn, it also wanted to cut something, and not only get dropped. That was what it was made for.

There were moments when Law realized he was damn close to talking to the weapon. The energy it was radiating settled immediately after he sheathed it, luckily; that feeling like it was screaming on the border of his consciousness, without voice.

Having a sword like that take a liking to him probably was telling much of his creepiness.

"Traffy? We going or what?"

Law startled. Luffy was already climbing over the railing in order to jump on the main deck; using the ladder didn't seem to cross his mind.

"I guess." Law still considered this one of the worst ideas of the day, but he didn't have much choice. "I'll get my towel and some clean clothes, see you in the bathroom soon."

"Yup!" Luffy darted towards the mens' quarters, hopefully to fetch similar equipment.

"Law?" Chopper asked, timid.

"Hm?"

"Should I go and search tools for stitching already?"

Law gave a sigh, watching the little doctor wiggling on place with the will to help, but being uncertain if he dared to. Chopper was so adorable and overly cute that just being forced to disagree with him made Law feel like a monster. Not to mention his sarcastic snap, that had been below the belt as hell.

"That'd be helpful." He placed his hand on Chopper's head for a moment. "There was so much blood, I don't believe we can avoid the stitching, so... the quicker it's done the better. I apologize for interfering, but this soy is seriously disgusting, for real." He would have wanted to swipe it off his face, it was still threatening to dribble into his eye, but that would have only made his hands dirty,
Chopper nodded. "I'll take them out meanwhile. And after we've treated him, I want to talk to you."

"For some reason that doesn't surprise me at all."

"You're not fine, are you?"

"Of course not." Trying to claim anything else would have been no use, as Chopper had happened to witness one of Law's finest moments himself. After that there was no reassurance that would work. "I'll get by, though. So don't worry."

Having dropped by the infirmary, fetching the towel and clothes, and leaving his sword on the bed, Law wasn't quite so sure that he would make it, anymore. He took a few deep breaths before daring to enter the bathroom.

In some incomprehensible way Luffy had already arrived there before Law, even though he had needed to visit the other end of the ship. He was pulling his stained clothes off, not even bothering with being careful with his injured hand. There were some drops of blood on the floor.

"You're slow," Luffy said, stripping his shorts without a moment of hesitation.

... Right. I really am not going to make it.

The idea of Luffy possibly being shy had never even crossed Law's mind, but this was a mild shock nonetheless. He hadn't imagined Luffy just pulling all of his clothing off in front of him like that kind of act was nothing at all, either.

Apparently there was no reason for Law to not stare. Thus he let his gaze roam over Luffy's body for a while.

It was... pleasing to look at, though in a way that was difficult to define. Luffy wasn't the most handsome or sexy man Law had ever laid his eyes on, and his physique wasn't especially drawing attention, but he was proportionate in such an easy way that it was pleasant to watch in itself. Especially because Luffy carried himself with such natural self-confidence.

When it came to the personality, though... Luffy simply was impossible to ignore, no matter how hard you tried; he was a magnet.

"You coming or not?" Luffy asked, hands relaxedly on his hips, causing Law's gaze to slip right in between them by force.

Law swallowed awkwardly, noticing that was also nicely proportional. Finally a burning feeling in his eye startled him to notice he really needed to shower – fucking soy – and started stripping off, remarkably more uncertain than Luffy.

It wasn't his body he was self-conscious about, even though the reason for many people considering it pleasing to look at remained as a total mystery to him. Had he gotten to choose his physique himself, it wouldn't have been quite so fucking narrow, but well, what do you do about a thing like that. In any case he had learned his lesson that one time, when he had been smashed, getting an awesome idea of shortening his too long legs by cutting a part of them off. The next morning, suffering from a hangover, he had been forced to admit that the idea had actually been pretty shitty; too long or not, these legs still were his own and belonged in their place.

He happened to be like this, and that was it. It wasn't even like him to care much of what people
might think of his appearance. On top of that, it felt like Luffy very often accepted things just like they happened to be, so it was useless to worry about that.

Clothing just was a boundary and shield he wasn't quite ready to take off just yet. Especially because he didn't understand Luffy at all, nor what the heck was going on in their relationship. Not being able to interpret what was expected of him was nerve-wracking.

Would it be improper to touch Luffy; Law was meant to be a doctor after all, so such a thing felt a bit out of line? Would it be even worse if he didn't touch, as they happened to be 'boyfriends' now and taking a shower together, and perhaps not being the least bit curious would be rude? He hated unclear situations, where every option felt wrong at some level. Why the fuck he had been thinking that showering would be a good idea at this point?

While stripping off, he was thinking too much and neglecting to look at Luffy. He lingered a moment too long inspecting the bruise in his thigh, which he had gotten last night by the edge of the bunk. Its edges had already started turning charmingly yellowish-green. Luffy's fault.

On the other hand... He saw quite an amount of bloody stains in his hoodie, as Luffy had been stroking his back and shoulders. That idiot didn't think of himself at all, just charging out after feeling that something was wrong, ignoring his wounds as if Law was more meaningful. Geez. That kind of behaviour made Law feel very complicated, but it was also clearing his head when it came to deciding where he should turn his attention now. It was his turn to take care of Luffy.

When he turned around, he wasn't surprised to catch Luffy watching him with blatant interest. The surprise was how pleasing he found this.

Having gotten to the shower Law rinsed his face to get rid of the soy, and then decided to start by being a doctor. It was best to take a proper look, seeing what was the matter before spending time for anything else; the damage might be worse than it had seemed like, and then they would need to hurry.

Law was holding Luffy's wrist while rinsing the blood and soy off with cold water. The grip made him extremely conscious of the way his touch made Luffy's pulse quicken, eagerly throbbing against his fingers. Forcing himself to concentrate was a difficult feat.

" Doesn't seem so bad," he said, having finally seen the wounds clearly. There was a cut near the thumb, seemingly deep but short; a longer but more shallow one in the middle of the palm; and some little cuts that only needed some band-aids. "Three of four stitches."

"Okay."

"Are you not going to object?" That was quite a surprise, Luffy had seemed to be pretty much against the treatment to Law.

Luffy shook his head. "Nope. I think it's gonna heal by itself, but you're the doctor. And if putting some stitches in it makes you happy, all right then."

It was such a ridiculously charming way to think that Law couldn't help smiling at it. The pulse in the wrist he was holding got even more frantic, and suddenly the air was heavy with tension. Luffy was watching him expectantly, like he knew what he was doing, and all he wanted to do was leaning towards Luffy's face and –

Not right now. Concentrate, Law. CONCENTRATE.

He coughed, letting the wrist go. "All right. Keep that hand out of the water, I'll help you to wash."
He was strongly suspecting that he was going to enjoy the task more than could be allowed.

"Like this?" Luffy stretched his arm a good distance away. Big drops of blood were still dripping out of the wounds at even pace.

Law stared at the elongated arm a while, until shaking himself mentally. Would he ever get used to that? He had finally gotten used to his own Power, and he had seen quite many that had been weird, too, but for some reason he always found seeing this stretching confusing. And why was he suddenly wondering whether every part of Luffy was elastic?

"Um, yeah. Just like that. You don't want soap getting into the wounds, plus the warmth would just worsen the bleeding, so keep it there." For a moment he considered making Luffy to squeeze something in his hand, to put some pressure to the wounds, but this was going to take just a few minutes. It wouldn't make much of a difference at this point, anyways.

Luffy was surprisingly quiet and still, as Law started shampooing his hair. That hair felt a bit coarse, indeed, even though it was hard to be sure with it being wet. He lathered the shampoo carefully everywhere, running his fingertips along Luffy's scalp and taking the chance to scrutinize Luffy, who was keeping his eyes shut, seeming like he was fully enjoying the treatment.

Right now Luffy seemed twice as intelligent, with his mouth shut and not in a wide idiot-smile reaching to his ears. His neck was pretty slender and sinewy, and Law's gaze lingered at it until slipping on a shoulder. There was a collection of scars that hadn't been there two years ago – they seemed to be quite new, made by very sharp jagged teeth.

Law withheld his question, pushing Luffy better under the shower to rinse his hair. The foam sliding along his body made Law swallow awkwardly; he had to look away before he got too excited.

He desired to wrap his arms around Luffy, pressing against his wet skin, and then just rub and rub their bodies together, enjoying the slide of his hard cock against Luffy's –

**CONCENTRATE, Law.**

The power of his desire totally got him by surprise. His cravings for sex didn't use to be directed at any person specifically, it used to be more a purely physical need – like hunger that could be sated by anything but bread. It felt like there was something more this time. Or if it wasn't downright something more, then it definitely was something else.

That definitely wasn't a thought for right here and now. Law concentrated on washing his own hair, more heavy-handed than usual in the hopes of it making him come back to his senses. He needed that sense in order to survive the next trial.

Soaping.

A touch on his chest startled him out of his thoughts presuming total disaster. Luffy had pressed his fingers lightly on his tattoo, following it lower and lower, towards his abs. That was a bad idea.

Law glanced at another of Luffy's hands, dripping more blood onto the floor. The blood was mixing with the water on the floor, it started to look like there was a whole puddle of it already. Almost like someone had been killed here. It made Law remember his task and get a grip of himself, taking a bar of soap and coughing. "All right. Stay still."

Luffy pulled his hand off Law's skin, mouth pressed into a thoughtful line. "You said that I can touch, then. Traffy?"
"Stitching comes first." Law shook himself mentally, rubbing the soap between his hands and starting to wash Luffy. He tried not to feel too closely how his hands were sliding on warm skin, and how Luffy tilted his head as Law touched his neck. He soaped Luffy's chest, slightly disappointed by the fact he couldn't really feel the texture of the scar because everything was slippery. Then the sides, the hips, moving lower, Luffy's cock twitched, it seemed delicious.

Law was very strictly thinking of blood dripping out of the hand, and wounds needing to be treated.

He circled behind Luffy, soaping his back. Slender shoulderblades, lower along the spine, Luffy's bottom looked very firm but not bony at all; he wanted to wrap his arms around Luffy and press himself –

*Do not think about it. Do NOT think about it. Falling into the sea, Trebol, wounds waiting for being sutured, list every brand of painkillers available in pharmacies and their components.*

Somehow Law succeeded in getting through the trial without getting hard, and quickly washed himself, too. After he was sure that all of the soy and other impurities were gone, he ushered Luffy to hold his hand under the cold stream of water while drying both of them.

"Feels nice," Luffy stated, as Law was drying the trickles of water that were running from his hair to nape.

"Coldness makes your veins contract, so it should reduce the bleeding," Law said, trying not to think of something that would have felt even nicer; and perhaps he himself was in a need of cold shower too. As an afterthought he realized that his statement didn't have anything to do with Luffy's words, but it didn't seem to matter.

It was blatantly obvious that getting dressed was the most sensible thing to do. Law told Luffy to stay still, and went to pull his clothes on. His favorite jeans had gotten wet, and the pair he was forced to wear instead was new and stiff; he hated them, but perhaps being a bit uncomfortable was exactly the thing he needed in order to maintain a grip of himself.

He tiptoed back to Luffy without his socks, and was pleased to see that the bleeding really had slowed down considerably. "Looks better. How is it feeling?"

"Cold," Luffy said. Being naked didn't seem to bother him at all, but it definitely was a distraction for Law's concentration.

Law wrapped a tiny, clean towel around the hand, and hurried to help Luffy wear some pants.

In the infirmary Chopper had been spreading everything they would need onto the table, and was passing time by restlessly rotating his chair round and round. Having seen them, Chopper jumped down, starting to run around them while talking way too quickly. "What does it look like? Is it bad? Luffy, are you feeling faint? Do you need to lie down? Do we need a blood transf-"

"Calm down, doctor Chopper." At times Law was seriously wondering how the Straw Hats made it with their doctor getting these fits of hysteria, but it seemed like Chopper always got a grip after running around a while, seemingly in panic. Also, one of Chopper's pros was being probably about thousand times nicer as a doctor than Law himself. But well, who wouldn't have been?

"I'm okay," Luffy said, sitting on a chair Law had pointed at. "You don't need to fuss."

"I am not fussing!" Law said.

Luffy watched him carefully for a moment. "Well, maybe not. But you're really intent, though."
"Want to complain?"

"Nope." Luffy flashed him such a brilliant smile, Law had to swallow.

Law seized Luffy's wrist again, trying to ignore how the touch made his pulse accelerate. He twisted the hand so that Chopper could see it, instead, pointing at the wounds. "I'd put one stitch over here, perhaps – and three over here – what do you think?"

"The second one seems to be quite shallow," Chopper said.

"That's true. But I suppose there's about zero percent probability for Luffy just letting his hand rest, not using it."

"Hey, why're you using my name if you're talking to someone else than me!?" Luffy asked.

"Because that is your name, Straw Hat."

Luffy opened and closed his mouth, trying to express what he really had been meaning.

Law didn't wait for him, instead turning to Chopper again. "And because the cut goes that way, it's going to open every time the hand is squeezed into fist if it's not sutured."

"That's true." Chopper thought of it for a while, a hoof on his chin, until he nodded. "I guess three would be fine."

Law reached for the bottle of antiseptics, but pulled his hand quickly away. "I guess you want to do the stitching? I mean, you're his doctor." Damn, he wanted to do something else than just watch, but getting even more involved in this wasn't any of his business.

"You can do it. If you don't find stitching your boyfriend difficult?"

"Was that supposed to be a joke?" He had literally been holding Luffy's heart in his hands as he had operated on him after Marineford, and even though the bond between them had been different at that time than it was now – fuck, he still didn't know what it currently was like – a few stings with a suturing needle truly wasn't a problem. He had never been known of being needlessly tender.

Chopper shook his head.

Law was about to say that it was another way round, that he might enjoy it too much, but bit the inside of his lip before the sentence had time to jump out. There were Luffy and Chopper listening to him, and the joke wouldn't have been understood by them for sure, causing confusion. Robin would have appreciated it.

"Luffy?" Chopper had climbed onto the desk so as to reach feeling Luffy's forehead. "You're so subdued it makes me worried, are you quite sure you're not feeling dizzy?"

"Yup. Totally fine." Luffy was just smiling happily, letting Law turn his hand over. If anyone else had smiled like that while waiting for suturing, Law would have been seriously worried of the patient's mental health, but Luffy couldn't be considered even nearly 'normal' anyways. He supposed that smiling was to be expected, if the patient did it constantly in any case, wasn't the least bit scared of pain, plus was excited by even the smallest contact with the doctor treating them.

"Do you need an assistant?" Chopper asked Law, hopefully.

"Thanks, that'd be very helpful." Law didn't have a heart to turn him down, even though he was
quite capable of putting some stitches to the wounds by himself, too – and competent assistant was never a hindrance, either.

After they had solved who was going to do what, the stitching in itself was so easy that it was almost anticlimatic. Chopper took care of cleaning the wounds, and handed exactly the right tools to Law, with exactly right timing; Law was free to concentrate all of his attention to the pin point and the tenseness of the thread. Pressing the sides of a jagged cut together and preventing them from parting again was very satisfactory, and the line of tiny black knots was almost aesthetic.

Some dressings, tapes and band-aids later Law was leaning backwards on his chair, letting out a deep breath. "That's it. I guess those can be taken out as soon as tomorrow, what with your crazy healing rate; otherwise they'll grow in."

"Wow. It's like new." Luffy was inspecting and poking at his dressings like it didn't hurt at all. He hadn't let out any noise during the whole stitching.

"Not yet. Try not to use that hand – I don't believe that you really remember it all the time, that's why I stitched it – but please do try, Straw Hat."

"How long are you gonna use that name, Traffy?"

"As I already stated, as long as you are. Straw Hat."

"Traffy." Luffy sank low enough to stick out his tongue, which wasn't very surprising.

"The marital war," Chopper snickered.

"Whatever." Law was suddenly feeling very tired. He washed his hands to get something to do, and to get rid of antiseptic that made his skin dry and smelled pungent. Having done that, he slumped to sit on the bed, wishing to be left alone for a moment. The emotional rollercoaster had worn him out.

Luffy sprang up from his chair, sitting on the bed right beside Law, as close as was possible, pressing their hips and shoulders tightly together.

Chopper smiled watching at them, and put the tools quickly back to their places. "I guess I'll take my leave. Luffy, it'd really be best to not use that hand if you can avoid it. Law, I still want to talk with you at some point."

Law and Luffy said, "Hm" in unison, as some kind of sign of unenthusiastic consent. Chopper clearly found this hilarious, for he was giggling as he slipped out of the infirmary, closing the door after him.

They were alone. After Law had had an episode of dissociation triggered by post-traumatic stress, behaving in a totally ridiculous way and ending up hugged by Luffy. After they had taken a shower together, with more sexual tension than could be beneficial for anyone's mental health. And now the wounds had been stitched, and there were just the two of them.

It was extremely awkward. Law had a sneaking suspicion that it would very quickly get even more awkward, if they didn't kiss soon, thus breaking down some stupid boundaries. Like this, he couldn't find his place, nor was he able to relax. Luffy being puzzled by his irrational behaviour and treating him like he was explosive wasn't any help.

He took Luffy's hand, resting on Luffy's thigh, and squeezed it carefully. The edges of bandages and band-aids could be felt as slight ridges.
"It's stitched now," Luffy said.

Law was feverishly wondering whether Luffy was referencing to the discussion they had had while showering, during which he might have given the impression that touching would be fine after the wounds had been treated. Some day his brain was probably going to shortcircuit totally because of thinking too much, and he was kind of wishing it would happen soon. Second-guessing and overthinking was burdensome; why couldn't he just switch his brain off and pull Luffy properly on his lap?

But no. Instead, he said, "I'm still surprised by you not claiming there was no need for that."

"I don't know about that, whatever." Luffy moved his fingers some, and squeezed Law's hand in turn. "But you needed to do it."

"You might be right." Getting momentarily absorbed in something he knew like the back of his hand – that had been a very mind-clearing, downright therapeutic experience, and Luffy was definitely right.

"It's not a big deal to me to let you."

Law's chest felt tight and warm at the same time. He had to do something, so he turned enough to get a good look at Luffy. They got caught looking at each other's eyes, and Law couldn't help thinking that Luffy's eyes were so big and round and warmly dark, they made him think of a cup of coffee. That was never a bad mental image.

He raised his hand, carefully cupping Luffy's cheek and jaw. It felt warm.

Luffy blinked, grinning. "Is this the point where we kiss?"

"I suppose. If you want to."

Luffy wasn't so much approaching as he was *attacking*, throwing himself at Law with such a force that it pushed Law on his back onto the mattress, accompanied by a surprised groan. Their lips smacked together in a pretty awful way; then there was a stunned, frozen moment as Luffy started to understand there was something more to kissing than just pressing their lips against each other.

Law buried his fingers into Luffy's wet hair, starting to nibble at his lips, doing his best trying to show what it was about. And when it came to anything physical, Luffy was incredibly quick to learn, and never did the same mistake twice during a fight, either.

Very soon Law had forgotten that his legs were in a pretty uncomfortable position, still hanging off the side of the bed; or that Luffy shouldn't be leaning on his bandaged hand. Luffy was pressing himself snugly against Law's side, partially on him, too; and that felt considerably more close and safe than it was oppressive.

One of Law's hands slid onto Luffy's nape, which was appreciated if the noise Luffy made was any indication. The kiss was confusingly *easy*, not getting very deep or demanding anything of him. It caused a nice tingling feeling, in which he could happily float hours without getting painfully aroused or frustrated.

Some time later – it felt like an eternity, and at the same time it was far too soon – Luffy pulled away so that only the tips of their noses were touching. Law tried to get his breathing even so as to say something, even if he didn't know what it would be.

"That was good," Luffy said.
Well, I guess that was a pretty good summary of the situation.

Law kicked his shoes off, settling a bit more comfortably onto the bed. He flashed a smile, it came out unusually easily. "That it was. Shall we continue?"

Luffy didn't need to be asked twice.
Luffy found it difficult to believe that he was kissing Law at the moment. It felt truly awesome in a way he had never experienced before – every cell of his being was awake and tingling, his heart was racing, and he was extremely conscious of Law's every single movement and reaction. It resembled fighting, where you also needed to fully concentrate on the current moment and your opponent, but it still was totally different than that.

Their lips were gliding against each other in a slow dance, causing an exciting feeling of sinking; kind of like Luffy was slowly being pulled towards Law. And Law's hands in his hair and on his nape felt really nice, it made him realize why cats purred.

He wanted to touch Law, too, so he propped himself up on his elbow so that he could place another of his hands on his chest. Frustratingly, he only felt the thick fabric of the hoodie; then he shifted his hand upwards, to Law's neck, that felt surprisingly hot. Law sighed against his lips, which had to be a good sign.

He was edging his hand towards Law's nape – that felt like a good idea, Law's hand on his own nape felt so nice – as his fingertips suddenly brushed against something cool and metal. Oh, there were those earrings. He downright had to fiddle with them a bit, making Law let out a quiet moan as his fingers curled more tightly into Luffy's hair.

As a response to that reaction, it felt like something was blazing in the bottom of his stomach, immediately coursing through him, reaching even the tips of his fingers and toes; something hot and demanding. It felt like he had been leisurely enjoying some delicious appetizers, and then suddenly in the middle of it realized that he was really, incredibly hungry.

Hunger; that sounded like a good metaphor. That kind of hunger that made him want to devour every dish on the table at the same time, because he couldn't decide which one he wanted the most; usually leading to Sanji kicking him, because he supposedly had terrible tablemanners.

Kissing like this was awesome, sure, but he wanted to do it more somehow, if that kind of thing was possible. Besides, he wanted to kiss other parts than lips, too. Like... everything, actually. And even though their sides were tightly pressing together, and he was partially leaning on Law’s chest, it didn't feel like this was enough. If they could press themselves against each other very snugly somehow – perhaps, if he shifted on top of Law and wrapped his arms around them a few times very tightly, and squeezed – but in that case, it would be very difficult to touch with his fingers –

Luffy was about to swing one of his legs over Law's hip, when it occurred to him that he was doing exactly the thing he had decided to avoid. Getting too excited, so that he didn't consider things sufficiently. He had decided not to be 'pushy'.

It had read in that booklet, too. That you always needed to talk with your partner before doing something, making sure that it would be all right. And Luffy wanted to do this right.
Somehow he succeeded in tearing his lips away from Law's, but it was an almost impossible achievement. Like trying to leave some uneaten food on his plate. Law was out of breath, looking at him questioningly.

"We should talk about things, right?" Luffy said. Felt like the sentence was kind of lacking something, in this situation, so he tried to clarify. "Like... those things."

"What?" Law asked.

"Those things. That couples do together." Luffy wasn't sure whether he remembered all of it, there had been so much information, but there had been stuff about licking cocks and pushing fingers into each other's butts, and it was supposed to feel good. Kissing had already greatly exceeded his expectations, so he really believed the claim.

Law looked at him, frowning, until suddenly collapsing onto the bed limply, like he was a burst balloon, giving a heavy sigh. "You did read it, didn't you?"

"Yup." Luffy was smiling widely.

"Why?"

"So that you don't need to worry, of course."

"I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about, Straw Hat."

"You said that you're bad in these things! So I thought I'd figure it out for you."

Law let out a painful-sounding groan, picking up a pillow that had been lying next to him, and hiding his face behind it. He was muttering something about wanting someone to kill him right now.

"That won't do!" Luffy tried to pull the pillow off. "I want you alive, Traffy."

After a small and pretty joyful scuffle Luffy managed to snatch the pillow out of Law's hold, but Law yanked it back to himself as Luffy was adjusting his balance. And used it to slap his face. It was the most playful thing he had ever seen Law doing, and he didn't need a more clear invitation.

A pillowfight with only one pillow ensued, where you scored points by taking the pillow and slapping the other one with it. In the beginning Luffy had a slight advantage because of his stretchy limbs, but then Law started being totally unfair, starting to use his Power too, with which he could just relocate the pillow into his hands. At that point the scuffle got a bit more physical, and the bed was frustratingly small for that kind of rolling around and tussling.

Eventually, Luffy ended up on his back, with the pillow on his chest. He had a firm hold of Law's hair, that felt very soft even while wet. Law was leaning over him, and there was a look in his eyes that Luffy liked; promising and intense.

Kissing was great indeed, it felt like there was a tremor travelling downwards along his spine, making even his toes curl.

Law pulled away way too quickly, looking so serious that his expression made Luffy to not object. "You're right, we really need to talk a bit. About those things."

Luffy was just waiting for the continuation. He wasn't quite sure if Law was trying to jeer by emphasizing his choice of words.
"Do you want to do that? With me?"

"Yeah?" Suddenly Luffy remembered that he was supposed to be considerate, and added, "If you wanna do that too."

Law's smile was only a twitch of his lips, hardly noticeable, but the way it made him look softer was startling. "Definitely. But would you do something for me?"

"What is it? I'm not giving you my food!"

"I'm not quite so suicidal that I'd try touching your food, ever," Law said, sounding like he was holding in laughter. "No worries."

"What is it then?"

"Forget everything you learned from that pamphlet. Would that be all right with you?"

Luffy froze, wordless. At times he was told that reading a book or two would do him some good, and now, after he had bothered with it for once... "But I did read it."

"I know. I told Chopper it's a bad idea, but he didn't listen to me. He's taking his responsibilities very seriously, and I do understand it – but it still makes me want to cut his antlers off."

Chopper would look strange without his antlers, so it would be best if Law didn't execute his words. On the other hand, though – "Hey, could you attach them onto my head, then? That'd be so cool!"

Law slumped, so that his forehead pressed against Luffy's collarbone. He also sighed, very suffering.

"Fine, no it is, then. Tightass. Traffy Tightass."

Having gathered himself a bit, Law raised his head again, very serious. "It is nice to know that you're ready to make an effort, and it's unfortunate that it happened to be useless in this case, but... trying to have sex exactly according to some instuctional pamphlet is a bad idea, and all in all that would be very unarousing."

"How is it done, then? Chopper wouldn't say. That's why he gave me that thing to read."

"But you're not going to do it with Chopper, are you?"

Luffy's jaw dropped. What on earth had given Law such a weird idea? "Of course not! Why would I do that? Are you totally stupid? It's not him I'm in love with, it's you!"

Law slumped again, radiating even greater desperation than before. Luffy didn't know what else to do than petting Law's hair while waiting for him to get a grip. He supposed he had said something stupid, again, but didn't know what it exactly had been – the thought of having sex with Chopper just was weird, wasn't it?

After a while that felt long, Law gave a heavy sigh, slipping his hand on Luffy's nape and starting to fiddle with his hair.

"That was a bad choice of words, I give," Law said, not bothering to raise his head anymore, instead he was rubbing his face against Luffy's neck. That goatee was a bit tickly. "I did mean that you could have just talked with me in the first place, because the whole matter happens to concern me."

"Oh... Yeah, I'd have, but you said that you're bad at this. So I thought to surprise."
"Someone please kill me right now. Seriously," Law muttered, very quietly.

Luffy was about to ask why Law was acting so strange, but suddenly Law was kissing his neck. And that felt damn good, he wanted Law to do it again. He tilted his head, trying to press himself to Law; it seemed to do the trick, for the lips continued caressing the side of his neck, and at times there was more wet touch by the tip of Law's tongue.

He was absolutely dumbfounded, as Law suddenly raised his head, asking, "How do you fight?"

How...? "Bare-handed?"

"Yes, I know. I meant, how do you decide what to do next?"

He had never thought of how he exactly was fighting. He definitely wasn't thinking of fighting, that much was sure. He just did it, it was kind of happening pretty naturally after he had seen what kind of move was required next. You never knew before you started. "Instinct?"

"Right. I thought you might say that." Law nodded, like he was very satisfied with himself. "So, you just start, try something, and..."

"... see how it works," Luffy finished. "How else? Don't say that I'm supposed to think then. It's like... instinct and observing."

"Yeah."

It was mindboggling that Law wasn't trying to object, starting to insist that thinking was the right way; but come to think again, Law was overthinking himself crazy before the coming fight even started, making those million plans of his. After the brawl had started, it seemed like Law didn't think any more than Luffy.

"But we were talking about sex stuff, not fighting," Luffy reminded.

"But the answer is actually applicable."

Luffy went silent, trying to get what exactly Law was meaning. He had asked how those things were done, and Law had asked how he was fighting. So, it was like instinct and observing?

That sounded... right. As he was thinking what he had done so far, it really sounded right. How he had instinctively wanted to finger Law's earrings, and the reaction had immediately told him that was something worth doing more, because Law clearly liked it.

In fact, it felt like everything had been progressing awesomely, until he had remembered the pamphlet, trying to consider his actions for once. All right, he wasn't going to make that mistake twice.

"Okay," he said.

Law kissed him again, and the warm feeling that had subsided for a while came back right away. He let his hands wander here and there, feeling what reactions they caused – Law's hair and nape were definitely good places to touch; the upper back didn't cause any particular reaction, but there wasn't anything hinting that Law didn't like hands over there, either, so at least it wasn't bad. Luffy was progressing lower along the spine, when there was a knocking sound.

He couldn't answer right now, for his mouth happened to be occupied. Whoever it was, they could wait for some time.
Law didn't seem to have any intention of answering the knocking or removing his lips from Luffy's, either. Without breaking the kiss, Law raised his hips, shifting his legs so as to crawl on Luffy more fully – that made an even more eager hot wave rush through Luffy, this started to be really exciting – and moved one of them between Luffy's.

Luffy realized their loins were going to press together in a really nice way, as soon as Law would come closer again, and he couldn't wait. Then he noticed the hem of Law's shirt sliding towards his armpits, revealing a part of his back, and couldn't help placing his hand on that skin.

It was really warm, and he felt the bony bulges of vertebra against his palm, but he didn't have time to so much as stroke it; there was another knock on the door, and it was thrown open right after that.

Sanji shrieked like one of Usopp's tabasco stars had hit him straight into the eyes.

Luffy and Law turned at the same time towards the door, where Sanji had covered his eyes, complaining they were bleeding.

"What is it now?" Law asked. He spoke quietly, in a manner that was foreboding a threat to cut something in pieces. In this case the thing was probably Sanji.

"I came to inform that those much begged takoyakis are ready to be eaten, so you might want to put that dry humping session on hold for a while."

"What?" Luffy asked. He didn't recognize the phrase.

"I'd like to point out we weren't quite that far," Law said.

Sanji didn't say anything to it, retreating and closing the door very quickly instead. "There's going to be nothing left for you if you don't hurry!" was heard from the other side of the door.

Luffy didn't want to take the risk of losing the snack – Sanji's takoyakis were insane – but he still had to give a sigh of small disappointment as he sat up. Besides, he was pretty hard right now.

Law sat up, too, pressing a palm onto his face. A heavy sigh was heard from behind it. "I forgot that there is one valid piece of advice in The ABC of Gay Sex."

"What is it?" Luffy asked.

"Make sure no one disturbs you."

~*~

The weather was still beautiful, so everyone wanted to enjoy the snack on the deck, in the fresh air. Robin closed her book so as to be able to concentrate on eating and observing more fully; at moments like this it was easy to notice if everything was not like it should.

Nami kept massaging her temples and glancing at the log pose while eating, like something having to do with the weather or their course was bothering her. Asking about it would have been no use, though, because Nami probably didn't know what it was yet – otherwise she would have warned them about the coming phenomenon already. Navigating in the New World couldn't be easy.

Brook, Franky and Usopp were chatting lightly about something while stuffing themselves with takoyakis. All of them seemed to be cheery, and Franky was drinking too much cola; nothing abnormal there, then.
Zoro tried getting two boxes of takoyakis at once, and was fighting Sanji because of that. Definitely nothing abnormal there.

Chopper was quiet, and kept glancing in the direction of the mast at times. Law was sitting on the bench circling it, like he was glued to it – definitely nothing abnormal, it had been his usual place since the beginning of the alliance – and was picking at his food like he was scared of Sanji seasoning his share with poison. However, he was looking remarkably better than Robin had expected, after his earlier episode, so Luffy's company had apparently done him some good.

And Luffy had already emptied eight boxes of takoyakis, watching around to find more food to eat, which was very normal indeed.

All things considered, it seemed like everything was all right, even though there were some small concerns. Robin concentrated solely on her food, just in time to see a stretchy hand snatching two takoyakis out of her box.

"Shouldn't you avoid using that hand?" she asked.

"Oops." Luffy stuffed the stolen takoyakis quickly into his mouth, coming a bit closer. As soon as he thought Robin wasn't watching, he used his good hand to steal some more.

"Take the whole box," Robin offered, pushing it closer to the edge of the table. Unless she was badly mistaken, she was soon going to get a new one; that suited her plans.

A huge smile lit Luffy's face like the sun, and it wasn't difficult to understand how such a thing made even Law melt. "Really? Thanks, Robin!"

"Did you get some stitches?" Robin gestured towards plentiful bandages and band-aids decorating Luffy's hand.

"Yeah. I don't think it's bad, but he seemed to prefer putting them in, so why not."

"Doctors..." Robin glanced at Law again, who apparently was trying to find the meaning of life from the bottom of his takoyaki box, if his expression was anything to go by. Law could try looking like some kind of a heartless sadist, by all means, but that seemed to be extremely far from the truth; perhaps a thin coating, and underneath there was a deeply caring person.

"Yeah, them." Luffy nodded, very solemn, which was a blatant contrast to him childishly spearing takoyakis with his fingers at the same time. "Chopper's worrying way too much, too." He took a look at Chopper, who wasn't eating with his usual enthusiasm at all, seemingly thoughtful. "Of Traffy. But he shouldn't. That's just making both of them cross."

"Are you not worried of him, then?" Robin's opinion was that it would have been reasonable. Anyone as powerful as Law being mentally broken enough to totally lose their sense of reality; it wasn't safe. It was clear that Law had been ready to attack the first person available, without seeing them at all; and good thing it had happened to be Luffy and not someone else. "You were really quick to appear – I assume it means that you were sensing something, and it couldn't have been anything good."

"It wasn't," Luffy admitted. His smile had disappeared altogether. "It was really... bad feeling, like..." He went silent, not wanting to, or not knowing how to describe it. "But how is being worried any help?"

That question was too good, and there actually wasn't an answer to it, but at least being worried would have been a normal reaction. On the other hand, it seemed like not bothering with too much
thinking was an essential part of Luffy's charm.

"Wouldn't being worried be like... I don't trust him to make it?" Luffy speared a takoyaki furiously, like it had presented such an insulting idea. "That'd make me angry. Traffy's strong."

"I'm aware of it, Luffy."

"Then it's fine."

Perhaps it was. Probably the last thing Law wanted was someone fussing over him and pretending to be his mother. That would probably feel very humiliating, and exactly like Luffy had said. Luffy seemed to understand Law remarkably well, perhaps because in some things they were more similar than Law ever wanted to admit. Stubborn captains, hating to be seen at a weak moment.

Besides, Luffy not worrying didn't equal him not caring. A lot. Perhaps that was just right.

"I knew the two of you would be good together," Robin said.

"Yup, me too. Felt it. In here." Luffy touched his chest, flashing a wide grin. "We're gonna get married one day."

Robin smiled at it. As Luffy decided to do something... well, good luck to Law with trying to avoid his fate.

"But that can wait. You're really smart, saying we don't need to start with that. Hadn't thought of it myself."

There was nothing to say to that, so Robin just continued her smiling.

"Oh, Robin! You know a lot of words, right?"

"I do, what about it?"

"What's 'dry humping'?"

Robin was so surprised, she was about to choke by a fit of cough. She didn't have time to gather her thoughts for explaining before the sole of Sanji's shoe connected with the back of Luffy's skull.

"What are you trying to ask Robin-chwan, you shitty rubber!"

"But Sanji, you said it yours-" Luffy whined, rubbing his head.

Sanji kicked him again in the middle of his sentence.

"Could you please not break my boyfriend, I just got him patched up." Law's dryish tone carried easily over the deck, despite him not speaking up – and the superficial sarcasm wasn't masking his caring, at least not from Robin.

Luffy was visibly overjoyed as Law paid attention to him like this, hurrying to sit beside Law onto the bench. Law got more lively immediately, persistently starting to protect his meal from stealing fingers. Worrying might truly be useless, if Law had energy to care about a few takoyakis that much.

"There's a new serving for you, Robin-chwan!" Sanji declared, placing an untouched box onto the table in front of Robin. It was accompanied by a stick, with a heart at the other end.

"Thank you." Robin flashed Sanji a smile that guaranteed she got whatever she wanted. Like an
answer to the question that had kept her imagination busy. "What did you happen to see, as you went
to fetch them to eat?" Sanji's shriek had been heard all over the ship.

"More than I'd have wanted to see. That isn't something a delicate flower like you should –"

"Sanji. Please do tell me." Robin kept smiling, but her tone got colder. It was flattering that at times
she got flowers and compliments, and generally was reminded that someone appreciated females –
that was something she had never experienced before joining this crew – but sometimes Sanji was
way too excessive idiot, and then that appreciation turned downright insulting.

"They were kissing. And horizontal."

"Ho, really?" Nami suddenly sat by the table, opposite to Robin, her ears always keen to listen when
it came to secrets and plots. "Which one was on top?"

"Law, at least at that moment." Remembering the sight apparently made Sanji need a cigarette, for he
started fumbling for the pack from his pocket.

Nami was processing the information for a while, then an ominous smile was spreading on her face.
"Who wants to bet which one of them tops first when they have sex?"

"I'll pass." Robin suspected that Law was going to cut something in two, if he became aware of such
a betting pool. If Luffy heard of it, in turn, he would take it as some kind of contest, causing him to
want to top for real... Well, when it came to Luffy, that sounded quite plausible in any case, whether
there was betting involved or not. Law would probably try to reason with him, followed by
behaviour that was common for couples who had been married for decades. They were so cute.

Secondly, Robin couldn't even begin to guess – she could imagine both options just as easily, and
fifty percent probability for getting it right didn't sound worth trouble. Thirdly, betting against Nami
was always a bad idea.

"Me too," Sanji said, somewhat greenish. "I don't want to imagine them doing it."

"I fail to see why they shouldn't", Robin said.

"Don't be so narrow-minded," Nami said to Sanji. "That's the most interesting thing going on aboard
this ship at the moment."

"I'm not narrow-minded, and I don't give a shit about what gender that panda-spider prefers in bed –"

"Panda-spider?" Nami interrupted.

All of them glanced at the mast, by which the couple was tussling for the box. Law had crossed his
legs, inadvertently highlighting how long they were.

"That's pretty descriptive, actually," Nami said.

"– but it doesn't mean I need to see it happen," Sanji continued. "Seeing Luffy doing something like
that was really weird. If you get what I mean."

"Why everyone thinks it's so terribly strange? It's like, all of you think that I won't... I'm not ABLE to
feel like that, or something like that."

Luffy's words, voiced a few days ago, were echoing in Robin's mind vividly.

"I don't think I do," she said. "There are people who only have eyes for just the right one, there's
nothing wrong with that."

"I'm starting to get used to it. Them," Nami said.

Sanji sighed, speaking out by blowing a heart-shaped smoke-ring. Essentially he was an absolutely hopeless romantic, there was no doubt of that. "Well, perhaps having intelligent company inspires Luffy to use his own brain for a change. That wouldn't be a bad thing."

"Yeah, let's wait for that day." Nami rolled her eyes.

While waiting for that day Robin asked for coffee, and Sanji hurried to fetch her some. She was going to enjoy it without any worries.
Pirates and Freedom

Chapter Notes

This was one of the more difficult chapters; some are easier to write while some... are not. Anyways it felt like something that was needed, I don't know what else to say.

Thank you everyone for leaving comments and kudos. <3

It was an early evening, when Nami suggested that Law and Luffy could try making themselves useful by going to observe, for example. Law had been mesmerized by a book he had borrowed from Chopper, but the request startled him back to reality, making him realize he had accidentally ignored Luffy for a while. He supposed he had needed some space, but getting so absorbed in the book for such a long time hadn't been his intention. For some incomprehensible reason Luffy hadn't tried clinging to his arm, instead bouncing restlessly all over the deck, annoying all of them one after another, without concentrating on anything at all.

Spending some time alone together in the crow's nest might be a good idea indeed; thus Law bit back a totally terrible joke concerning which part of Luffy specially needed observing, settling for climbing up the rig after him.

Law hadn't been thinking of his healing arm for a couple of days, but the strain of the climbing made him remember it again. Raising that hand over his head, and using it to pull his weight up caused a strange sensation in the injured part; like some nerves had been wrung too tight, kind of like a cramp but not in muscles.

Getting into the crow's nest was quite a relief. Law raised his shoulders a few times, massaging his arm, and like that the pain luckily started subsiding, turning into light prickling.

"Is it still hurting?" Luffy asked.

"So it seems. A bit." Trying to deny would have felt stupid, as Law was busted already.

Luffy touched the arm, unusually serious. "It was so terrible. Seeing you on that floor like that."

"I apologize for making you worried, but I can assure you that my side of the incidence wasn't particularly pleasant, either." Hearing his biting tone made Law want to bite his tongue – Luffy hadn't done anything to deserve it, this time – but he didn't need to be reminded of that moment of bitter defeat; it was far from the most glorious moments of his life. Thinking of Doflamingo didn't feel like a very intelligent thing to do, anyways, not so soon after his most recent episode.

"But it was totally awesome how you attacked him with that arm," Luffy said, flashing a grin that disappeared right away. "Although I guess it hurt like hell."

Law shrugged. He did not want to discuss this topic. "I don't know about that. I was so furious and desperate, having my arm severed felt like a relatively small matter."

"There are moments like that sometimes." Luffy nodded.

"Yeah."
"But it was really stupid of him; hurting you."

"What do you mean?" The words slipped out of Law’s mouth before he had time to prevent it – the statement was so utterly absurd, he just had to hear the reasoning behind it. He thought it was anything but stupid, it was more like an inevitable and fundamental fact, law of nature. There was such a deep grudge between him and Doflamingo, starting with everything concerning Corazon and the Ope Ope Fruit; there was no way things could be in any other way.

He wanted to hurt Doflamingo, too. So badly that he was disgusted with himself to the point of almost throwing up.

What he wouldn't have given to get his hands to knocked out Doflamingo before the marines arrived. The things he would have done to him.

The first thing of all would have been cutting Doflamingo's heart out. After that there would have been no need to get his hands dirty by touching anything else; the heart would have been enough. It would have been such a first-rate stress ball for Law to squeeze, throw into a wall and punch every time he happened to be irritated or anxious. How satisfactory it would have been, knowing that every squeeze made Doflamingo suffer agonising pain, no matter where he happened to be. Living in a constant uncertainty and fear, because Doflamingo could never know when the next wave of agony would hit him, and whether it would be the last one.

Law was pretty sure he wouldn't have grown bored with that pastime anytime soon. But perhaps, after some years had passed, he would have gotten enough; simply crushing the organ under the heel of his boot.

That would have been the ending he desired. Not this knowledge that the bastard was going to sit in a cell in Impel Down without any worries.

And thinking of this made him so sick with himself. Some people might try saying that he wasn't as bad as his reputation was indicating to, but he himself was aware that he was an absolutely, fucking sick, twisted and sadistic psycho.

He blinked, confused, as Luffy suddenly cupped his cheeks, tilting his face downwards so as to look him straight in the eye.

"It was stupid, 'cause it really made me mad," Luffy said, looking like he was ready to kick someone's ass again. "After that I just couldn't lose, wanted so badly to beat the shit out of him."

Something was making Law's throat and chest feel tight, like some suppressed emotion was trying to free itself, clawing its way out. Or perhaps the hinges of that figurative box, into which he had locked his heart to keep it safe, were creaking as it was trying to force itself open.

He put his hand on Luffy's nape, letting it rest on his warm skin. "That you did, handsomely." Going after even more thorough revenge felt ungrateful, as he had already gotten this much – and lived, that was a totally unexpected bonus he had never even dared to dream of. He would have preferred Doflamingo as dead, but even like this... The underground imperium Joker had been steering would fall apart soon as its leader was rotting away in the prison; there was going to be total chaos, everyone just running around in circles, lost, and fighting against each other for the remains.

That's what I wanted, wasn't it? Why am I not able of being more satisfied than this?

It might be just his mind being too badly messed up for now, and wounds too fresh. In that case it would get better as the time passed. His head had been in a better order before Dressrosa, before the
scars had been ripped open; it would be possible again, then. But this definitely wasn't the right moment for thinking that.

"Why the fuck we're talking about this?" Law asked. "I've never noticed that wallowing in past and going through things that have already taken place would be like you."

Luffy's mouth dropped open, then his brows furrowed thoughtfully. "Oh, yeah. It was because of that arm." He brushed it lightly with his fingertips. "I just thought it healed already? 'Cause it hasn't seemed like it bothers you. So, isn't it bad that it's worse again?"

"I don't believe so." Forming sensible sentences was difficult to Law, again finding out how much attention Luffy paid to him was mindboggling. "This was the first time I put a strain on that arm after that incidence. It's not weird at all that straining it makes it hurt, even though it feels like it's healed otherwise."

"Oh, all right then."

"I just need to do some rehabilitation." At least some sort of stretching might be in order, if the tightly wrung sensation in his nerves was anything to go by. And exercising his fine motor skills in some way, that would help all of those nerves remember their place and purpose.

"If you wanna train, you can use Zoro's weights." Luffy gestured towards a set of gigantic weights, neatly sitting by the wall. The crow's nest serving also as a gym seemed to be the main reason for Zoro spending a lot of time in here every day, being on look-out while he was at it.

"Uh, thanks for offering." Law stared at the weights; he never wanted to even try lifting them without using his Power. "I think I'll pass, though."

"Don't be shy, he doesn't mind! I play with them sometimes, too."

Law could imagine that playing was precisely what Luffy did with them, not doing some serious training. There was a person who thought that a few tons of iron was a pretty fun toy, which could be waved around for the fun of it if he happened to be bored; Law found trying to understand this fact somewhat disturbing.

"I don't think it's weight training that I need but something a bit different, but I appreciate your offer," Law said. Climbing up and down the rig would probably be more useful, he had noticed it a moment ago. That was a versatile move straining the whole body. Besides, he didn't much feel like admitting that he wouldn't have the strength to lift those piles of iron using only brawn. He didn't consider himself as a weak man by any means, but there were some whose strength was downright monstrous.

"You should mind your own hand," he continued, as Luffy had been watching him silently for a too long time, and he couldn't even imagine what he was thinking. "You clearly didn't bother with trying to be careful with it, while climbing up here." He had so been right about stitching the more shallow one of the wounds, too. Otherwise it would have been torn open already.

"It's totally fine." Luffy glanced at his palm, then trying to quickly hide it behind his back, but Law had enough time to see some dark red blossoming through the white bandage. "It's fine!"

"Yeah, I can see that." Law gave a heavy sigh, sitting down onto the bench by the wall and placing his sword leaning against it beside him. There were windows all around the room, and through them he saw endless blue, divided into the darker and the lighter half by the horizon.

Luffy sat beside him, swinging his legs over Law's and making himself comfortable by nestling
almost on Law's lap, head on his shoulder. One of Luffy's legs was pressing the bruise in Law's thigh in a nasty way, but it was tolerable if Luffy somehow stayed in his place. That might be too much to hope for.

The two of them alone, again, and Law still didn't know what to do. At least being close like this started to get easier, he truly was realizing that this was fine. That Luffy was something that was supposed to be there, something he could touch. Even though there still were many places he hadn't dared to touch yet.

Just being silent and still wasn't a good alternative, though, not right now and in here. It forced him to be aware of how much they were swaying. The movement was much greater here on the top of the mast than it was down on the deck, and he didn't like it the least bit. It felt even worse than he had been expecting. He needed something else to think unless he wanted one on his most humiliating secrets revealing itself.

"What are you thinking?" he asked. It felt like a decent opening for something resembling a conversation, and it might give him some knowlegde of his strange boyfriend.

"Not thinking." Luffy sounded almost insulted by such an assumption. "This's just feeling good." He wrapped one of his arms around Law's back, rubbing his cheek more comfortably against Law's shoulder. "Your shirt's really soft."

"It's probably because it's old and worn. I'm running out of clothes – I've already dirtyed two shirts today." First some coffee, then water and blood. And Law's selection of clothes he had with him wasn't great. Now it felt like all of them needed to be laundered at the same time.

"I like it. It smells like you."

Law made an ambiguous noise, for he really didn't know what to say.

Luffy snuggled a bit closer still, until his nose was touching the side of Law's neck. Then Luffy inhaled so deeply it was like he was trying to absorb Law through his nostrils.

And I really didn't need THAT mental imagery.

"I guess you're thinking something, again," Luffy said, returning to the topic. "Some fancy plan to use against Kaidou or something like that?"

"Actually not. I wish I'd have some good idea about that, I'd be –"

Law went silent in the middle of his sentence, as Luffy suddenly pressed a tentative, wet kiss on the side of his neck. That caused a pleasant warm rush, and somehow Luffy managed to notice it, starting to move his lips on his neck with two-fold enthusiasm.

He immediately remembered the promising making out session they had had earlier, which had been interrupted so unpleasantly. They had talked a bit, and Law had succeeded in saving his ass from some clumsy attempts at applying The ABC of Gay Sex, which was a relief. He just knew Luffy might have stopped while they were at it, starting to count with his fingers, trying to remember how many of them should be used while prepping according to the instructions. For instance. Or trying to remember which part should be caressed next, like some specific order was necessary just because it had happened to read in that pamphlet as an example. Or something even worse. Just trying it out was the most natural way to learn for some people, and their ability to apply things they had read of was, in turn, round zero.

Luffy's instinctual power of observation was so good that Law had no problems in trusting that.
Anything that worked or didn't work wouldn't go unnoticed, that much was sure – and this theory was currently proving to be correct, as Luffy was kissing a particularly sensitive spot a bit more boldly, it might leave a faint mark. That was working, definitely.

Law wrapped his arms better around Luffy, pulling slightly, encouraging Luffy to shift onto his lap instead of being glued to his side. Luffy did that, happening to shove his heel straight into the most sore spot on Law's thigh in the process. Law hissed through his teeth.

"Oh, sorry." Luffy shifted carefully so that he wasn't putting any pressure on the bruise. "Saw that as we were taking that shower. Where did it come from?"

Law sighed heavily, closing his eyes for a moment. Hearing that kind of question, voiced so naively and telling that Luffy had failed to see the connection for a change; it was just... pretty indescribable. "You happened to drag me into your bed, hitting it against the edge in the process."

Luffy's expression was like guilty puppy's, making Law regret his impatient tone immediately, so he continued. "I'll live. Just makes me think."

"Is there some thing in the world that doesn't make you think?" Luffy asked.

"Probably not. Or if there is, at least I've never come across such a thing."

"What is it this time?"

Law took Luffy's stitched hand, following the edge of one of the bandages with his finger. There were some red dots blossoming in the bandage. "Noticing that we seem to have a terrible tendency to hurt each other isn't exactly encouraging."

"You fixed this."

"Yeah. And you know just as well as I do that it still was completely my fault."

"Wasn't!"

"It was. I've also selfishly dragged you into my own messes. If I hadn't proposed the alliance –"

"– I'd have attached myself to your arm and kept clinging to it just because," Luffy finished. "Meeting you again made me so happy. Had been thinking of you for the last two years, even though I didn't get why. So I wouldn't have let you leave just like that anyways."

"I'm still feeling guilty." Keeping up that argument was easier than commenting Luffy's words and trying to understand that for the last two years... Sure, Law had also been thinking of Luffy at times, wondering whether his injuries had healed; reading newspapers, searching for news concerning Luffy and growing worried as he found none – but he wasn't going to admit such a thing. Besides, he hadn't been thinking in the same way as Luffy, it had been purely because of curiosity and professional pride –

Who am I trying to kid!?

"Things happen," Luffy said. "We're pirates."

"That's true." Law sighed, pondering whether to reveal a fact or not. The ship started climbing up to one crest, making the mast start leaning to another direction again, the movement was really unpleasant. "But I never wanted to be a pirate."
Luffy was staring at him silently, eyes even wider than usually. "For real?"

"Yeah. As long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to heal people like my father did. I followed him and read medical books as soon as I learned to read. That's all I wanted."

"You are a doctor. An awesome one."

"I like to entertain a thought that I am... But in reality I've never graduated." The Academy of Flevance had burnt, just like everything else – after that he was mostly self-educated. He was quite proud and aware of his skills, but it still felt like something was missing.

"You really need to have a piece of paper about everything, to prove yourself it's true?"

"That'd be preferable." As stupid and formal as that felt, that was the way his mind worked. Luffy reminding him of what was essential in some things was probably good for him.

There was a long silence, making proceeding into any direction difficult. For now the discussion had effectively killed the desire to be absorbed in kissing or such, but a new topic was avoiding Law. Thus, he was just sitting still, Luffy as a comfortable weight on his thighs, and was caressing Luffy's hand while the other of his arms went round the small of Luffy's back.

"How did you become a pirate, then?" Luffy asked. "If you didn't want it?"

"It's a long story." Not so very long, actually, but Law wasn't sure at all whether he wanted to share it.

Luffy hmm'd, flashing a disarming smile. "Okay. Tell me sometimes if you feel like it."

Law had a sneaking suspicion that the topic would be left alone if he didn't happen to bring it up himself. That Luffy wouldn't keep asking about it, just leaving it be. It seemed like Luffy didn't much care about things that other people had done in the past, anyways; what kind of people they were right now was the only thing that mattered. It probably was a sign of special kind of interest that he had even asked Law about it.

Law was surprised as he found out he wanted to tell, at least something. Perhaps it was because he didn't feel any pressure to talk.

"I was born in Flevance," he began. Luffy looked at him attentively, and there was nothing in his expression hinting that he had recognized the name. Anyone interested in politics and the way the world worked would have recognized it immediately, but Luffy seemed to have hardly any interest for that kind of knowledge. It didn't come as a surprise. "It was a beautiful and prosperous city. I had a family – father, mother, little sister." Remembering started to be painful, he usually avoided thinking of his family. "My father was a doctor, I wanted to become one, too."

Luffy wrapped his arms around him, pulling him into a hug like guessing that the story wouldn't take a joyful turn.

"There was poisonous substance in the ground, thus everyone got ill before long." Law tried condensing the story into as simple and bare facts as possible, giving a lecture of disregard of the government and greediness of people and such would be no use; it would probably just make Luffy fall asleep. "It was lethal, and there was no cure, despite my father trying to come up with one."

Luffy's hand was stroking Law's back up and down, having a calming effect.

"For a child getting to know that you're going to die at the age of thirteen, at the latest, is quite..."
paralysing." Law gave a bitter snort. No one had told him about it quite so harshly, but he had been prying his medical reports on his own. At that time he had already needed to research and prove just about everything. And the understanding of how hopeless and purposeless everything was had grown in him, adding a very bright and charming shade to his personality.

With all due loving irony, of course.

"But you're alive. So your dad found that cure, right?"

The world would surely be a nice place to live if it worked like the gullible, naive idiot currently squeezing Law imagined. Law gave a heavy sigh.

"I wish. The situation started to be uncomfortable for the government, they didn't want to waste resources and such... There was false propaganda everywhere." Law realized his words were undoubtedly going over Luffy's ears. "In few words, they decided to wipe the entire place out, solving the problem that way. It was burnt, citizens and all. It was hell." In his own ears his voice sounded very distant and emotionless, like he was completely disconnected from the incident; like it had happened to someone else. But it didn't feel like that. He was just trying to keep himself together.

He was still having dreams about it, those streets white as snow, dotted with blood and ash. And then there was that stench. And screaming. In these dreams he was running along never-ending burning streets, and behind every corner there was a body with a familiar face.

"I escaped by hiding among a pile of corpses, but I needed to disappear. The government can't stand someone surviving even though they shouldn't. I'd have been eliminated."

"So, a pirate," Luffy said.

"Yeah." If living in the legal society was impossible, there wasn't many other options. "I was ten years old at that time."

"And your family...?"

"I'm the only survivor." It felt like there was no need for him to tell how lonesome it had been. Not that he had even been capable of putting it into words.

Law rested his head on Luffy's shoulder for a while, just being there. He had very recently been thinking what it would be like to be embraced after such a long time; now he knew. It felt very safe, and like the arms wrapped around him were keeping him together. In any case he hoped the atmosphere would get lighter; wallowing in godawful angst again hadn't been his intention.

"All of that must have been really terrible," Luffy said quietly. His words were so clumsy they didn't sound empathic at all, but the emotion was effectively conveyed by the hug that was just perfectly tight, and it didn't seem like Luffy had any intention to let go any time soon.

"But isn't it fun being a pirate? I mean, you don't hate it, right?" Luffy asked after some time.

"I guess not." Law felt his lips twitch slightly and was grateful that Luffy couldn't see it, though perhaps it might be heard in his voice. He felt a little bit better immediately. "I don't enjoy it all the time but it has its upsides."

"Yup! Like being free."

"As long as you don't get caught."
"Of course. Otherwise it wouldn't be an adventure, and interesting. If everything was clear from the beginning."

Law didn't quite know whether he found Luffy's attitude more irritating or charming. But he did know that he found the way Luffy's chest was rising and falling against his own in the rhythm of his breathing pleasant.

"Have you always wanted to be a pirate, then?" he asked.

"Yeah. Since I was a little kid! Since I met Shanks –"

"That Shanks?" Law needed to make sure.

"Yup! I didn't know he's so famous at that time, but he was great! I wanted to become like him. But even greater."

"In other words, you need to become the pirate king."

"I will." Luffy sounded so sure about it, petting Law's nape. "You just wait. And you'll be my spouse."

"That remains to be seen." Law realized his attitude had changed radically as Luffy's claim didn't awaken the need to resist whole-heartedly. Mostly he felt some kind of mild, worn out annoyance because of the insisting – and a flash of something claiming that such a future didn't sound so awful.

He started to be fucked, officially.

"You will." Luffy squeezed tighter for a moment, pressing his nose to the side of Law's neck. "'Cause I love you, Traffy."

Ouch. Law jolted, those words still felt just as good as a cannonball hitting him at close quarters. "Please don't say that."

"But it's true too."

He could feel it, and that fact just made it even worse. "Yes, but..." He didn't actually feel like explaining, it would sound weak and pathetic.

"But what? Traffy?"

"It's... awkward, for I can't reply in the same way." Not yet, at least. "And it awakens some sad memories and bad premonitions."

Luffy was quiet for a long time, Law already had time to think he had taken offense. But as Luffy finally spoke, he only sounded thoughtful. "Who was that person? Did you love them, too?"

"Oh, there was nothing romantic in it." Law realized he might have given the wrong impression. "We were more like family. Yes, I did love him, kind of like a big brother."

"When a person like that dies, it hurts. A lot."

"Yeah." Law could hardly get out any voice, but he knew Luffy understood the feeling perfectly. After the Marineford... Yeah, that had been quite similar.

"Maybe you wanna tell something about him one day?" Luffy managed to ask the question without sounding demanding or intrusive at all, just purely curious. "He had to be a really great guy if you..."
liked him so much."

"Are you saying that I'm difficult and picky, or what?"

"Yup. But that's fine. That's you."

Damn. Law had enormous problems in dealing with this kind of attitude. Blind idiots were one thing, he could have understood it if Luffy had been so crazy with infatuation that he failed to see Law's faults. But Luffy clearly seeing them and just not caring of them, accepting them in a blink of an eye... Law couldn't understand it or deal with it.

It was the same story with his own crew. All of them were aware that he wasn't exactly the sweetest person in the world, and they still liked him and wanted to follow him.

That kind of behaviour tended to make him melt into mush, if he made the mistake of actually thinking of it. Which, in turn, was a thing he avoided.

How was he supposed to refuse Luffy's request after this?

"How about I tell you now?" The wound was now open anyways, and bleeding profusely, so he should be able to get out some additional sentences as well.

"Sure, that's fine."

"After I had lost everything I had..." Law took a deep breath in. The most foolish and incomprehensible decision of his life by far wasn't something he liked to remember. It was difficult to understand what the fuck had been happening in the mind of the ten-year-old Law, but it hadn't been anything good anyway. He wasn't the least bit proud of himself. "I joined Doflamingo's crew."

Doflamingo had been close enough, so that even a child had been able of finding him. And powerful. That had suited Law, who had wanted to tear down this stupid and unfair world, destroying everything. If the citizens of Flevance could be destroyed just like that, why the rest should be allowed to live, either?

No, he was not proud. But what else you actually could expect of a badly shaken child who knew there wasn't any kind of future to come? He would never grow up; never be forced to face the consequences of his actions, taking the responsibility. He was still going to die during the next three years, right?

Ha. The irony had once again slapped him across his face with heavy hand.

He was alive. And he remembered every single shitty deed he had done at that time, in painful detail.

Not that he had exactly been nice after those days, either. Luffy would probably laugh, saying that of course he hadn't, they were pirates after all. And so it goes... But there was a limit to everything, and there were many shades of black. If he felt uncomfortable while looking back, knowing he wouldn't act in the same way anymore – it told starkly that he had truly been horrible at that time.

"So... I was there. Learning of being a pirate, and medicine; and all in all just being a hopeless little shit. I was waiting for being finished by that poison."

"How did you, then – ?" Luffy went silent in the middle of his sentence. "Hey, you said something at Dressrosa. That Mingo's brother saved your life, and got killed. Is that...?"

"Yeah. This is the same story." At that time he had told hardly anything, and there hadn't even been
time for such a thing, but noticing that Luffy remembered the words was heartwarming. Despite the
situation in which they had been voiced.

"To me he always goes by the name Corazon," Law continued. "He apparently got fed up with my
hopeless attitude, practically kidnapping me with him. Dragging me from one hospital to another,
trying to find a cure..." How enraged he had been in the beginning, as he had been drooping on
Corazon's arm like some petulant pet; and how incredibly annoyed he had been by the antics of that
clumsy idiot. He had slammed a hand onto his face a billion times, as the fool had tripped on some
totally nonexistent obstacle, or succeeded in setting himself aflame while smoking. He had never met
anyone with as bad coordination as Corazon, the man had been a catastrophe on legs.

"That travelling took half a year – somehow, in the middle of all of it, we got close. He was...
family."

"And you got better," Luffy said.

"Eventually yes, but it didn't actually happen easily. There is no medicine or cure for that syndrome,
that became very apparent. Nothing natural, at least. But Corazon managed to steal the Ope Ope
Fruit, making me eat it."

– sickening taste and the feeling of being choked as the disgusting mass was sliding into his throat –

"Too bad that Doflamingo had also been interested in the Fruit, and things... turned out really ugly." Law wasn't sure if he would be able to continue anymore.

"No wonder you're so mad at Mingo."

The things said aloud were only a tip of the iceberg, but Law didn't feel like digging more deeply
into that pile of shit. It was clear that his own mind wasn't ready to deal with those scenarios yet;
Doflamingo's plans of making him inherit the Heart seat, using him, as he had now gone and eaten
that particular Devil's Fruit. Any thought going even remotely into that direction was enough to make
him so thoroughly sick he felt it even in his toes, making his stomach sway even worse than the top
of the mast.

He hurried to the unhappy ending of his story in order to block could-have-beens from his mind. The
reality was bad enough.

"In the end, Corazon shut me into one of the treasure chests so as to hide me, and was left to face
Doflamingo and his gang alone. So... he said those words to me, and I still remember how many
times Doflamingo's pistol was fired that day, and then he..."

– died. He claimed that Doflamingo wouldn't kill his own brother, that he would be all right. He
LIED to me, he had to know he was going to die.

And he died.

Died.

That idiot.

It hurt like hell, like someone had filled Law's lungs with lead and left him to choke. It wasn't
difficult to remember why he was avoiding thinking of these things. It only took a couple of words,
and he was immediately backsliding to that moment thirteen years ago, when his life had been
wrecked for the second time.
And the facts that had been branded into his mind at that moment, they were as permanent and painful as marks left by a branding iron.

*It's cramped and dark in the chest, and I'm all alone.*

*Everyone who loves me, dies.*

*Doflamingo is the scariest thing in existence.*

Luffy pulled him into such a tight hug that he felt his ribs complaining. It didn't feel bad, more like something he needed; it was anchoring him, making breathing easier.

He wasn't in the treasure chest. Luffy didn't have any intention of dying, and had sent Doflamingo into the prison.

It still took a long time before his trembling ceased. "Uh, are you trying to fuse us together or something like that?" he asked, trying to sound grumpy.

"That might be nice, but I at least can't do that. But I can wrap around things pretty snugly." Like proving his words, Luffy's arms were stretching until they circled around both of their torsos several times, it was like they had been tied together. Tightly. Besides, one of Luffy's legs got longer, too, wrapping around Law's leg like some kind of a rubbery vine.

Law wished that a thought of very indecent bondage plays hadn't suddenly crossed his mind. Wallowing in that kind of mental imagery would have an effect that surely wouldn't go unnoticed, because Luffy happened to sit on his lap. But at least his mood had clearly improved if he was thinking of such a thing instead of the past.

"Isn't being stretched out like that tiresome?" he asked.

"Not at all! I mean, it's not more tiresome than any moving and using my muscles."

"Yeah, of course. Of course it was me happening to get a freak Power that drains a shocking amount of energy every time it's used. So fitting."

"But it cured you?"

"... Yes. It wasn't a fun experience." Because Luffy seemed to be all ears, Law went on. "At that time I was really sick already, but just eating the Fruit didn't do anything. I needed to cut the poison out of me."

His first operation had taken place while his fever had been high enough to make his brain melt, making everything blur at times. Using a too dull knife, for that had been the only thing available. And without much insight about what exactly he was trying to do. In those circumstances cutting his own flesh open tediously had been quite an experience, even though he had noticed it wasn't painful really. It had been anything but neat, and his nerves had been about to break down several times.

He just couldn't have allowed himself to die, not after everything Corazon had done for him. Besides, he had had a mission to accomplish, the one in which Corazon had failed. He would stop Doflamingo, and to do that he had needed to live.

More because of stubbornness than any kind of skill he had managed to remove some poison from himself, so much that the fever and pains had lessened some. The second attempt had followed a few days later, with a bit more clear mind and a bit more experience, and it had been a success.
Suddenly there had been a whole life to live. And lived he had, carefully concentrated on his vengeful goal.

Could he say that he was free now?

Free from the poisonous inheritance of Flevance, free from his mission, free to do whatever he wanted to do?

He needed to find some other reason to live.

As he was sitting on that bench, watching the surface of the sea rippling a good distance below him, and Luffy literally wrapped around him, it felt like he might succeed in that.
Kind of Even

Chapter Notes

I'm a bit nervous about how this chapter turned out, but well, I'm glad I got it done in any case. The last few weeks haven't been great IRL. A dose of OTP is much needed!

Thank you, all of you who have left comments or kudos. :)

Law had estimated Luffy's insane healing rate correctly. Only one day had passed after the stitching, and the wounds looked so clean that the stitches could be taken out.

Chopper was stretching himself to have a look as the bandages were taken off, and the red welts uncovered. They had healed up and would probably soon disappear altogether, and he nodded, satisfied. Luffy leaned to say something to him so quietly that Law couldn't hear it. Whatever it was about, it made Chopper glance at Luffy and Law slyly – and was that a weird expression on his face before hurrying to leave.

"I leave him to you, Law," Chopper announced by the door before slipping out.

For a moment Law was staring at the closed door, starting to tingle with anticipation as he remembered how the situation had progressed yesterday after the stitching. The current setting seemed quite similar.

He was immediately reproaching himself for having an overly vivid and absolutely too dirty imagination. This was ridiculous. They had been together since yesterday morning, and he was already quite convinced that a human being could possibly die because of sexual frustration, after all. Even though he had constantly told his crew bemoaning the lack of company otherwise.

"It's not going to kill you, you idiots. If you have that much extra time to complain, you can mop the floors of the corridors, for instance."

Fuck, if Shachi and Penguin had been here to see him right now, they would have died of laughter. And he didn't even want to imagine how much dry humour Vince would have seen in his situation.

Now Law had developed a totally believable theory. The certain body part getting constantly engorged with blood could very possibly overstrain the heart, plus cause lack of oxygen in the brain; it would be adequate to talk about a fatal over-arousal-syndrome.

Which was fucking stupid, of course. He was well aware that human body didn't work in such a ridiculous way, not without some latent illness at least; and when it came to himself, he was quite healthy, in good shape even. Physically speaking; he wasn't going to talk of his mental condition. Not willingly, and without heavy sarcasm, at least.

He was just a bit horny. So what? Not a big deal. He was used to going a long time without anyone else touching him, and he never had insurmountable problems in controlling himself.

Convincing himself silently didn't help him to deal with his condition or explain it away, no matter how hard he tried. He started to become frighteningly aware that this wasn't one of his usual cases; purely physical need that settled down after he had ejaculated – how it happened didn't make any
It wasn't only sex that he wanted, he wanted to have it with Luffy. It wasn't purely physical anymore. Apparently that made all the difference in the world.

It was getting bad. The previous day had been filled with sitting beside each other, and even on each other's lap; involving some touching and kissing, too. Enough to awaken millions of images about how nice it would be to go further. In the evening Luffy had decided to come and sleep in the infirmary too, just like that, and Law's thoughts had nosedived into the bottomless dirty gutter that happened to be his imagination. Perhaps something would have happened, too, if Law hadn't been hesitating for too long, fingers twitching; his idiot boyfriend had enough time to fall asleep.

Never before had he hated and envied someone as fiercely for how gifted they were at sleeping. He was left to lie awake, writhing with his erection and perverse thoughts, not wanting to wake Luffy up. That was awkward as hell as he was lying in contact with Luffy in order to fit into the narrow bed. It had also become apparent that Luffy was sleeping in damn weird positions at times, even more so than Law himself. At one point of the night Luffy had been lying on Law sideways, his head hanging off the edge of the bed. Had it been anyone but Luffy, Law would have feared he would break his neck.

Having finally fallen asleep, of course he had had perverted dreams. He wasn't particularly surprised as Brook's wake-up-music woke him up as a not-so-happy owner of a persistent morning wood, either. The breakfast was already ready, though, so there was no way Luffy would be interested in anything else than stuffing his face. Law didn't even bother with making any suggestions; he was just thinking of some drowned, bloated corpses in order to kill his boner.

It was getting fucking intolerable, truth to be told. After the morning Law had decided it was best to avoid contact so as to not tease himself more.

It had been quite an annoying day, because he was also avoiding being alone with Chopper, not wanting to give him a chance to have a discussion about Law's traumas. He had promised to talk with Chopper, but he hadn't said when that would happen; and playing chess with anyone capable sounded so much more relaxing.

He had been losing more than was beneficial for his ego, mostly just because Luffy had developed a new habit, coming to lean against him and watch the game, or perhaps just touching his nape while passing by. The fatal over-arousal-syndrome was the reason for that kind of behavior making him so pathetically hard, so pathetically fast.

The newest symptom of the syndrome was apparently him thinking of sex as soon as he was alone with Luffy in a private place. Stupid. He was a reasonable and rational individual, intelligent even, and it wasn't like him to slip into this kind of hopeful thinking. They were here to take the stitches out. He was a doctor. Luffy was a patient. Period.

And that thought suddenly popped open a new box full of dirty fantasies, in which he was wearing an authoritative white coat of a doctor, pressing the stethoscope onto Luffy's chest more sensually than was necessary. Not to speak of some more thorough examinations. What if he started with feeling that prostate –

Concentrate, Law, and get a damn grip already. Perhaps he doesn't even think of –

Luffy flashed a grin revealing every single tooth, stretching his hand to the door of the room and turning the key in the lock. And then the lock of the other door, too.
"We won't be disturbed now, right?" Luffy asked, his smile growing even wider.

Law could downright feel his nervous system going totally crazy.

He shook his head to clear it a bit, and reminded himself of the stitches. It was best to start with them, anyway, otherwise the coming procedure would constantly gnaw at him until he finally dealt with it.

"This might sting a bit," he said, having cut the threads and seized one of them tightly with tweezers.

"I don't mind."

Law didn't actually care whether Luffy minded it or not. He was going to pull the stitches out in any case, you couldn't just leave them in no matter what the patient said. It was just a deep-rooted habit to give a little warning before pulling.

Luffy was clearly standing for his words, for he didn't even twitch during the whole procedure. Soon there was only eight very little red dots reminding of the stitches, covering them up didn't feel necessary.

"That's it," Law said. "Try not to do anything extreme with that hand for a couple of days. The tissue is not completely healed up yet, but it shouldn't bother you much anymore."

"It didn't bother me at any point." Luffy felt the closed up wounds, they were a bit scabbed. "But perhaps it really healed up faster like this. Thanks, Traffy!"

"That was my intention, yes."

"I don't like stitches usually. They prevent me from stretching, or get torn if I forget them and stretch anyways."

"You shouldn't forget a thing like that!" But right after snapping Law realized this was like lecturing a wall. He gave a heavy sigh, trying to make a point that Luffy would understand. "Do not stretch the parts with healing wounds anyways, whether there are stitches or not. That definitely tears them open and aggravates them, slowing the healing down considerably."

"Okay." Luffy complied way too quickly and easily for Law's taste, meaning that the words had probably went over his ears.

That wasn't essential anymore, though, and the same applied to this whole conversation. Law cleaned up after the procedure, and sat down onto the bed, wishing Luffy would join him. It felt a bit ridiculous and considerably desperate to purposefully settle in a way that it would be easy for him to lie down. Just in the case.

Luffy sat down, facing Law, and glanced at his palm one more time. "Can I do whatever I want with this now?"

"Yes, but try to be –" Law's advice was cut short as the hand in question suddenly shoved his shoulder, making him thud onto his back with an undignified yelp. Before he even had time to prop himself up on his elbows or ask what the fuck, Luffy had already leaned over him and buried his fingers into his hair.

"I wanna touch you," Luffy stated.

There was an almost painful tightening in Law's groin, and a hot rush travelling through him. This
wasn't the way to go about it he had been expecting of Luffy, the least of all the leading question, but the bold straightforwardness following it fit well. All in all, it worked like a charm.

Luffy stopped for a moment, looking Law in the eye, searching for a confirmation, and there was something warm and intense glimmering in the dark eyes. And Law didn't have anything else to say than, "Fuck yes. My thoughts exactly."

He wrapped his own hands around Luffy's neck, pulling him closer; their lips found each other in a kiss that soon got more demanding. Just fumbling and nibbling with their lips wasn't enough, and Luffy apparently agreed because he tried to get more by crushing their mouths together with greater force, which would soon make their lips sore by pressing them against their teeth.

It might be about time to show how the tongue could be used while kissing. Law cupped Luffy's cheeks with his hands, pushing a bit, guiding Luffy to ease up some. The hint was taken immediately and the touch of his lips got softer; soon Law was dragging the tip of his tongue along Luffy's lower lip, making him to pause altogether, just waiting what was going to happen next.

His experimenting tongue was slipping between Luffy's lips, finding Luffy's own. As he had teased it with a couple of small movements, Luffy awakened from his frozen state, answering the gesture; it felt like an electric current going down his spine all the way to his tightening groin. He was silently cursing his new and uncomfortable pants, they were tight as hell, not stretching even a millimeter even though his cock was persistently trying to get more erect.

He clearly wasn't the only one really getting hot and bothered. Luffy was making frustrated little noises while kissing, nudging his hip with something that could only be a very promising hard-on, until suddenly getting an inspiration to interlock their legs.

Law was grateful to press him throbbing shaft against Luffy's hip; the solid contact was quelling his frustration a bit, momentarily at least. At the same time he remembered how he had been about to make similar move yesterday, when they had been interrupted. Luffy apparently remembered it too, or was just going by instinct.

And he was trying to READ how to have sex!? Geez...

One of his hands was fiddling with the hair on Luffy's nape, while another was sliding under the hem of his shirt from the backside. It always was somehow surprising to find out that the texture of Luffy's skin felt like any other skin, despite its absurd flexibility and springiness. And it was very warm, no wonder he was boiling between the mattress and Luffy.

It felt like it continued for a long time – the greedy glide of tongues and lips against each other, slight rubbing against each other, too much clothes, feeling the other wherever you managed to get your hands to, the tension getting worse all the time. But at last they separated, gasping for breath, and watched each other, the tips of their noses touching each other.

Law couldn't come up with anything to say, he was dazed and Luffy's eyes seemed bottomless.

"Wow," Luffy said. "That had to be the greatest and awfulest thing ever."

"Awfulest?" Law needed to hear more before he could decide whether he was amused, insulted or just dumbfounded. Yes, he probably was somewhat rusty when it came to kissing, but it couldn't have been too terrible. At least it didn't feel like that to him. The other way round, actually.

"Yeah. Kinda like... watching a cooking piece of meat that's already smelling great."

Law blinked, trying to get the Luffy-like metaphor. And it did make sense, surprisingly. That
waiting, as you felt like dying because of hunger and couldn't think anything else than the coming moment when you got to sink your teeth into the well-done delicacy. "I get what you mean." And if you asked Law, it was about time to take that roast out of the oven.

I can't believe I really used that metaphor even in my own head.

He pushed Luffy's shirt slightly off his shoulder, revealing the row of fresh scars. It seemed like a bite of a shark. Law brushed the mark made by one teeth with his fingertip, but despite his curiosity he was even more interested in taking their clothes off than the origin of the marks. "Take this off."

"This too." Luffy tugged the collar of his hoodie.

"Indeed, it's hot as hell. Give me some space."

They sat up, quickly getting rid of their shirts. And then their hands were unanimously mapping their bodies, sliding on their shoulders and chests and abs, following scars or tattoos.

Law let out a content sigh as he got wrapped in a tight embrace; the feel of bare skin against his own was a bliss. It felt natural that Luffy settled on his lap, being the shorter one of them; it put them nicely on the same level. He kissed Luffy's shoulder, moving onto the neck, enjoying the throbbing of the pulse against his lips and the noises he was drawing out.

He started to have a sneaking suspicion that Luffy would be damn loud after the situation progressed some more. Nothing else could be expected as he knew what kind of racket Luffy used to make while doing anything; talking with loud volume, talking even if he didn't have anything to say, talking in his sleep, talking with his mouth full of food, shouting while bouncing here and there, screaming in joy for whatever reason...

Apparently it would be best if Law mentally prepared himself for the whole ship probably hearing them. He could hardly do anything to silence Luffy – perhaps he didn't even want to, he admitted it to himself.

For now the noises had mostly been quite silent gasps or moans, accompanied by some words like "There" or "Traffy". It seriously started to seem like he wasn't going to be called by his name even in bed. It didn't bother him as much as he had been imagining. In fact 'Traffy' had started to sound special, because Luffy was the only one calling him that.

Perhaps he should come up with some stupid nickname of his own for Luffy, instead of Straw Hat which was used by the whole world. Just to be even. He would think of it, sometime when he didn't have anything essential to do.

Right now his lips were sliding up Luffy's neck, to his jaw, and from there to his ear lobe.

"Ah! How it that feeling so much? It's an ear. That's weird."

"Is it?" Law nibbled the mentioned body part again, then sucked it. The lobe felt pleasantly soft and malleable as he was caressing it with his tongue. "There are sensitive spots everywhere in the body, so I don't think so."

"Never noticed."

"Hm." It wasn't so surprising, perhaps touching some places while masturbating didn't cross your mind unless you had happened to read anatomy or erotic literature – or both, which was a downright filthy combination. Law suspected that Luffy was going to experience some interesting and probably pleasurable surprises.
"But you like it even more, right?" Luffy suddenly asked.

"What?"

"Someone sucking your ears."

"Why not to try?"

Luffy didn't need to be encouraged more, soon he was dragging his tongue between Law's earrings, experimenting. Law wouldn't admit moaning as Luffy started fumbling them with his lips. There were tremors going down his nape, and he really wanted to take his pants off.

"Yours are more sensitive," Luffy declared.

"Actually it's not possible to compare the sensations of different individuals reliably," Law said, trying to sound intelligent and not like his brain had been totally switched off and replaced with his dick. "But you might be right. Piercings often are."

"They feel funny."

Law couldn't come up with anything to say, and perhaps there was no need for talking, for Luffy concentrated on playing with his ear, seeming so entranced with it that he didn't even remember they had something essential going on. Instead of talking, Law reminded Luffy by grabbing his hips tightly and thrusting their loins together.

The groan escaping Luffy started to be just as loud as Law had been expecting. If someone was in the kitchen, right behind the one and only wall... well, thinking of it was no use. Thinking of anything was no use. There was a hot and tight sensation in his groin, and he could feel every single one of his heartbeats down there; it started to get painful. He felt some precum leaking out...

He couldn't wait anymore. The fatal over-arousal-syndrome was going to kill him.

_Don't be stupid, there is no such a thing._

Taking some deep breaths didn't calm him down much, but at least it allowed him to gather his thoughts a bit. He slid his hand down from Luffy's waist, until his fingers dived under the sash, touching the waist of his pants. These needed to go. Law yanked the end of the sash. "Is it fine to take these off?"

Luffy blinked, freezing to look at him in wonder.

"What is it?" Law wanted to bang his head against something but didn't know why – perhaps because he had made the mistake of talking, or perhaps because of hurrying too much; or maybe he was just hoping that such an act would somehow make him come back to his senses.

"Your voice. Why does it sound like that?"

"Sound like what?"

"Low. And kinda like... hoarse? Is your throat hurting?"

Law snorted, disbelieving. "No. I guess it's the arousal."

"Oh." Luffy smiled again, in a way that told he liked the answer very much. "I like it."
"That's great. But I asked you a question." Law tugged the sash again.

Luffy frowned, thinking for a moment – trying to remember what exactly Law had been asking, perhaps – until a new tug at the sash reminded him and his expression brightened. "Yeah. Sure. Wouldn't this be kinda pretty difficult with pants on?"

"Perhaps a bit." At least Law had so few clothes at hand that he wasn't particularly willing to cum in his pants. But the first thing he was going to do was getting Luffy's pants off, as he had now began to strip him off. Their moment in the shower yesterday was only increasing his desire to see Luffy naked, because now he knew it was definitely going to be a pleasant sight to see, and he really wanted to know what that cock looked like when it was hard.

He opened the sash and pulled it off altogether. Going by Luffy's expression, the cloth was caressing his skin in a pleasant way as it was sliding off, and then their loins pressed together demandingly again.

Before Law had time to properly get his hands to the button of Luffy's shorts, Luffy grabbed him into a one-armed hug, pressing his face into Law's neck.

"What –"

His neck was kissed, wetly and greedily, like Luffy was intending to eat him alive; a mental image that didn't feel very far-fetched. As a target of that attention the only thing he could do was leaning against Luffy's strong arm and letting his head tilt backwards, revealing his whole neck for fumbling lips as another of Luffy's hands was travelling down his chest.

Having reached the waist of Law's jeans the hand stopped for a moment, making Law squirm, frustrated. It was so close, he tried to shift so that the hand would touch him where he wanted. To no avail, because Luffy was practically sitting on him.

The attempt didn't go unnoticed, though, and soon curious fingers were sliding on the front of his jeans, following the ridge of the hard shaft. They tried to wrap around it, but the jeans were too tight and rigid for that. Law was nudging the hand impatiently, but didn't want to beg aloud.

It did the trick. Luffy kissed his neck once more before detaching his mouth from it with a wet smacking sound, placing Law on his back and starting to free him from his pants. At last.

Getting rid of the last of his clothes was such a relief that Law wasn't able to wonder much how he was the first one ending up in this position. Wasn't he supposed to lead, he was the one knowing what to do after all? But with Luffy things never went like he had planned.

If he had had some kind of a plan, it had involved rubbing their cocks together – it was easy, nice and close. Or he could have first used his hands, giving some ideas.

Very fine and realistic plans, that were useless and went down the drain as soon as Luffy got to freely place his hands on Law's skin. Law had already had fantasies about those hands, but for once the reality was better than imagination.

One of Luffy's hands settled on Law's hip like steadying him in his place, another moved on his chest where it started the slow and steady slide, getting a feel of his body. Luffy seemed extremely concentrated, keeping an eye on every single twitching or tensing of Law's muscles, but kept also glancing at his erection with blatant curiosity.

It happened to be the throbbing center of Law's attention too, downright screaming for getting touched. He could only hope that caressing and fingering every part of his body before getting there
wouldn't cross Luffy's mind. That kind of thing might be really pleasant sometime, but not now. However, he didn't want to deny Luffy or make him hurry, because he seemed so preoccupied and curious with him. It was pretty flattering. He dug his fingers into the blanket, trying to be ready for anything. Despite everything, he wasn't as nervous as he had expected.

It also took an unexpectedly short time before Luffy found his way across Law's stomach to his groin, but maybe he shouldn't have been surprised by it. All of his reactions were read and they all showed with screaming highlights where he wanted that hand touching him – and that was where it ended up, too.

There was nothing shy or hesitant in the way Luffy's fingers wrapped loosely around Law's shaft. Luffy dragged his fingertips up and down, from the base to the tip, a couple of times, feeling it. He was twisting his wrist, trying a couple of different angles, and tightened his hold right after getting a good feel. With a straightforwardness that could be expected if one was touching themselves.

Law groaned, his eyes closing involuntarily as Luffy started firm, slow strokes. The pace made him extremely aware of the healing wounds in Luffy's palm, those slight scabs sliding on his almost painfully sensitive length.

He needed it faster, this kind of ribbed friction was driving him crazy; he tried to make a hint by thrusting into the hand a little quicker, but Luffy leaned on the hand resting on his hip, and suddenly he wasn't able to lift his hips from the mattress much.

Luffy might have meant the gesture to be soothing; do-not-rush-and-I'll-take-care-of-you kind of thing. It didn't feel soothing in the least. It made every muscle in Law's nether regions tighten with sheer raw lust, forcing him to let out an even more desperate groan. Being pressed into the mattress and almost being forced to just enjoy the treatment was even pushing his thoughts aside for a moment, and then there was only hands.

The hand was pumping up and down, changing the hold and speed at times, but except some random easings it was getting harder all the time. As it should. The fingers pacifyingly stroking his hip were an interesting contrast to it. And in addition to hands he felt Luffy's gaze like some kind of a warm energy, moving here and there on his skin.

He wanted to hold onto something, too, but the only part of Luffy he could reach was the knee as he was sitting on Law's legs like he owned them. Law's fingertips were digging into the elastic skin as he felt his orgasm approaching, until Luffy moved his hand even more forcefully and he was coming all over Luffy's hand and his own abs.

For a while the only things he was aware of were his own gasping and the muscles resembling pudding, feeling like they might float away at any second.

Law forced himself to open his eyes, as Luffy let go of his softening cock. And he was happy that he had chosen to look, because Luffy glanced curiously at the jizz coating his hand, and without further ado pushed his fingers into his mouth, sucking them clean. Looking like he liked the taste.

The sight was enough to cause a lazy twitch in Law's groin. That, in turn, effectively made him
remember that Luffy was probably feeling very uncomfortable; and Law was more than willing to assist him in solving that problem.

He sat up, they looked at each other for a moment, Luffy licking his lips – and suddenly Law had pressed their lips together into a kiss that was tasting like himself, and was clearly giving away Luffy's franticness as he was trying to eat Law alive and fuck his mouth with his tongue. Law was feeling dizzy as they separated again.

"You're so quiet it feels weird," he pointed out, tracing Luffy's neck gently with his fingers. The caress made Luffy tilt his head. "You all right?" It felt so uncharacteristic that it forced him to wonder, even though Luffy definitely seemed to be all right; pressing himself eagerly against Law everywhere they happened to touch, pupils dilated and cheeks glowing with heat.

"More than! Just concentrating." Luffy also sounded like his usual carefree self, with a pleasantly out of breath undertone. "And you're kinda quiet, you know? Like, a moment ago, too. Needed to be quiet 'cause I wanted to hear you."

"Hn." Law didn't know what to say about that, getting to know how much attention Luffy really had paid to him was a bit embarrassing. Like he had been inspected with a microscope. His hand was sliding lower from Luffy's collarbone, all the way to the front of his shorts, and the touch made something twitch eagerly against his hand. He started – at last – opening the shorts, and soon Luffy shifted so that he could yank them off.

Law let his gaze roam all over the bare body, from head to toe. Luffy had settled on his side, leaning on his elbow, and somehow the posture succeeded in seeming totally relaxed and open, like the hard-on straining towards his stomach didn't bother him a bit.

Huh. Law swallowed, sure that this damn relationship was going to be the death of him, in some way or another. He wanted to roll Luffy completely on his back and crawl between his legs – a sudden impulse, maybe because Luffy's knees were quite spread already – but that would have been jumping the gun. They didn't even have any lube. That was one more reason to wish for getting to some island to do some shopping, for there was no way he was going to steal some oil from the kitchen and be forced to explain the lack to the sharp-eyed cook.

He leaned forward to kiss Luffy, pressing his shoulder at the same time, making him to settle on his back. Apparently he forgot himself in the kiss for a too long while, because it felt like Luffy was trying to rip his scalp off while burying his fingers into his hair, starting to really sound desperate.

"– can't – wait anymore –" Luffy panted, having gotten his mouth free.

"Ah, sorry. Didn't mean to be a tease." Not this time, at least. Law slid his hand over the scar to Luffy's flat stomach and to his groin. "You're nice to look at, so I got distracted."

"Yeah, you too. I wanted to put – ah!"

Law wrapped his fingers around the stiff cock, never getting to hear what Luffy had wanted to put, because it seemed like the end of the sentence had totally flown out of his head. He fingered the hard-on all over, getting familiar with its size and shape, and deciding it was lovely in every way. It was of a nice, proportionate size; not grossly huge but definitely satisfactory. It was straight, felt really hard and was throbbing enthusiastically in his hand.

And it was a part of Luffy, meaning... "Does this stretch?" Law asked before managing to bite the words back. He wanted to bite his tongue in two immediately, silently cursing his sick thirst for knowledge.
"Yup, of course." It didn't sound like Luffy was insulted by Law's curiosity.

All right, it might have been a stupid question.

"It's not useful at all, though," Luffy added.

Maybe not useful, but the thought was so absurd that Law’s fingers were itching to try it once just out of the curiosity. His damned obsession with human bodies and anatomy. He did his best to push it aside, concentrating on pumping his hand up and down, but Luffy was watching him, frowning, even though his hips were swaying in the rhythm.

"You can pull it if you want to," Luffy said.

"What?" That had to be the strangest suggestion Law had ever heard while having sex.

"You wanna do it, right? I can see it in your face. So, go ahead. It doesn't feel bad."

Law simply couldn't turn down that offer. He took an even firmer grip under the glans, starting to carefully stretch the member, looking with wide eyes as the shaft got longer and longer like it was some sturdy rubber band. Luffy didn't say anything and didn't seem to mind, but apparently the sensation wasn't very sexual. What it might feel like, Law couldn't even imagine. As he imagined someone pulling his dick, all he wanted to do was curling into a ball and shielding his groin with his hands, possibly whimpering.

He quickly returned to his original task after satisfying his curiosity about how the elasticity worked. It really didn't seem useful at all, on the contrary it might actually be annoying while jerking off, especially if you were in the mood to do it roughly. It might work better lubricated –

Taken by a sudden bout of inspiration, he touched his stomach which still was splattered with semen. He started to smear it on Luffy's cock, making it slick all over.

His fingers were easily sliding on the hot shaft that felt even harder after the treatment, finding all of the most sensitive spots.

"I've – never – ah – thought ah-of – that," Luffy said. His eyes were closed, muscles tensing and quiveringing as he tried to thrust into Law's hand.

Watching and listening were about to make Law hard again, but he did his best to ignore the hot rush, closing his hand into a fist to be fucked. Seeing how Luffy got lost in the sensation, back arching and abs tensing, was a beautiful thing. He kept his hand in place, letting Luffy do the moving, following what kind of pace he liked and enjoying the strong slide through his fist. The movement had the wheels of the bed creaking quite ominously.

Soon he had to kiss the stretched out neck, so he did, tasting the hot skin and inhaling its scent deeply. It was wild and a bit salty, reminding him of a sea breeze. Luffy wrapped his arms around Law’s shoulders, clinging to him like he was drowning, his groans getting louder all the time.

Law tightened his hold still, adding a sweep of his thumb aimed at a particularly sensitive spot after every thrust. Almost immediately Luffy tensed into an orgasm – and damn, that groan definitely could be heard on the deck, too, Luffy didn't even try to silence it as he was shuddering, his too short nails digging into Law's back.

Law loosened his hold as Luffy's hips slowly settled, kissing his neck once more before raising his head, wanting to see how his boyfriend looked like right after coming.
He still hadn't gotten used to the word, but perhaps it would happen if he repeated it in his mind often enough. He was starting to get used to the idea, that might be more important.

Luffy opened his eyes, there was a soft look in them. The smile was just as wide as it always was, but more lazy than usually. And oops, it seemed like Law had made a distinct mark, having gotten excited and sucked the side of Luffy's neck in the end, because the response to that had been so positive. The good thing was that the mark actually looked pretty good on Luffy's skin, and he probably wouldn't mind much.

"That felt so much better than doing it myself," Luffy said.

"I think so too." Law couldn't help smiling.

Realizing that he really meant his words was a strange thing. Previously Law had came to the conclusion that the best kind of sex happened when he got absorbed into some filthy fantasy in the company of his own hands.

Whenever he got a grip of himself and got some company, it usually was unsatisfactory in one way or another, or at least it was so draining mentally that afterwards he was left wondering why he bothered at all. Perhaps it was his desperate attempt to feel a bit more normal, and like he actually was a human being. He also suspected that he would soon develop an insurmountable mental block if he went too long without it – maintaining a routine was much easier than starting again after a long time. Thus he took care to get laid once in a few months, whether it made sense or not.

But this... there was no doubt that this had been the most pleasant and emotionally easiest sex he had ever had with another person. No forcing himself in any way, no pressure, just feeling good together.

It made him wonder whether he actually understood sex as well as he had been thinking. It started to feel plausible that sex actually was something else than a clear cut act aiming at orgasm and progressing from start to finish, after all.

Besides, it had been damn hot. He would love to explore the subject more closely.

"Traffy," Luffy said, poking at Law's brow with his finger. Law knew he was on his way of developing a permanent wrinkle there, with too much thinking and his usual expression. "You're thinking too much again, right?"

"Chronically."

"Come here." Luffy tugged him persistently closer, trying to press the whole length of their bodies together.

That sounded like a very welcome idea, so Law quickly grabbed a towel next to the sink, using it to clean them quickly. After that it was much more pleasant to get wrapped in an embrace. As he was lying there, it crossed his mind that cuddling was also starting to feel like a meaningful pastime.

Fuck, he was so screwed.

~*~

Luffy was lying mostly on Law, his nose touching the side of Law's neck and their legs intertwined. He really liked the way their chests were rising and falling against each other, and the way Law smelled after sex, and the way Law's arm was going around the small of his back. It felt like his whole body was buzzing with bone-deep lassitude that didn't make his sleepy, like after a fight he had won.
This almost was a victorious fight, getting this close to Law. It felt really good, it made him want to say again that he loved Law, because for some reason it felt like he was almost exploding with the feeling right now. But Law probably didn't want to hear it.

"Don't say that."

He did understand how hearing that might bring back sad memories, but wasn't it about time to get over them? It had been so many years already. And Luffy wasn't going to die, like that Corazon guy, so Law could stop worrying already and stop getting bad premonitions.

When it came to Law supposedly feeling awkward because he couldn't reply similarly...

Well, it just seemed like Law was kind of slow at realizing some facts. And even slower at admitting that he had realized.

Luffy probably needed to settle for waiting that Law would be ready to say it. Waiting wasn't one of his favourite things, but sometimes adventures involved phases like that, too. He could take it. There was all kinds of interesting stuff going on, after all.

It was weird to think that he had had sex with Law. With some other person. Jerking off felt pretty nice, sure, so he did it sometimes, but he had never before met anyone with whom he wanted to do it together.

Until Law.

And then Luffy's head was suddenly full of thoughts of everything he wanted to do with Law, and having sex was one of those things. Actually he couldn't come up with anything he didn't want to do with Law, no matter if it was sleeping or eating or just being around him or fighting or adventuring or just about anything.

And that sex had been awesome. He wanted to see more of Law's expressions as he was touching him, more thoroughly than this time, he had already gotten some good ideas about how he had been handled. So, more of that, too.

They needed to get married, because it felt like the right thing to do.

Luffy rubbed his nose against Law's neck, and then kissed it. He really liked the way Law's skin tasted, too – he wanted to kiss it in every possible place, and lick it, and actually eat him all through.

He restrained himself, slithering lower so that he could rest his head on Law's chest. The heart was beating under his ear, steady and powerful, and he was glad that he knew it was Law's own. Not Caesar's, yuck.

I've touched it.

It felt really personal, and it had probably been intrusive, especially because he hadn't had any kind of permission, but the heart had just been there, and he guessed he had gotten protective and it had kind of happened. But, on the other hand, now Law had stretched his cock, which in turn had to do with his Devil's Fruit Power; so perhaps they were kind of even? It had been personal and intrusive, too.

It still didn't feel like it was quite right. He wanted... something else, he didn't quite get what it was.

The heart kept beating under his head.
"Hey, you can remove your heart and replace it with someone else's, right?"

"What kind of question that's supposed to be?" Law asked, sounding lazy, not irritated. "You've seen me do it, so doesn't it go without saying?"

"Yeah. I mean, can you put your own into someone else's chest, too?"

"Why the fuck would I want to do that?"

Law could by all means sound like the idea was the most horrible ever, not even deserving any closer consideration. The heart in his chest still started a remarkably more enthusiastic beat.
Chopper was hanging on the railing of the ship, feeling lethargic and useless like a shirt that had been hung to dry, watching the waves they were ploughing getting higher and darker all the time. The storm predicted by Nami would soon be over them, and there was a thick dark gray mass of clouds looming ahead, some shreds of clouds were already stretching towards them. It felt like it suited Chopper's mood.

It had been three days since the dissociation episode, and he still hadn't been able to catch Law so that he could have had a real discussion with him. It was aggravating, frustrating, worrisome – Law had frankly admitted that he wasn't all right, accepting Chopper's claim that they needed to talk; why he couldn't ever be alone and still long enough for Chopper to actually say something to him?

Most crewmembers weren't aware of the incident, even though news and gossips usually were spreading here faster than any stomach bug. The ones who had been there had kept their mouths shut, and Law definitely wanted that to continue, meaning that Chopper couldn't even refer to it if someone else was present.

Law had mysteriously started to enjoy the company of multiple persons, especially if Chopper was anywhere to be seen. Several hours were spent by playing chess every day, and Law wasn't in any hurry to finish his meals and retreat into the peace of the library, where Chopper could have cornered him.

Having spotted Chopper, Law might surprisingly start asking Franky about the structure of the ship, confirming their course with Nami, or asking for Brook to play some of his favourite songs, all of which sounded terribly sad. Inadvertently Law also had almost frightened Usopp to death by asking what was it he was tinkering with; Chopper had needed to make some sedative tea for poor Usopp. The conversation they had had while Usopp was drinking the tea had almost turned into some kind of trauma therapy, giving Chopper more reasons for worrying – it seemed like Dressrosa had been really rough for Usopp, too, more so than anyone had even realized, and now he was worried that he was going crazy.

Chopper wished that Law was even half as enthusiastic to unbosom as Usopp, but no. Even when Law shut himself alone in the infirmary to give his nerves a break Chopper couldn't talk to him, because he simply didn't open the door. Every time that happened, Chopper was left standing in front of the door for several minutes, fiddling with his key and pondering whether to march in after all, without invitation and against Law's wish. So far he had estimated that pressing the issue would have more negative consequences.

And if Law wasn't hiding in the infirmary or among the crew, he was with Luffy. You really didn't want to get between them.

Their relationship was the most popular topic aboard the ship, it felt like it was discussed every time at least two persons happened to be in the same place. Chopper didn't get why several related issues
mattered at all, but he was avoiding commenting after he had been called too naive once again.

Naive? He had a very professional view of the matter!

The fact that despite all of his expertise as a doctor he hadn't managed to drag Law aside for a little conversation was damaging his pride. Plus, he was worried! Avoidance going this far wasn't a good sign.

The waves started to be so high that he needed to cling to the railing with all of his might so as to not slide off and tip over the railing. Behind his back the sails were already taken in by the others; he supposed he should have been helping, but so far nobody had asked him to do anything, and he didn't feel like moving.

"Doctor Chopper," called a soft voice next to him out of the blue.

Chopper turned to look, too fast to control his movement. Seeing Law, he startled so that he almost felt his antlers jump off his head because of sheer bewilderment; and slipped off the railing towards the churning waves, limbs flailing wildly.

He was screaming like someone was trying to eat him, sure that he was going to drown. With these waves it would be hard even for the best swimmer to dive after him, and he himself swam as gracefully as an anchor.

Before the surface of the water was too close, a bluish Room was spreading from the deck, enclosing also him, and after a second Law had pulled him back. He was hanging in the air, held be the back of his coat Law had grabbed. He opened and closed his mouth stupidly as he was lowered back to the deck. His legs felt like jelly.

"Try not to fall in," Law said.

Chopper still couldn't say a word. He was shocked because of his fall, and couldn't come up with any reason for Law to suddenly search for his company after such a long avoidance. Continuing to avoid him during the storm would surely have been very easy, as everything was in such a turmoil in any case. So, he was just staring up – looking from his point of view all human beings except little children were tall, but Law was even more so than most of them; and the impression was heightened due to Law having so slim build and long limbs.

Law was eyeing Chopper for a moment from his heights before squatting in order to be on the same level. "Hey," Law said quietly. "Do you happen to have any cyclizine or meclizine at hand?"

This explained why Law had came to Chopper despite his unwillingness to do so. Law needed some medicine. But why on earth would he need those...? Chopper had some, sure, just in case they happened to encounter people who weren't used to sailing, but he had never expected anyone aboard this ship to need them, that simply couldn't be.

The storm clouds had stretched right over them already, and suddenly it was much darker, like it was a late evening. However, as Chopper happened to take a good look, he could still see Law being pale and not at his best in any way. The dark shadows under his eyes were standing out from his colorless face even more dramatically than usually.

Chopper put his hoof on Law's forehead to feel it. It was clammy.

Diagnosing took him a lot more time than usually, because in addition to being totally obvious, it also was totally unexpected. "Are you getting SEASICK?"
Right away he slammed a hoof on his mouth, because he realized he had shouted the last word in a loud voice because of being so surprised. Law looked at him flatly, visibly displeased; and several heads were turning to look at them, seemingly wanting to ask if they had heard quite right. Usopp dropped a hammer on his toes as he froze to stare at them.

He's going to cut me in pieces and tell Sanji to make some sautéed reindeer!

Chopper tried to make himself calm down while he was inching further from Law. Law really wasn't so scary, not that scary at least, or at least he didn't think he was, but right now...

Law raised his hand on his face, inhaling slowly and deeply. After a painfully long wait the hand dropped down again, and Law spoke quietly, but the tone wasn't soothing in the least. "Thank you very much for shouting one of my most embarrassing secrets aloud, doctor Chopper. Yes, I do get seasick. Do you have pills for it or not?"

Now Chopper was feeling so guilty and miserable; just being cut in pieces would have been preferable, after all. He considered himself a good doctor, and quite empathic person who respected his patients – why did it always happen that he managed to say too much, when it came to Law? This wasn't the first or even the second time. It wouldn't be a wonder if Law hated him now.

"Y-yes, of course," he stuttered. "By the way, it's not... I don't think it's embarrassing at all, it's pretty common, almost a third of human beings are prone to it, so --" Even he himself didn't know what he was trying to say anymore, he realized he was only blabbering because of being so nervous.

"Then, would you be kind enough to give me some?" Law sounded impatient and irritated, but at least being close to him didn't feel like being crushed by a giant iceberg anymore. That was a relief.

Chopper dashed over the deck, towards the infirmary, hearing Law's long, quiet steps following him. No comments were made by the others, which probably was beneficial to their health.

In the infirmary Chopper quickly looked at the bed, as Law slumped to sit on its edge, leaning his head to his hands. The bed seemed to be... messed. He wished that his hearing wasn't as good as it was, but if the way the others were talking was any indication, not even humans had avoided hearing that Luffy was having fun. Luffy really loved to make noise.

As Chopper happened to be here now, and rummaging his store, he could snatch earplugs for himself as well. He put one pair into his pocket, then started to search for medicine for motion sickness. The door of the cupboard was hitting his shoulder with every rocking movement the ship did, and the bottles were sliding from one side of the shelf to another, making searching difficult.

"Which one do you want?" he asked. "I have both."

"What?" Law startled, like he had been in deep thoughts. "Oh... cyclizine it is then, I guess. It feels like it agrees with me a bit better."

"I have some herbs, too, they're pretty effective. I could make a mix of them?"

"If you believe it'd more effective."

Chopper really believed so. If he had some special field as a doctor, that was his passion, it was pharmacy. He had a good feel for it, downright ingenious, and never before had he had a chance to excel in it in front of Law.

Perhaps he could conciliate Law after letting his secret slip by mixing a particularly good drink. He took his mortar and throw some dried leaves onto the bottom of it; their scent, resembling dill, made
his nose twist. Then followed one and a half pills of cyclizine, that seemed like an optimal dose after he had estimated how much Law supposedly weighted.

Chopper locked the wheels of his chair securely before climbing to stand on it, starting to grind the ingredients into as fine powder as possible, while wondering how he would dare to bring up the topic that had been bothering him. Probably there was no way to do it in this situation, as Law already was nauseous, short-tempered, and irritated with Chopper to begin with.

"I haven't been seasick even once during the last five years," Law said. "I can't say I've been missing feeling like this."

"I'm sure of it." Chopper's experiences about nausea were limited to stomach bug and a couple of unlucky – and very unforgettable – testings of medicine, but it gave him a wide enough view. "Did it happen to you a lot before it?"

"Mine isn't a very sensitive case. Normal waves are quite all right. A few singular billows are quite all right. But if the rocking gets worse than usual and it continues for hours..."

"Like right now."

"Exactly. Besides, aboard my own vessel I have my own store of medicine at hand immediately if the weather starts to change, so not many persons know about this. And I would have appreciated maintaining that state of things, that was hanging in the air without Law needing to say it aloud."

"You're apparently keeping a lot of things from the others." Saying it was much easier than commenting the fact that one secret had been revealed now.

"Don't we all?"

"Well... I guess." Yes. Chopper was also keeping some things from the others, he didn't want them to know. Like the fact that he was still afraid if he happened to draw the shortest stick at some island and was left alone to guard the ship. And that he knew the number combination needed to open the lock of the fridge, even though only the women were supposed to know it in addition to Sanji. Robin had told it, and sometimes he stole food at night, always so little that Sanji imagined the loss was caused by Robin or Nami, thus turning a totally blind eye to it.

"Did something happen five years ago?" he asked, changing the topic. "If getting seasick ended then?"

"I replaced a sailboat with a submarine. That was the most effective cure I've found."

That sounded like an effective prescription, if not a bit extreme. But perhaps the submarine had other plusses in addition to it moving beneath the waves. "I've never been in a big submarine. Just the one Franky built."

"That one's lovely." Law sounded amused for some reason, which was a much better alternative than pissed, even though Chopper couldn't understand the reason for his amusement. "Bigger ones are more stable and moving more heavily, depending on the model. Want me to show you around after getting there? I'm pretty proud of my sick bay."

A kind of excited squeal escaped Chopper as he imagined it. "Of course! Do you have a real operating theatre?"

"I do. I don't have very much use for it, but sometimes..." Law's voice got quieter, very thoughtful and emphatic. "Sometimes I'm happy to have it."
Chopper wanted to ask what kind of realization was hidden in those words, because it seemed like Law himself had just realized something. But it probably wasn't Chopper's business. Instead, he was happily wiggling on his chair because Law was willing to show his submarine to him, and thus be in his company, like – "Are you not mad at me?"

"Nope. I wish you would occasionally keep your mouth shut, but apparently I find being angry at some creatures in the world impossible; and you have the questionable honor of belonging into that group."

He was left wondering who belonged to it in addition to him. Luffy, perhaps? Even though Law disagreed with Luffy often, and at times they were bickering furiously without reaching any solution, they never seemed to really get mad. Perhaps that was the so-called 'marital war'.

"Besides, you're making effective medicine for me right now," Law added.

"Don't try to flatter me, you asshole! That doesn't make me happy at all!" But despite the good try, the corners of Chopper's mouth stretched into a happy smile, and it definitely could be heard in the rising tone of his voice. On top of that he had to sway and wiggle on his chair, because so much joy just couldn't be contained in his body.

The medicine would be effective, that was true. He decided that the powder was fine enough already, and started to think of the best way to consume it. He could put it into a capsule, but the effect would be a bit slower that way. "Can you drink?"

"Haven't tried it for a while, but I think so. As long as we're not talking about a huge glassful."

"I intend to make a drink out of this."

"Sounds good to me. Affects quickly."

Chopper nodded, hopping down from his chair. Getting to the tap proved to be more of a challenge than he had expected because the floor kept swaying so wildly. It wasn't so bad as long as he kept still, but climbing the steep slope that the floor had become was a whole another story. For a moment it straightened itself, then rocked into another side so suddenly that he staggered, falling and thumping into the wall by the sink.

"Carefully. Don't expect me to treat you while feeling like this, if you get bruised." Law seemed downright miserable.

Chopper didn't correct him, despite knowing that Law would treat him, and anyone else too, if necessary. Even if he had to do it while puking his guts out. Chopper had already seen what kind of doctor Law was despite his harsh words. When it came to that Law was similar to Doctorine, and come to think again, it might be one of the reasons for Chopper feeling so cosy in his company.

However, he didn't want to make Law struggle while feeling nauseous, so he peeled himself off the wall carefully, managing to get a half full glass of water out of the tap. A bit wisened, he returned to the desk moving only during those short moments when the ship straightened itself on the crest or on the lowest point of the waves. Soon he was mixing the powder with the water, seasoning the drink by a capful of stomach soothing medicine.

"Here you are." He handed Law a slightly orange drink, there were tiny white and dark green particles floating around in it.

"Looks so yummy. Good thing that Vince isn't here to see this – this would inspire him to invent some totally sick cocktail."
"Your friend?" Chopper wished to hear more, Law very rarely spoke about his crew.

"He's at Zou with all of the others." Law was eyeing the drink suspiciously for a moment, but finally let out a resigned sigh, starting to take small, tentative sips like expecting he would feel sick at any moment if he wasn't careful. "It's not quite as bad as it looks like."

"That's right. Let's wait for five minutes and we'll see if it starts to work."

"Fine." Law gave an even heavier sigh, gulping more of the medicine.

And suddenly there was a suffocating silence in the infirmary. The things and medicine bottles were sliding back and forth in the cupboards, making silent dragging sound and thumping into the walls. The locked wheels of the hospital bed were trying to turn despite the mechanism, screeching and clicking unpleasantly. The wet splashing of the waves hitting against the sides of the ship could be heard outside. Those sounds were not in the least enough to fill the room.

There were so many things Chopper would have wanted to ask, but he wasn't quite sure whether he could right now. This couldn't be a good moment.

"Um..." he finally started, as Law had gotten half of his drink down. "How's sleeping?" That sounded like a decent start, the question was important but still not the most difficult one.

"It's not more hopeless than usually, actually."

Chopper wondered whether he actually wanted to know what it usually was like. Law had only given the impression that it was really bad, but hadn't described it more. "Would you tell what that normal situation is like?"

"That's not what you want to know, isn't that right?"

Perhaps not in the first place, but refusing to answer was really making him curious. "Now I do."

"No you don't."

"Yes."

"No. I don't want to think of my sleeping even myself. But oh well, you asked for it..." Law was smiling over the rim of the glass, grim and creepy you're-so-going-to-regret-this-smile, making Chopper want to quickly take his question back. Perhaps he really didn't want to know, after all.

"Usually I sleep about three or four hours per night. Most of the problems lie in falling asleep and staying asleep. In addition to that, there is lots of nightmares and other kind of restless sleeping, like a handsome collection of different parasomnias."

"You have problems in everything!" Chopper squealed. When it was put like that, there wasn't a single thing in the sleeping that was working.

"That's what I've been saying all the time."

*No wonder that the usual tips for insomnia are irritating to him.*

"Have you been using those sleeping pills?" Chopper asked.

"Once." Law gulped the remains of his drink, making a face. "Urh."

"With those sleeping issues, you could use it mo-"
"I know what I'm doing. I'll take it again when I'm starting to snap, so don't worry about it."

This conversation sure was a way to increase Chopper's worrying, but he felt like Law's patience was growing thin when it came to this particular topic. And if the situation wasn't more hopeless than usually... it was actually a downright good situation after a mentally traumatizing experience; usually traumas tended to make it even worse. "Is Luffy helping?"

"Perhaps a bit." Law shrugged.

Chopper was squirming on his chair, wondering whether he dared to say that it seemed to help more than a bit. Apparently Law wasn't very eager to admit that having a relationship – caring and being close – was doing him some good, but it seemed obvious to Chopper that he was a bit more in peace with himself. The last couple of nights had passed without anyone seeing him during their steering turns; wandering on the deck, staring at the sea like pondering whether it would be best to jump after all. Plus, he was smiling a bit more.

Intimate relationships were something Chopper had never gotten a chance to monitor closely. Doctor Hiluluk and Doctorine had both been loners, and even though he had learned a great deal of humans after joining this crew, never before had anything resembling a romance blossomed aboard the ship. Watching it was really fascinating, he could learn so much more than by reading books. It also was totally different when it involved his friends, who he liked and for whom he was truly happy.

He realized he had started to see Law as his friend, despite having not known him for a very long time. It felt natural, for Law already kind of was irrevocably married to Luffy.

Escaping from Luffy after he had decided something was impossible, Chopper knew it based on his personal experiences. Like deciding that he definitely wanted Chopper to join his crew, even though Chopper himself had known at least hundreds of reasons for not being able to do it. He was a freak reindeer with a blue nose, and he couldn't believe that any human being could ever consider him as anything else than a monster. Let alone dared to wish someone really wanting to be his friend.

Did Luffy listen? Nope. At least not the words Chopper had said aloud – on the contrary, he listened to what he was feeling. And Luffy's answer to that had been 'Shut up, let's go!' He could imagine how Law was feeling. But because of that he also could say that Luffy was good for Law.

Perhaps he should try to steer Law talking to Luffy instead of him, that might be beneficial for their relationship anyways? He was squirming more while wondering how to say it without triggering Law's typical 'Don't order me around' answer.

"Are you trying to obsessively guess which one of us penetrates the other, too?" Law asked, sounding very fed up.

"No! I didn't think anything like that!"

"All of you seem to find that question extremely fascinating."

That was true. Chopper didn't find it weird that some discussions had reached also Law's ears, because he seemed like a guy who noticed everything and knew everything about everything. Law being fed up with the topic wasn't a wonder, either. It was probably weird to hear such musings about his own relationship, and Law seemed to appreciate privacy pretty significantly.

"I don't get why that would matter in the first place," Chopper said.
Law was left staring at him, raising his eyebrow curiously. "Oh?"

"I mean that both of you are males. There's no way you can have children, no matter what you decide to do; so there's no need to deliver sperm into some particular place so as to enable the pregnancy. In other words, anything you consider pleasurable is adequate."

Law blinked, freezing totally for a moment and then bursting into almost silent laughter, making him hold his sides, his shoulders shaking. It continued for a long time and got worse every time he glanced at Chopper.

Chopper wasn't quite sure whether he was proud or sorely insulted. It wasn't easy to make Law laugh, so this was an achievement without a doubt, but that achievement would have felt considerably more satisfactory if he hadn't been totally serious.

"That's a delightful view," Law got out as soon as he was able to talk again. At least it seemed like he had totally forgotten the rocking of the ship for a moment. "If some dimwit gets brave enough to ask me, I think I'll quote that..."

"What's supposed to be so funny!? That's totally true!"

"Yeah. Forgive me, I just really wasn't expecting such a... eh, justifiable opinion." Law raised a hand to his mouth, trying to hide his amusement behind it somehow.

Changing the topic sounded like a very good idea. "Are you feeling any better?" It seemed to Chopper that even though Law still was very pale, the tone of his skin was a bit less greenish than it had been earlier.

"A bit. What were those leaves? I haven't seen anything like them before."

"That's no wonder, because they only grow on Torino island. It's in South Blue, so –"

"Torino? Have you been there?"

Chopper nodded. "Have you heard of it?"

"Of course. The name of the island crops up at times in literature, as one of the pioneers of medicine. There's supposedly extraordinary flora." Law was fiddling with the empty glass he was holding, staring at the bottom of it. "Apparently it's true."

"Yeah, that was a really wonderful place! I have heaps of all kinds of dried medicinals I picked."

"Damn. Now I'm envious."

Chopper remembered how he had woken up on the island, and gotten pecked by the giant birds. That wasn't anything to be envious about. He said it aloud, making Law smile a bit, and soon he found himself explaining his experiences with great enthusiasm.

~*~

Thousand Sunny was rocking from one crest to another in the storm that felt never-ending. The vicious wind was trying to rip the sails open, and the downpour was filling the ship with water almost as badly as the waves constantly splashing over the railing.

Nami screamed that they were drifting off their course, demanding the use of the paddles, which lead to a quarrel with Franky who in turn wanted to save their scarce fuel, just in case the situation got
even worse. Usopp tried to make the quarrel stop by asking for both participants to calm down – safe distance away, of course. After the attempt had failed he concentrated on howling that all of them were going to die; Brook joined the chorus, remembering to mention that he was already dead, of course.

Luffy was laughing, balancing on an overturned barrel as it was rolling from one side of the deck to another as the ship was swaying; he was walking back and forth like some performer in a circus. It seemed like he had fun like in the best kind of amusement park. Law was doing his best to not look at that performance, because seeing the rolling movement of the barrel made him want to puke. Avoiding it was difficult, because Luffy was a magnet attracting his gaze. Seeing that someone was able to be so cheerful in this situation was royally pissing him off.

Law, in turn, wasn't interested in anything else than seeing whether his stomach would agree to settle. He was sitting on his favourite place by the mast, following the chaos because it gave him something else to think than his own condition.

Being seasick felt worse than he had remembered, perhaps because he hadn't been in a storm like this for a long time, and nowadays he wasn't even used to the normal sea in a sail ship. Knowing that there were loads of people suffering from the same liability didn't comfort him much – most of those others weren't absolute idiots deciding to become pirates like him, no, they realized it was better to stay ashore.

Not that piracy had been the first item in his list of desired careers, but well.

The medicine Chopper had given him was helping, but it didn't cure all of the symptoms. He would probably pull through this without throwing up if he took it easy and didn't do anything stupid, but he was still feeling queasy and clammy. Getting some fresh air was helping some, though.

If you could say anything good about being seasick, at least Law had been able to use it as an excuse for leaving Chopper's question about dissociation and its triggers unanswered. Chopper had suddenly dropped it in the middle of their quite nice chat about Torino Island, seemingly stupefied as he realized he had asked it aloud; so it seemed like he had been thinking of it while they were talking, pondering whether to ask about it or not, until it finally had escaped.

Law had noted that talking of it right now wasn't a great idea unless Chopper particularly wanted to mop the floors. The topic was enough to turn Law's stomach upside down even in a good moment.

He just might avoid hearing that question again, because Chopper had seemed visibly mollified by getting to hear that Law had surprised himself by ending up speaking to Luffy to some extent. That would be a welcome turn of events, because avoiding the little doctor had started to get difficult. Besides, he didn't want Chopper exploding with worry so badly that he would let something slip – revealing that little episode to the whole crew would be even less desirable than his unfortunate liability for getting seasick.

Surprisingly enough, so far no one had teased him because of that extremely humiliating liability, even though there had been some weird stares. It was a small comfort as he was trying to get more comfortable, pulling his soaking wet coat tighter around him so as to not shiver in heavy rain. Needing to wear his winter coat after leaving Punk Hazard wasn't something he had been expecting, but even that wasn't feeling too warm after it had absorbed what had to be at least ten liters of water.

He was so going to take a hot shower after the storm subsided and he had recovered some. Perhaps a bath, even, even though he never was able to enjoy being submerged in water. It always had him thinking of drowning.
Law was startled out of his misery as the kitchen door opened, and Sanji appeared carrying a tray full of snacks. Apparently it was time to fuel. Sailing through a storm was an exhausting task, even though all they were doing was drifting from one swell to another, trying not to get too far from their course. The rudder didn't want to obey, the waves were splashing onto the deck at times and the water needed to be pumped out, and Nami was hysterical because the wind kept torturing her tangerine trees.

The food was eagerly devoured like it always happened aboard this ship, and Luffy wasn't the only one trying to grab half of the offerings on the tray. Law didn't want even a bite, even though Sanji had made some onigiris, too.

"Not feeling like eating?" Sanji asked, having stopped in front of Law.

Law only shook his head, wishing that refusing to eat wouldn't cause any kind of drama with the cook.

"Well, Chopper said you might say that, and demanded that you at least take this."

A steaming mug was pushed into Law's hand. There was a herbal aroma wafting from it. "What's this?"

"Doctor's prescription."

"I'm not going to argue against it." At least holding the mug was a good way of warming Law's cold fingers. He wished he could have tolerated going in and lying down, but doing that tended to make him even sicker, then there was nothing to keep his attention away from his misery. Being out in the open and getting fresh air was better. "Is he always so... officious?"

"Always." Sanji nodded emphatically. He sighed as the stretchy hand snatched the last onigiri from the tray, but let Luffy have it as it had become clear that Law didn't want it.

Law took a careful sip of the drink, recognizing enough ingredients that he realized it was meant to quell his nausea. He wouldn't mind it working. Sanji didn't seem inclined to move, instead he was shielding himself with the empty tray in order to light a cigarette despite the downpour.

"How many times Chopper has tried to make you quit?" Law asked. For some reason the idea was endlessly amusing; he could imagine Chopper waving a pamphlet in front of a fed up Sanji.

"Three. After the third time I told him that if he tries to lecture me how smoking affects my respiratory system once more, I'll turn him into sautéed reindeer."

"He's right, you know."

"Sure." Sanji inhaled the smoke deeply, seemingly euphoric like demonstrating that he didn't give a shit. "You don't seem like the type of doctor who gives enthusiastic lectures about healthy habits."

"That's true. I don't want to spend my time for such a thing. Cutting the patient open, dragging those lungs out and showing what they really look like tarred is so much more effective." There wasn't anyone in Law's crew who had smoked for long after joining, he made sure of that. The ventilation was big enough problem in the submarine as it was, and cigarette smoke was giving him headache if there wasn't enough air.

It might be pretty arbitrary dictatorship, but he was the captain and the vessel was his, and it wasn't like he was trying to win the title of The Most Affable Pirate in the World.
Sanji shuddered hardly noticeably, but he still didn't move. It felt like he had something to say.

Law pondered whether to ask the question that had been greatly bothering him for the last couple of days. Since Luffy had thrown the contents of the watering can on him in order to get him back to reality. He could somehow live with the fact that Luffy... On the other hand, did he want to know? It wasn't like he could help his thoughts and feelings even if the answer was the one he was fearing. It would only make him even more embarrassed.

But when had he supposedly been able to control his sick curiosity? "Sanji?"

"Yeah?"

"You can use Haki too, isn't that right?" Law hated how he lapsed to steering the discussion by an idiotic question, the answer of which was already known by him. Luffy had told him that in addition to him, Sanji and Zoro knew Haki too, but he couldn't come up with any other way to bring it up. Not right now at least, as he really wasn't at his best.

Sanji nodded, frowning, clearly not understanding why Law asked something that was going without saying.

"Observation?"

"Yeah. So what?"

Law took a deep breath, bracing himself to answer. "It has become apparent that at times I've been kind of... radiating pretty shitty mood. I just hope it hasn't been so bad that you can't help sensing it."

"Ah. That's the explanation," Sanji said after having been quiet for a moment.

"For what?"

"Luffy's behaviour a few days ago. He was in the kitchen, totally normal and annoying, trying to 'help' me in cooking by snatching the soy. And then he suddenly freezes, hissing 'Traffy' and crushes the bottle he's holding before running to the ladder."

Law tried not to think of the things that had been going through his own mind at that time. The things Sanji had told weren't surprising, he had already pretty much guessed everything based on Luffy's words. "But you didn't sense it?" He hoped that was the case. Hoped fervently.

"Nope. And I don't want to." Sanji threw his butt over the railing, starting to hold the tray above his head with both hands.

"Good. Just thinking, because Luffy..."

"No. I'm not bad, nor is the moss head, but Luffy is Luffy."

In other words, mad strong. That's right.

"Plus, he likes you for some reason," Sanji continued. "I wouldn't find it strange if he was... attuned to you somehow, or something like that."

That sounded quite plausible, too. Law was feeling considerably better after getting the answer. Luffy inevitably becoming aware of his bouts of angst was bad enough – he really didn't want to drown anyone else in them.

"I have a question, too," Sanji said. He had been awkwardly shifting his weight from one leg to
another and glancing at Nami, who was shouting orders on the foredeck, wearing a pink raincoat that probably seemed like a very seductive piece of clothing to Sanji.

"Oh?"

"So... which one of you tops?"
The storm had been raging until late night, and as it finally started subsiding there were quite many pirates who were overstrained, soaking wet, sweaty and freezing at the same time – in other words, sorely needing a nice hot bath. Nami was somewhat resentful because she hadn't managed to reserve the bathroom first, but she had needed to keep an eye on the weather plus try to deduce where they actually were drifting.

At least most of the males got their bathing done remarkably fast, so she didn't need to wait for a long time. But Usopp and Chopper had gotten too excited trying to splash each other, if the flood on the floor was any indication; Franky had left a pile of empty bottles of cola in a corner; and there was the reek of one of Sanji's most horrid aftershaves lingering in front of the mirror.

Nami supposed it could have been even worse. Having enjoyed a relaxing bath she wrapped a towel around her head to prevent her hair from wetting her shirt, making sure her clothes fit her in the right way, and stepped out. It was still raining a little, hardly noticeable drizzle that was resembling very wet mist.

The deck was almost empty. Brook was steering, but almost everyone else had crawled in their beds in order to get some rest before breakfast.

Almost. Law was still sitting on the bench circling the mast, looking drenched like someone had thrown him into the sea after the storm. He had barely moved during the storm, only visiting the nearest toilet at times. Luffy had joined him at some point, and was now sleeping, curled into a very peculiar position so that his body was going around Law's back and head resting on his thigh. Luffy was giving a very convincing impression of a combination of backrest and some kind of a touchy-feely dog.

It was damn adorable. Nami had a hard time trying to understand that the pile of captains was worth more than a billion berries in theory.

"The bathroom's free," she said, having stopped a few steps away. "And no one wants it after you, so you can be as slow as you wish."

"Okay." Law shook Luffy's shoulder. "Wake up. Time to bath."

"Don't wanna..." It was difficult to hear Luffy's mumbling as he was talking into Law's thigh.

"I didn't ask whether you want it or not. You're not sleeping beside me if you don't wash up, period."

"Naaaaa.... Traffy –"

"Sure, you're not obligated to sleep beside me in any way, so you're free to continue napping here by
all means, but let go. I am going to take a bath right now."

Luffy reacted to the order to let go by wrapping his arms around Law's waist several times in that rubbery way only he was capable of.

"Geez," Law sighed.

Nami realized she couldn't help smiling while watching them. In the beginning she had had thousands of suspicions of this relationship being one of the worst ideas in the world, but actually it seemed like they were proving to be quite a good couple. Extremely strange and contradictory, but somehow balanced anyway.

She was dying to know which one of them was leading in bed. It was none of her business, but it didn't matter – she loved knowing stuff that was none of her business. This was currently the most interesting question aboard this ship, very clearly topping the question about whether Franky and Usopp were going to get that stupid cola compressor to work.

Theoretically speaking it probably should be Law, who supposedly knew what he was doing. But Luffy was always a wild card who didn't really follow anyone, and was doing things his own way, so... Speculating just happened to be interesting.

Getting the answer might prove to be considerably challenging. Nami's first move had been sending Sanji to inquire, but apparently Law had just politely offered to make Sanji properly acquainted with his own lungs, not giving away any hints.

"How badly we're off our course?" Law asked, like he wasn't trying to wrench Luffy's hands off him right now. It pretty much looked like he was struggling doing some weird work out, using rubber bands as resistance.

Nami glanced at her wrist, remembering suddenly that she had left the log pose on her nightstand before going to take a bath. She had been staring at the needles attentively for most of the night, watching them drifting towards the destination of the left hand needle by force, but she still couldn't say how bad the curve was going to be. "I'll tell you at breakfast, after I've taken a look at the map and done some calculations. Perhaps one day longer?"

Law nodded. "That's not too bad."

"Yeah. Well, I'm going to get some rest now, try to get out of the bath before breakfast."

"Of course," Luffy answered, tightening his hold of struggling Law's waist, it seemed thin even when he was wearing a thick coat. "I'd never miss a breakfast."

Nami snorted, glancing at Law to see what he might think of this declaration. They ended up sharing a look, revealing that they agreed on at least one thing – yes, Luffy was totally hopeless and frustrating individual, and the worst thing was that they still liked him.

"In that case you'd better let go, Straw Hat," Law said. Nami couldn't even imagine how Law succeeded in using that patient tone of voice while talking to Luffy. "Or are you just going to cling there until breakfast?"

"Yup!"

"I wouldn't recommend that. You're soaking wet and sweaty – your cook's not going to allow you near the table."
Luffy apparently couldn't come up with an argument, but he wasn't letting go either, rubbing his face against Law's coat.

"Let go. Now."

Nami was frozen in her place, even though her soft bed was the most inviting thing in the world after the draining night. She just had to see how that bickering was going to end. After his napping Luffy seemed to be lazy and in his worst kind of childish mood, and there were very few persons in the world who were able to handle that.

"Don't wanna," Luffy said.

Law gave a long-suffering sigh before a Room was forming around him, glimmering blue, and suddenly Luffy was hugging mere air, hitting his face against the bench because Law's thigh wasn't under his head anymore.

"Feel free to do whatever you want." Law was suddenly standing a few meters away from the mast, yanking the hem of his coat in order. "I am going to take a bath, right now, you can choose whether to join me or not."

Luffy was rubbing his face morosely, then he seemed to realize something and bounced happily after Law who already was striding towards the bathroom.

Nami was still smiling as she slipped under her warm blanket and switched the light off.

~*~

Law wasn't sure whether his coat was going to dry ever again. It was meant to be worn in frost, not rain, and it felt very heavy as he took it off. Even while wet it still was so isolating and warm that he wasn't shivering too badly.

For once a tub filled with warm water seemed fairly inviting. He usually preferred taking a shower, but after the nauseous night he was feeling so clammy and disgusting that soaking couldn't make it worse. If he meticulously scrubbed himself all over, he might feel like a human being again.

"You're always so slow," Luffy complained. He was completely naked already, sitting on the edge of the tub, swinging his legs impatiently.

"I'm just wearing clothes according to the weather, and not hanging out wearing shorts and sandals during a storm." And fine, Law might have spent some time brushing his teeth in the infirmary, but it hadn't taken that long. He had been spared from emptying his stomach because of being seasick, but only barely; and he really had wanted to get rid of the sour taste once the ship mercifully had stopped swaying so much.

"I had a coat too!"

"Unbuttoned all the time." A mere thought was enough to make Law shudder while he was trying to peel his wet, tight jeans off. It proved to be quite a challenge, it felt like peeling his own skin would have been way easier. It would come off as neat, uniform strips, revealing muscles underneath –

Stop. Right now.

Luffy seemed to think his stripping off was quite a good show, for he stopped complaining and concentrated only on watching in silence.
Taking clothes off in front of Luffy had become an easy and pleasant thing; it was amazing to see how much a couple of nights together and a couple of nice handjobs could change things. Law had started to feel considerably more comfortable in this relationship, understanding how things tended to work, belonging to his place.

At times he caught himself thinking that this might work, despite all of his expectations. Whenever that happened, he was mentally shaking himself by shoulders, because that couldn't happen and expecting anything good would be no use.

Firstly, he simply didn’t do real relationships, he knew nothing of such a thing, he couldn't handle one, he just wasn't a relationship kind of guy but a grumpy loner.

Secondly, his boyfriend happened to be Luffy, which sounded like a certain one-way-ticket to some mental hospital.

Thirdly, nothing ever worked in his life anyway, so why would this be an exception?

Summary: I'm starting to like this, and that's why I'm scared shitless. Because I don't believe I get to keep this.

Law snorted to his thoughts, succeeding in getting rid of his jeans. He was shivering and getting goosebumps as air touched his moist skin, even though the air in the bathroom was moist and warm, not cold at all.

Arduously unfastening his earrings with his frozen fingers felt like it was taking an eternity. He didn't bother with taking them off often, but if he was going to be meticulous, that was what he was going to do. He might be a bit of a hygiene freak – but he was also a surgeon – but he felt better if he made the effort of sanitizing them thoroughly at times.

Every time he chose to do it, he cursed the amount of them. Only two per ear, but struggling with those bitchy locks was always a never-ending torture. And putting them back would be even worse than unfastening them.

"Are you gonna come today?" Luffy asked.

"Yeah." Law managed to unlock the last earring, yanking it off a bit quicker than he should have. He hissed as the yank pinched his earlobe in an unexpected way, not unpleasant but almost enjoyable.

At last he sat onto the edge of the large bath tub beside Luffy, and really felt like being slow. And unwilling to get into the water. No matter what his reason told him, his subconscious tended to associate so large amount of water with drowning and nothing else.

"It's not seawater," Luffy said like he had read Law's mind. It wasn't difficult for him to guess what caused the hesitation, as he suffered from the same problem. "Well it is, but it's apparently dis-... dis-... dis-something, or that's what Franky says. So it's not gonna drain your energy."

Law turned around, curious, putting his feet into the dis-something water. It had been in the tub for some time so it couldn't be very hot anymore, but with his skin being so cold the contrast still was almost too much. It didn't feel like all of his energy was being drained via his feet, leaving him totally empty and limp. Good. He had no idea what Franky actually had done to the water but it was working.

"I still don't like bathing," Luffy said, crossing his arms stubbornly.

"Me neither, but sometimes making an exception is worthwhile."
"Makes me think of drowning."

"The same goes for me, too." Law inched into the water and was now wet up to his knees. Luffy was still firmly sitting on the edge with his back facing the tub, and Law couldn't guess whether he was going to join him at all. Perhaps Luffy was just going to sit there all the time, watching him, and finally settling to taking a shower. Well, as long as Luffy ended up washing himself in one way or the other, Law didn't mind.

"It's not drowning I'm afraid of," Luffy said quickly, like suddenly wanting to defend himself. "It's more like that..."

"Absolute helplessness?" Law suggested.

"Yeah, that."

Speaking about drowning was not the way to make getting into water any easier. Law remembered very clearly every single time – there were only a few, he knew how to be careful but sometimes it wasn't enough – he had fallen into the sea for some reason, and all he had been capable of doing was screaming helplessly in his mind as he was sinking way faster than a human being should. The Devil's Fruits might give you superhuman powers, but everything came with a price tag and you become hated by the sea.

"How old you were then?" he asked. "At that time when you ate it?"

"Seven."

Huh. Law himself had just turned thirteen, and remembering what it had been like to be able to swim was difficult for him, too. Not that swimming had been a very popular pastime in North Blue anyway, what with the water being so damn cold year-round. "How did it happen? Was it by accident?" He couldn't imagine why a little kid would knowingly eat a Devil's Fruit. However, it was very easy to imagine Luffy eating everything that was in front of him without even watching what it was.

"Yeah." Luffy turned to look at Law, flashing a somewhat embarrassed smile, but he didn't seem to be particularly sorry because of the incidence. And why would he be, as he genuinely seemed to like his Power – something that sometimes made Law as fiercely envious as Luffy's ability to fall asleep easily. There was no way he was ever going to succeed in concluding that kind of peace with himself, and realizing that always tasted bitter.

"I thought it was a dessert," Luffy said.

Law couldn't help a snort of laughter. "The most horrible tasting dessert ever."

"Yup. Then Shanks saw what I was eating, grabbing me by ankles so that I was hanging upside down in the air, and shaking me as he tried to make me spit it out. And suddenly I was just stretching so that I hit my head against the floor."

Law held his bout of laughter in with all of his might. That wasn't funny, having your life overturned like that out of the blue; it might be a tragedy even and definitely not funny. But when he imagined Luffy as a seven-year-old brat who was held by his ankles and shaken, and suddenly getting longer until he hit his head...

Fuck, it was hysterical, and he could believe that something so insane had happened namely to Luffy. He pondered whether he should try stuffing his fist into his mouth so as to not howl aloud with laughter. Because this wasn't funny, and his sense of humour was totally awful.
Sometimes people thought that he didn't have a sense of humour at all. And after getting to know what it exactly was like they wished that had been the case.

"You should laugh," Luffy said, not seeming to be insulted at all. "You do it way too little anyway. So if you sometimes feel like laughing, don't try holding it in."

Law lowered his hand that had been in front of his mouth, chuckling at the mental images Luffy's words had awakened for a while, but soon he got a grip of himself. At least Luffy had apparently gotten his Power in a hell of a lot more pleasant way than he himself. Actually, he didn't know how anything could be worse than his way, but the world was such a shitty place that probably it was possible.

"You know, at one point I was wondering if you laugh at all, ever. Nice to see you do."

Law made an ambiguous noise, inching deeper into the tub. He was in the water up to his waist now, and shivering even more as his skin was trying to get used to the change of temperature.

He could have told Luffy that he had never been particularly inclined to laugh easily; that even as a child he had been the spoilsport who specially needed to have books torn away from his hands and then dragged off to party, and everything that had happened to him had hardly improved the situation. But those were memories he didn't want to dig out right now. The atmosphere was pretty nice, and he wasn't feeling sick anymore. And it would be even more comfortable if Luffy deigned to properly join him, sliding beside him instead of sitting too far to touch.

"Come here," he invited.

"Why?"

Law carefully considered his answer. 'Why not?' was trying to roll off his tongue by force, and he swallowed it, because that definitely wasn't the way to get his way with Luffy. A pointless verbal play circling the real matter – definitely the wrong way to go. Logical reasoning concerning the benefits of bathing didn't sound like an approach working on Luffy, either. Luffy and logic didn't tend to walk hand in hand; it was more like Luffy tended to knock logic out, declaring that he was the winner of the match.

At last there was only bare, naked truth left. Law supposed he was following the right track, it was time to test the theory. "I want to know what kissing while bathing is like."

Luffy froze, thinking of this for a while, only his eyes were moving as his gaze was wandering on Law's upper body. Having finally lifted his gaze, Luffy's eyes seemed even darker than usually.

"Okay."

Without further ado he turned around, slipping into the tub, too.

"It's warm," Luffy said.

Law made an affirmative noise, finally sitting down so that the water came up to his shoulders. His thermoreceptors were confused for a moment, making him shudder like he was cold; then the feeling of being warm enveloped him, and he needed to let out a satisfied sigh, leaning his back against the side of the tub. Water was a dubious element, but this didn't feel too bad. Even though putting his head under the surface would be something he would do just as willingly as closing himself into a treasure chest.

There was a touch on his shoulder, startling him back into reality. Luffy had splashed to him, looking at him in a way warming him even more effectively than the bath. He was looking, too; it simply was
impossible to not look at the drops of water trickling on Luffy's skin, subtly changing their direction as they followed the lines of his abs.

"Like this?" Luffy placed his knees on either side of Law's thighs, leaning closer with his hands of Law's shoulders; apparently trying to make Law drown, not into the water but into the kiss.

Law slithered even lower, so that he could comfortably lean his head on the edge of the tub while kissing back. He put his hands on Luffy's nape, running them on his upper back, feeling the smooth skin and shoulder blades underneath it; while Luffy's hand found its way to the side of Law's neck as the kiss got deeper.

If Luffy's intention was turning him into hot, floating jelly only caring of the feel of lips on his own, this definitely was the right way to go. Luffy was leaning over him, eager and self-confident and dominant, but not forcing in the least; it blissfully made his brain switch itself off for once, rolling down along his spine all the way to his groin in ecstasy.

It was a surprise that he found just leaning back and letting the other one to lead so easy. The idea had felt fascinating to him for a long time – he had diagnosed it as some kind of byproduct of being so overly tense, alert, and in control that it got tiresome. It often made him have fantasies where that control simply was taken away from him. Even if it had to happen half by force, because he definitely was unable of giving it to anyone willingly.

Mental images where he was tightly pressed into the mattress or against the wall, and downright forced to just enjoy the treatment were excellent jerk off material, but he had never expected that kind of thing really working on him. He was way too guarded; surely that kind of situation in reality would only cause him to panic, a million alarms exploding in his mind, and a compulsive need to wring that control back to himself?

Wrong.

This was reminding him of Dressrosa. The long moments he had spent thrown over Luffy's shoulder, with those accursed Sea Stone cuffs around his wrists. He had been wondering why he wasn't terrified all the time, he definitely should have been – he was being carried around as a helpless package, not able of using his Power, and Doflamingo was waiting for them at their destination. But he just couldn't bring himself to be terrified, against his expectations, because in some surrealistic way he had been feeling like Luffy wasn't going to let him fall.

Shit, this starts to get too deep. And I'm sooo screwed.

That merciful time when he had been able to deceive himself seemed to be over, even though he tried to avoid the inevitable realization with all of his might. He just couldn't ignore how he felt like he was some kind of melting mass molded by Luffy's hands, apparently he really was trusting –

The realization had his eyes suddenly opening, and immediately his hands were on Luffy's shoulders, pushing him away.

Luffy blinked at him, lips parted, until finally shutting his mouth and tilting his head. He was visibly wondering why on earth Law wanted to stop such a nice kiss so suddenly. Perhaps wondering whether he had done something wrong, even, and that was an intolerable idea.

"I'm sorry, I just..." Law didn't know how to finish. 'I just am myself, and that's awful?'

"You thinking too much again?"

"Of course. Always. Sorry about that."
Luffy gave a laugh. There had been many times when Law had wanted to rip all of his hair off because Luffy's habit to laugh in any kind of totally inappropriate situation was driving him out of his mind; that Luffy was able of considering so many things hilarious and being a total idiot was unbelievably annoying. And how could you take seriously someone constantly bursting into laughter?

Now Law realized he had started to see the difference in nuances, and it might not be as idiotic as he had been thinking. This particular bout of laughter was quite short and not very violent, it didn't force Luffy to hold his sides, not to speak of rolling on the floor, howling. Similar ones tended to make an appearance whenever Luffy thought someone was worrying too much, or being stupid in some other way, but not in a way that put him in a bad mood.

*You're being so stupid again but I don't mind, I'm still in a good mood* laugh, or that was how Law was interpreting it.

The worst thing was, it really made Law feel better. It made him feel like him being difficult wasn't such a big and serious deal.

He didn't want to talk about it, instead he put his hands on Luffy's hips, pressing him lower suggestively. Luffy sat on his lap; almost weightless in the water, but very concretely there. Their half hard cocks were lazily touching each other.

Just a couple of touches would surely have been enough to get them back to the mood quickly, but Law was still reeling because of his unwanted realizations. It felt like just pulling Luffy even closer, leaning his head on his shouder and trying to digest everything was a better idea.

A moment ago Law had been thinking he was starting to get used to this relationship. And then he accidentally happened to realize that he had lowered his shields so much it was alarming; and suddenly he had a whole new tangle of problems in his hands, he had never needed to even think of clearing it up.

Sexual fantasies were sexual fantasies, and a lot of time they had nothing to do with the things you really wanted to do in bed. Law was more aware of this than most people – his own were sometimes so twisted that he had been forced to think about the issue many times, so as to reach some kind of truce with himself. Among that selection of mental images some fantasies of submitting didn't feel like anything he needed to think twice. All of it was just imagination, he just happened to have a fucking vivid imagination – and how much of that was because of his Ope Ope Power? – and he couldn't help it, it didn't mean anything really. Period.

Suddenly the issue had become very material. He thought whether he should say something to Luffy. Not that they needed to do anything about it. But perhaps mentioning it would be a good idea, otherwise there was a good chance he inadvertently confused his boyfriend greatly at some point.

At least he was greatly confusing himself right now.

"Are you still sick?" Luffy asked, the silence had supposedly lasted for too long.

*Yes, totally fucked up.*

"No, it passed already." Law felt somewhat weak because he had barely dared to eat anything, but otherwise he was fine physically speaking. After getting some rest and food he would be like new. "Remember when I said I don't enjoy being a pirate all the time? This storm was definitely one of those moments."
"Yeah, I do. But I've never been seasick so I wouldn't know."

"You haven't missed anything too joyful."

"Is it like puking in an amusement park?"

Law snorted with laughter. Apparently this wasn't the moment for wallowing in his own mind, and actually it was a great relief. Concentrating on chatting about this and that with Luffy was much more comfortable. "Well, I don't have any experience of that, but I think it might be similar to some degree."

Luffy gave an enthusiastic, wordy and detailed description of his day spent in Sabaody Park. Apparently there had been some important mission he was supposed to accomplish there, but he had been kind of sidetracked because of having so much fun. Getting too excited and speeding up in one particular ride had caused him to puke his guts out, something Law didn't find very surprising.

He couldn't even imagine why Luffy suddenly decided to share this very uplifting experience with him. So that they could feel kinship and sympathy? To make him think of something else? Fuck, why was he thinking too much even now? In any case listening was pretty nice.

The silence settling after the explanation was nice, too, lighter than previously. Law gave a satisfied sigh, slowly stroking Luffy's back up and down.

"I guess it happened on Sabaody after all," Luffy suddenly said.

"What?"

"Me starting to like you."

Law couldn't come up with anything to say, so he just hummed as a question.

"Maybe I just didn't start realizing it before you patched me up. Even though I didn't get that I had realized at that time. Not before we met again."

... Wow. That had to be one of the most messed up explanations Law had ever heard. But he understood just enough that one of his worries subsided. "If it's like that, good."

"How so?"

"I don't want you liking me only because I happened to save your life."

"I was thinking of that too! I mean, my life's been saved pretty many times, but I've never before felt... it's only you. So there had to be something else in it too."

Law tightened his hold of Luffy, feeling very, very warm. That had nothing to do with soaking in warm water.

"I remember that Auction Hall," Luffy said quietly. "And how nearly everyone started screaming and running around. And you were there just sitting on your seat, looking really cool and amused and saying that the marines were already there. And I thought something in the lines of 'Wow, who's that?'."

"You left quite a first impression, too," Law said.

"Naah, that wasn't a big deal. I just punched an annoying jerk into the wall 'cause he was hurting my friend."
"Indeed."

"But what were you doing there?" Luffy pulled away a bit, cupping Law's cheeks so that they were looking at each other. "You weren't there to buy a slave, right?"

"Definitely not." The mere thought was almost enough to make Law's stomach turn upside down. "I was snooping. At that time human trafficking was one of Doflamingo's little businesses."

"Oh. I didn't know."

"He abandoned it after you and your crew had obliterated the Auction Hall. You wouldn't believe how priceless it was for me to see it happen."

"I might. At least you seemed really amused by it."

Law smirked.

"So..." Luffy went silent for a while, frowning, until suddenly almost pressing their noses together. "Was it, like, love at the first sight?"

"I'm not sure that I believe in such a concept at all." Law still wasn't sure whether this was love. He wasn't even sure whether he really knew what love was. He didn't want to think of love. He had quite enough things to think of even without that, thank you very much. "But I suppose it was at least some kind of intrigue at the first sight."

Luffy burst into a brief bout of laugh, like Law's explaining was very hilarious, then got serious again, looking deep in his eyes. Luffy licked his lips. "Whatever. But now there's no doubt that I l-"

"Don't." Law hurried to swallow the rest of the words with his lips.

Right away the kiss was deep enough to drown into. Their teeth clashed together unpleasantly, tongues feeling clumsy in their haste, fingers pulling hair a bit too hard. It was so needy and possessive kiss that it mainly succeeded in highlighting the words Law was currently trying to swallow and forget with all of his might.

His heart was madly racing in his chest, excited by passion and soaking in the warm water, and he couldn't help thinking of Luffy's words again. Last days he had been thinking of them every time he happened to become aware of his heart for one reason or the other.

"Can you put your own into someone else's chest, too?"

No, he wasn't going to think about it. Why the fuck Luffy had asked that, there was no way he could have meant anything as disturbing as Law himself was thinking? Why did he have to be so macabre all the time? Why couldn't he just shake this idea off?

Clearly he had drowned in this so deep that no reason was going to reach him anymore, he was just going to sink deeper and deeper like had fallen into the sea, without any hope of being rescued, there wasn't anyone able of saving him anymore.

Luffy's fingers tightened their hold of Law's nape and shoulder, not letting go.

~*~

"I wanna wash you," Luffy said, as they had moved from the bath to the shower. He was feeling uncomfortably warm after soaking in the water – Law had explained something about veins dilating,
he hadn't been listening really – and the temperature of the shower wasn't cool enough to fix it. Law, in his turn, claimed it was too cold; apparently he would have wanted to boil himself.

The quarrel about the temperature, and particularly their solution to the problem made Luffy remember why he never liked those so-called compromises. They were solutions no one really liked. Like this lukewarm shower.

"Sure." Law was smiling slightly while handing him a shampoo bottle.

If tolerating too warm water meant that he was allowed to grope Law's body as much as he wanted while getting him soapy, and that Law even was smiling at him like that while he was doing it... Actually the temperature didn't matter at all.

Law kneeled, probably to make reaching easier for Luffy. It was funny, the fact that Law didn't even realize reaching was no problem for him. He could always stretch. And he wasn't so short, either. Actually he pretty much liked the way his head fit so comfortably just under Law's jaw.

He didn't say anything, though, just stood still, watching Law, who had already shut his eyes in order to prevent the shampoo from getting into them. Very conflicting emotions were battling inside his chest. He knew damn well that Law was really strong, was aware of the things he had overcome and what he was capable of in a battle; and Luffy would have gladly kicked the ass of anyone claiming otherwise. Still... right now, waiting there, Law seemed so vulnerable that suddenly all Luffy wanted to do was hugging him tightly, babbling stupid reassurances about never, never, never letting anyone hurt him again.

Luffy pushed these thoughts aside, starting to wash Law's hair. It felt totally different to his own, it was softer and kind of like... fluffy, perhaps that was why it always seemed to be sticking out to every possible direction. Even though it was wet, his fingers were easily sliding through it as he was carefully rubbing shampoo all over.

He never was this thorough with washing himself, but watching Law's face relaxing as he dragged his fingertips along the scalp was nice. He definitely wanted to see more of that face fully concentrated on sensations.

He could have kept playing with Law's shampood hair eternally if he hadn't been so eager to go on, and get to lathering soap all over his body. That sounded like even better pastime. Besides, the shampoo getting rinsed off Law's hair was definitely a pleasant sight to see, white suds of foam caressing his skin. Watching it got Luffy uncomfortably hard, especially after they had stopped a couple of quite passionate bouts of kissing just like that.

Cold shower would have helped him to deal with that problem, but Law was definitely going to nag if he touched the tap, starting to change the temperature. That was something they hadn't agreed on in the first place. So he just had to let the problem stick out, wishing they would do something about it. Or perhaps it would be better if he just jerked off? He wouldn't mind Law watching him.

Law happened to open his eyes at that moment, and his gaze was immediately sliding along Luffy's chest, lower, to the body part begging for attention. The gaze felt almost like a physical touch, making the shaft twitch hopefully.

"Is that for me?" Law asked, one eyebrow raised, and licking his lips.

Looking away from those lips was impossible for Luffy, especially as Law put a hand on his abs, slowly leaning closer. It seemed exactly like Law was going to – was he going to, really? Luffy remembered reading that pamphlet; there had been stuff about something that was called oral sex. He
had been quite fascinated by the concept, particularly after finding out how much he liked Law's taste.

As Law's mouth was approaching him, he realized that imagining how lips would feel around his own cock hadn't even crossed his mind. He had only imagined what using his own mouth on Law would be like, wondering whether you could do something particularly fun with a stretchy tongue.

It felt like that kind of thing always happened to him. He got sidetracked somehow, totally forgetting what he had been doing in the first place. But not this time. He had been about to wash all of Law, and that was what he was going to do, even though the direction in which they were proceeding right now sure seemed incredibly tempting.

"I still wanna wash you, so stand up," he said.

Law huffed, glaring at him, strange mixture of irritation and fondness in his eyes. "Don't order me around."

His mouth dropped open, ordering Law around hadn't been his intention. He was about to say that, stopping himself before he even got started, because Law's face told that if he took that particular path, it would only lead to something his crew called a marital war once again.

Bickering with Law was often fun, but not if there was something Luffy really wanted to do. He didn't want to put Law in a bad mood because that would pretty much kill the mood; Law too often took things too seriously and sometimes it was difficult to make him stop sulking. Thus, Luffy had to come up with some other solution.

This was like that part of an adventure that couldn't be solved by fighting. He knew that he wasn't great in those kind of situations, so sometimes he imagined what someone else would have done in his place, someone who was great in those kind of situations. It helped sometimes. And suddenly he remembered the Drum Island, and Vivi criticizing his way to lead. And how they had finally gotten their way, as well.

"Sorry. I just really wanna wash you, so. Can I?"

Law's lips twitched and tightened in a visible attempt to prevent himself from smiling. Then they parted and there was a small sigh. "I guess." Law stood up right away.

"I've wanted to do this for days already," Luffy said, rubbing the bar of soap between his hands and starting to slide one of them on Law's shoulder. The warm, soapy skin felt even more fascinating under his fingers than he had imagined; he lost himself stroking it with such a concentration that remembering he needed more soap was difficult. "Since I got that wound and you washed me."

Law's only answer was an appreciative noise as Luffy's hand moved to his neck. He really liked Law's neck, which was long and graceful. As it tilted under the movement of his hand, it was intriguing to see some tendons became visible underneath the skin. Besides, if he touched it in a particular way, Law totally turned to jelly. He carefully placed his palm to the side of Law's neck so that he could fiddle with the hair on his nape with fingertips. The act had Law's eyes fluttering close and breathing become heavy. And when Luffy pressed his palm bit harder against Law's neck, curling his fingertips into his nape, a quite high 'Eep' escaped Law, something he probably wasn't proud of, but it definitely made Luffy's cock ache.

What is more, that neck tasted good. Luffy leaned closer in order to kiss it right now, because why the heck he would have resisted the urge.
"Hey, wait –" Law started.

Luffy didn't wait, instead pressing his mouth to Law's neck. A second later he was gagging, coughing, and rinsing his mouth, trying to get rid of the taste of soap on his tongue.

"Idiot," Law sighed. There was some kind of frustrated and resigned but still warm tone in his voice, it didn't make the word sound insulting at all.

The tangiest taste of soap disappeared quickly with the rinsing, but the aftertaste was persistent. Eating something would surely have helped, but there was nothing to eat here, so he needed to wait for breakfast, something that didn't delight him much. Except that maybe –

He wrapped his arms around Law's neck again, pulling him into a kiss. As soon as Law tasted the soap he yanked his head further, looking so unbelievably sour that Luffy burst into laughter, needing to cling to Law so as not to fall onto his ass. There was such a fun echo in the bathroom, it only made his bout of laughter worse and worse. Law squeezed him tighter, petting his back soothingly, but it wasn't enough to make him stop laughing.

Instead his laughter died suddenly, as one of his movements had his cock slipping between Law's thighs out of the blue. The surprising sensation made him freeze, gasping for breath and eyes wide. Those thighs felt so hot and were squeezing him, and he supposed he had been fiddling with his shaft with a soapy hand without even noticing himself, because he had slipped there so easily.

He wanted to move. He needed to move or his balls were going to explode, he was so sure of it, but he couldn't even begin to guess what Law thought about someone humping his crotch. That sounded pretty weird, but it definitely didn't feel weird at all but totally awesome.

"Tra-traffy," he started, noticing that controlling his voice suddenly was very difficult.

Law squeezed his thighs together even more tightly, putting one of his hands on Luffy's buttock and grabbing it. That felt like a quite clear invitation to go on, thus that was exactly what he did.

Luffy was moving, thrusting deeply between Law's thighs, in a way that felt really natural somehow. The soapy squeeze hugging his cock was really good, but it was even hotter to see how quickly Law got hard as Luffy's shaft was softly nudging his balls while sliding beneath them.

Soon the sensations were so overflowing that he felt totally helpless in the midst of it all. Drowning. All he could do was jerking against Law, groaning and trying to avoid getting soap into his eyes or mouth while leaning his forehead on Law's shoulder.

Law didn't say anything, but let out a quiet moan at times as Luffy moved harder, kneading his ass quite possessively, cock nudging his stomach with every thrust. As Luffy pressed himself even closer to Law, trapping his erection between their bodies, a small whimper escaped Law.

That was enough. Everything was suddenly too much, the squeeze and the hands on Luffy's buttocks and heady closeness, and then there was that noise – he was cumming between Law's thighs, clinging to him like his life depended on it. He realized he had shouted only after hearing his voice echo from the walls. His knees felt like pudding, but that was totally okay, for Law wrapped his arms securely around him, holding him tightly.

For a moment he was just trying to even his breathing, wondering whether he could dribble into some kind of rubbery puddle onto the floor despite the embrace. Then he became aware of the hard shaft between their stomachs. Plus, his lips were slippery. He had licked them before thinking twice.

The disgustingly clean taste of soap kicked him into action, getting him to try rinsing it out of his
mouth again. Having gurgled with his mouth full of water for a while, he turned to Law again. He seemed extremely amused, and also quite turned on.

Luffy wanted Law feeling as great as he himself, and that hard-on was totally begging for attention, so he grasped it.

Law almost jumped out of his skin, making a strangled sound before finding his capability of speech. "Fuck, give me some warning before grabbing me just like that!"

"Sorry." Luffy squeezed the shaft as an apologize, but it twitched in his hand, hinting that it didn't mind being grabbed at all. Besides, Law's reaction had been so funny that he wanted to see it again.

Luffy tightened his hold, making Law drop the murderous expression from his face very quickly. He pushed Law's chest with his other hand, making him take a couple of steps back, and finally lean his back against the wall. Touching the cold tiles made Law shiver, but he settled more comfortably leaning against them nonetheless, sighing.

"You're going to be the death of me," Law grumbled, quietly. "Unless I really kill you first."

Luffy burst laughing. Law gave another sigh, hitting the back of his head against the wall, brows furrowed in an frustrated way.

Having calmed down a bit, Luffy started fondling Law, slowly pumping his hand up and down, and soon it felt like Law might melt into the wall. That was nice, but actually he wanted to try out that oral sex thing. He needed to do some thinking.

It seemed that Law didn't like sudden surprises while having sex, meaning that Luffy couldn't just drop onto his knees and swallow him without any warning. Come to think again, he didn't even know whether Law enjoyed that kind of thing at all, because they hadn't done anything like that yet. So, proceeding with caution might really be the way to go, that would give him a chance to see the reactions.

He leaned closer in order to kiss Law's shoulder, planning to kiss his way lower and lower from there – that felt like a good idea, and kind of cool, too – but Law's voice stopped him.

"I wasn't aware that you enjoy the taste of soap that much. Perhaps I should give your cook some advice about putting soap foam into your desserts instead of whipped cream."

... Oh. They still hadn't rinsed that damn soap away, because Luffy wasn't actually finished with his washing, and Law was avoiding the supposedly too cold shower like it was seawater.

Luffy snatched the handle of the shower, immediately turning the spray towards Law who didn't sound particularly delighted as the water suddenly hit his face. Luffy quickly showered him from head to toe, throwing the shower somewhere in the vicinity without caring where it was flowing.

"... definitely will kill you one of these days." Law looked like a wet cat, and he was shivering, but at least there was no soap on his skin anymore, so Luffy finally could execute his plan.

Law wasn't tasting like soap anymore as Luffy started kissing him here and there, from shoulder to collarbone to chest. Too bad that Law didn't taste like Law either, because he was too clean, but at least Luffy made him let out some hot sighs and moans, his muscles were tensing, and his skin felt pleasant under Luffy's lips. Apparently Law really was being cold for there were some goosebumps on his skin, so Luffy decided to properly warm him up. He kissed and licked everywhere he happened to reach, while one of his hands was fingering Law's hard-on and the other wandering on his chest.
He brushed something that felt considerably different to ordinary skin, and made Law inhale sharply. He pulled away slightly to see what that had been. A nipple. Were those sensitive? He licked it to properly find out, soon noticing that was the case. The hard shaft was throbbing and twitching in his hand as he concentrated on marveling how funny that little nub felt under his tongue.

Law's hand found its way on Luffy's shoulder, pressing down quite forcefully for a second, until suddenly letting go and starting fiddling with his hair instead. Like... Law had wanted to push him lower, and had immediately had second thoughts, preventing himself from doing that.

He descended along smooth abs, and then getting onto his knees felt like a good idea, it put him in a suitable position.

"What are you – ? You don't need to –" Law was sounding very out of breath and hoarse.

"But I wanna."

Luffy didn't have any idea what exactly he was going to do with the cock straining in front of him, but there was no doubt he was going to come up with something once he started experimenting. The first thing he wanted to find out was how putting it into his mouth would feel, so he grabbed the base securely, opening his mouth wide and pushing about half of the length in like he was about to take a bite of a banana. Except that he didn't bite; if there was one thing he knew without a doubt, it was that biting this particular body part wouldn't be the least bit appreciated.

Instead, he closed his mouth around it. Law's surprised groan almost sounded broken, and his hips twitched.

Luffy liked how hot and stiff the shaft felt in his mouth, and how very alive. It was twitching a bit as he started feeling it with his tongue, giving its underside some tentative swipes. He tried wrapping his tongue around it, but couldn't reach all the way. Law's breathing had gotten very heavy and excited, though, indicating that the idea had been awesome; so Luffy stretched his tongue and managed to make a complete loop around the throbbing length.

"Fuck," Law said. And it wasn't cursing, more like it just happened to be the only word he managed to get out while drowning.

It seemed like Luffy's actions were appreciated, so he supposed it was all right to experiment some more. He tried to feel even more, tightening his lips around the cock, and then finding out he could kind of suck it. Law's knees almost gave way, so Luffy put his hand on his hip, pressing him tightly against the wall in order to prevent him from collapsing.

Law seemed to like it. A lot. His hold of Luffy's hair tightened, until he suddenly pulled his hand off, trying to dig his fingers into the tiles instead.

Was Law liking that more, or was he assuming that Luffy didn't want to have his hair pulled and was trying to prevent himself? Luffy had no idea, nor could he talk right now. Maybe he would ask later, but if keeping his hands against the wall made Law feel more comfortable for now, whatever the reason was, then it was fine.

He ventured to let go of the base of the cock, letting his hand wander, gently fiddling with the testicles, dragging lower and feeling the inner thigh. He had cummed in between them, and remembering that sparked a lazy fire in his groin.

Law seemed to be very, very tall, if you were on your knees and looking him up. Tall and narrow and every muscle tensing, head tilted back so that he was watching the ceiling, and his neck was
stretched out and Adam's apple showing. Luffy didn't know why that particular part of Law's body was driving him crazy – among many other parts – but that was the case. He wasn't able of kissing it right now, though.

Apparently Law felt he was being watched, for he lowered his gaze, meeting Luffy's eyes even though he had difficulties with keeping his eyes open. "You could – move," Law suggested, breathing heavy.

Right, that probably had been the idea. Luffy moved his tongue, making it wriggle around the shaft. Law clearly liked it, but it still didn't exactly count as moving. Having considered a while, Luffy pulled back a little, his lips were sliding along the velvety shaft; the noise Law made confirmed that this was what he had been meaning.

He stopped when there was only the tip in his mouth. Wrapping his tongue around it had Law throwing his head back, hitting it into the wall so that Chopper would surely have started to babble about concussions if he had happened to see it.

The taste was every bit as fascinating as Luffy had been imagining, musky and manly, he liked it really much. But he also wanted to get more into his mouth, so he was leaning forward, testing what that would feel like. At this point he needed to hold Law's hips with both hands, as they tried to jerk forward by force, and the fingertips clawing the tiles were tense and white.

He felt the tip hit his throat, but that didn't slow him down.

"W-wait, I –"

Luffy stopped, humming questionably. That felt funny as there was something in his throat.

Apparently it felt even better for Law, because he was suddenly cumming, groaning and arching his back. Luffy kept him steady, trying to swallow the spurts releasing into his throat. After that he carefully pulled away.

Luffy let go slowly; Law's knees bended immediately, and he was sliding along the wall until he finally was sitting on the floor, panting and seemingly dazed.

It clearly was time to cuddle now. Luffy crawled between Law's legs – which put some mental images into his head, based on the pamphlet he apparently couldn't forget, even though Law had told him to do it. After reading that it was possible to put his cock into another's ass, and that it would feel good for both of them... well, forgetting something like that just was kind of difficult.

Maybe he doesn't wanna do it and that's why he wants me to forget it?

But if that's the case, he could TELL me that...

Perhaps it was just that Law was right. This instinct and observation thing seemed to work well and felt natural. There was no need for him to ask whether his first attempt at oral sex had been any good, because he had already seen and heard and felt it all, and Law's sated, soft expression was saying much, too.

He wrapped his arms around Law, pulling him onto his lap. "I wanna hold you."

Law didn't say anything, but slumped, leaning on his shoulder. Hugging like this was somewhat difficult due to their height difference, but Law seemed to be jelly and bent his back so that it was possible. Luffy felt like his heart was about to explode with all of the feelings he had, until he suspected it was going to pop out of his chest on its own.
"Why did you tell me to wait?" he asked before he had time to forget. "When you were in my mouth."

"Ah, that..." Law sounded so relaxed and tired, Luffy was half expecting him to fall asleep. "I thought your gag reflex would kick in if you just swallowed it down just like that." Law snorted, exhausted. "How stupid of me. I've seen you eat. But I wasn't exactly thinking clearly at that moment."

"What's gag ref- ref...?"

"Refl**ex,**" Law repeated. "Nothing you need to think about. You clearly have nothing like that."

"Hmm. Okay." Luffy wasn't going to bother his brain if there was no need, but he got the impression that the reflex was something that was considered normal; meaning it was quite plausible that Law had it. Remembering it might be useful.

They stayed there for a good while, but finally Law sighed and started to move. "I suppose we need to finish with washing before we fall asleep."

"Yeah. We don't wanna miss the breakfast."

"Idiot..." Law kissed Luffy's shoulder before scrambling onto his feet.

Luffy stayed on the floor for a moment, because there he had an excellent view of Law's backside as he turned to pick the shower from the floor. Actually he wanted to do that thing he had read about, but it seemed like he needed a plan to make it happen.
"Land ahoy!"

The shout woke Law up, groggy, like he had just fallen asleep a moment ago. Probably that really was the case.

"Land? Land!" Luffy crawled over Law with such a speed that he happened to shove his knee against Law's stomach, getting tangled into the blanket in the process and managing to face plant onto the floor, ass sticking up. That was quite a sight, considering that Luffy didn't have a stitch on. Getting dressed after the bath had felt like too much trouble, so they had just dragged their asses to bed. Luffy hadn't even bothered with wrapping a towel around his hips as he moved from the bathroom to the infirmary, making Law wonder with horrified interest if Luffy used to streak bare-assed often. For some reason he would have bet for 'Yes' option, what with how little Luffy seemed to care about modesty.

If it meant that the first thing Law saw in the morning was a naked ass, he didn't particularly feel like complaining. Especially if the ass in question happened to be as shapely as Luffy's. A knee pressing against his stomach was something he appreciated a great deal less, though.

"Ouch," they said pretty much in unison. Law was rubbing his stomach, Luffy his head.

"Try to be a bit more careful, I don't have rubber powers." However, Law was very relieved that Luffy's knee hadn't hit him a little bit lower still. And that he wasn't feeling a trace of seasickness anymore, because if your stomach was pressed while seasick the reaction wasn't particularly beautiful.

"Uh. Sorry." Luffy succeeded in sitting up. "But did you hear, it's land ahoy! I wanna see it now!" He jumped up, putting his hat onto his head before he was about to dash out.

"What if you pull the rest of your clothes on too before running onto the deck?" Law supposed that the crew might appreciate the gesture.

"Well, fine." Luffy grabbed his shorts from the floor, pulling them on without bothering with his underwear. Then he run out, without shirt and sandals, still buttoning his shorts. The sash was left lying on the floor as a yellow pile of cloth.

Law was left staring at the closed door, blinking. That was way too energetic so soon after waking up. He wanted to bury his head under the pillow for the next three hours.

Almost immediately the door was yanked open again, and Luffy pushed his head in. "There really is an island! You have to see it, Traffy! Come on –" Luffy was constantly bouncing onto his toes like some restless spring.

Law tried not to cringe because of too loud voice, making his sleep-deprived head throb like he was hung-over. It was too much to take before getting some coffee into his system. "Yeah, I'll come.
Luffy shut the door, and was gone again. Law could hear several voices talking animatedly on the deck.

Apparently it really would be best if he bothered with getting up. He had a sneaking suspicion that next time Luffy might drag him out physically instead of waiting for him to move by himself, and he preferred being dressed if that happened. Unlike Luffy, he actually cared about modesty so much that he didn't want to give a show for the whole crew.

His spine was giving some nasty cracks as he was stretching a bit in order to wake up. It seemed that he had been sleeping on his back for once – that had to be because Luffy had used his stomach as a stepping stone – but he had also succeeded in twisting one of his hands behind his nape quite peculiarly. His wrist had been in a poor position and squished under him, and now it was trying to get revenge by killing him with dull pain.

He got up from the bed, starting to search some clean clothes. They seemed to be lessening all the time even though he was laundering them. Perhaps there would be a clothing store on the island they had found, that would be very welcome occurrence. Not to mention a pharmacy.

Washing his face and brushing his teeth didn't do much in the way of shaking him awake, and his reflection in the mirror looked even more like a corpse dug out of a grave than usually. He supposed that nothing else could be expected if you had been sick for most of the evening and night, not capable of sleeping and eating, and afterwards your brain had been sucked out while taking a shower. He had expected that he could sleep after that, but with him it was never that easy. And then they found an island just as he had fallen asleep.

Fucking hell. His reaction to the island would have been considerably more approving about three hours later, he suspected that he wouldn't have slept longer than that in any case.

As Law stepped onto the deck, the Straw Hat crew cheerfully said good morning to 'Mr. Sunshine', and it didn't improve his mood much. Everyone except Sanji was out, watching the approaching island; Franky was steering.

There really was an island looming in front of them, it was close enough to be seen with the naked eye. It was still far away but he could see two tall tower-like shapes on the opposite ends of the island, even though it was too early to guess whether they were natural or built by humans.

"Where are we?" Law asked Nami, who was peering at the island through binoculars. He supposed that he already knew the answer, wishing that his presumption was wrong.

Nami sighed, lowering the binoculars and glancing at the Log Pose again. The left-hand needle was pointing straight at the island. "There's no way that's anything else than Carata."

"Shit," Law commented. Sometimes he really hated being right; it was ironic that he tended to be right remarkably often. "So, the storm blew us totally off the course then?"

"So it seems."

"Who cares?" Luffy asked. He squeezed himself between Law and Nami, throwing an arm over their shoulders. Law was too tall for that, meaning that Luffy was practically hanging from him. "It's an island! Adventure! OI CREW, prepare for landing – !"

Law winced, quickly slamming his hand onto Luffy's mouth. "Do not shout next to my ear if I have a headache."
As Luffy concentrated on tussling with Law, Nami succeeded in squirming off from his hold, moving a couple of steps aside, right next to Robin. Both women had a somewhat crafty smile on their lips.

"Don't decide to disembark just like that, either," Law continued, while Luffy was trying to wrench his hand off his mouth. "There's a Navy fort on Carata, that means we need to be careful, you realize that? Plus, we have a hostage-eh – fuck – don't –"

Apparently Luffy didn't dare to yank Law's hand hard enough to free himself, worrying of hurting him perhaps, and chose to start licking it instead. There was a couple of very slow, wide and wet licks, and after that Luffy started squeezing his tongue between Law's fingers; it was thrusting there with small and soft but persistent movements.

Law tried taking a deep breath in order to calm down, for he didn't particularly feel like making his hand kink known here, in front of everyone. Not thinking of dirty thoughts was impossible, though, as his fingers were getting such lavish attention. He almost wanted to let Luffy go so as to prevent the situation from getting even worse, but that would have meant losing.

"How did this suddenly turn into some kind of battle?"

Luffy managed to push the tip of his tongue through the gap between two of Law's fingers, curling it around one finger and starting to squeeze it into the next gap, trying to wrap it completely around the finger in question. It was resembling the recent blowjob way too vividly, and what was even worse was that it clearly reminded Luffy of it, too. Because Luffy looked at Law, eyes huge and a bit feverish, looking like he really started to enjoy what he was doing.

It felt like all of Law's thoughts and blood rushed south.

"Oi, shitty bastards!" Sanji's shout interrupted the movements of Luffy's tongue, for a moment at least. "Get a room! I don't need to see any weird hand porn before breakfast!"

Law let Luffy go. It absolutely wasn't losing, right, it was just him being polite. If the others found them disturbing, and all.

Luffy licked his lips, then bursting into laughter like participating in a show like that wasn't awkward at all. It seemed that there were some very essential differences in their sense of modesty, and Law started pondering, mildly horrified, what kind of situations he was going to end up in because of this accursed relationship. 'Being embarrassed' started to sound like a probable cause of death.

"I'm going to kill you," he announced. He still remembered way too well the warm and wet tongue slithering between his fingers, and his skin felt cool in the morning air, wet with spit.


That's exactly where the problem lies.

Law thought it was safer to concentrate on something else, even though meeting the crew's gazes was bound to be awkward, too. He looked at Sanji, who had been shouting at them from the kitchen doorway. "You mentioned the breakfast – is it done soon?" If there was one thing you could use to make Luffy shut up, it was food.

"Or a dick. No, do NOT think about it.

"Ten minutes," Sanji said, returning to the kitchen.
"Food," Luffy said, dreamy tone in his voice, looking like he might drool at any moment.

"Yeah, soon." Law was quite hungry too, having spent the evening without daring to eat, and he wished there wouldn't be any bread available. "At the breakfast we can decide what would be the most suitable strategy –"

"We eat, then Sanji's gonna make lunchboxes for us, and after that we go and explore the island."

Law put a hand onto his face, giving a heavy sigh. He could downright feel several amused and pitying gazes focusing at him.

"Don't say you wanna think again," Luffy said.

"Someone has to," Nami reminded.

"Trafalgar's right – if there's a Navy fort on the island, there's even more reason for being careful than usually," Robin said.

"But he's thinking too much!" Luffy said.

"I'm not! You're not thinking enough!" Law said.

"I'm not stupid!"

"I never said you are!"

"You did, if I'm supposedly not thinking enough!"

"Well, you're not!"

"You are the stupid one 'cause you can't stop thinking!"

Law gave a very deep sigh, lowering his hand and directing a frustrated look at Luffy. "Straw Hat. There's no recognizable logic in your arguments. How is it possible for you to first come to the conclusion that I'm saying you're stupid because you're not thinking enough, and after that say that I'm stupid because I'm thinking too much? Which one of these you're trying to use as a criterion for being stupid; not thinking enough, or thinking too much?"

Luffy was just blinking, confused, trying to take Law's words in.

"Don't even bother with it," Nami said. "He's an idiot."

"I know." Law looked at Luffy, who opened his mouth to argument. "And no, I didn't mean it as synonym of stupid."

The sullen pursing of Luffy's lips made them look really kissable. Law was resisting the urge, because everyone was following their bickering with great interest, almost holding their breath; and he didn't need an audience that big.

"Is that also part of the marital war?" Chopper asked.

"No!" Law said.

"Yeah," Usopp said to Chopper, totally ignoring Law's answer.

"Super passionate war," Franky shouted by the helm.
"It'd be best for them to just look for some jeweller's on the island, and buy rings," Usopp continued. Chopper looked at him admiringly, like he had suddenly became some kind of a relationship guru.

"Yo ho ho, it seems like that turn of events will be pretty inevitable," Brook said.

"No," Law said.

Such an emphatic refusal made Luffy startle, looking very hurt, it reminded Law of a kicked puppy. "Traffy...?"

"I meant getting rings." That look made Law feel like a monster, and he couldn't not take Luffy's hand, holding it placatingly between his own. He tried talking so quietly that the others wouldn't hear him. "I don't know yet... But even if we decided to, hm, get married –" It was difficult to believe he really was giving the idea some serious consideration."– there's no way we're getting rings."

"Why? You don't get to decide that on your own!"

Law was touching the hard bulges of Luffy's knuckles with his fingertips. "You would hit something and get your own flattened in the very first day, fist fights and rings are a bad combination." He had needed to cut some rings off his patients' fingers, and never had that been pretty, not for the ring nor the finger. "When it comes to me..." He twisted his hand so that Luffy could see it better, and glanced at his ring finger, with letter E tattooed on the base. Now it was time for a How well do you know your Luffy test; he imagined this argument would fly. "It just wouldn't look cool."

"That'd be bad," Luffy admitted. "Because you're like, one of the coolest things in the world."

For a moment Law wondered what other things were included in Luffy's list of coolest things, but supposed it would be best for his ego if he didn't know what was on the same level as him. Meat and robots, perhaps? No, he really didn't want to know.

"I've decided. We're not getting rings," Luffy declared.

"Wow, for once we agree on something."

"But we will get married."

Law rolled his eyes. "That remains to be seen."

"That's true," Robin said. She had been leaning against the railing beside Nami, observing the exchange of words with great, amused interest. "But I might warn you; our captain is quite an obstinate one..."

"I'm pretty obstinate, too," Law said.

"Traffy's more obstinate than me," Luffy claimed.

"What? How so? That's not possible." Law didn't believe there was anything in existence that was more obstinate than Luffy.

"It is too." Luffy started intertwining their fingers, being unusually serious as he looked at Law. "I'm obstinate 'cause I don't do things like other people want --"

"Oh really?" The amount of sarcasm could have sunk a ship.

"– but you don't even do those things you wanna do."
Huh. Law wasn't sure if the claim had anything to do with being obstinate anymore, but there was a disturbing amount of truth in it, and it had come totally out of the blue. It definitely was more than he was able to handle before his first cup of coffee in the morning.

Luffy definitely was not stupid. Just so extremely peculiar that sometimes it was difficult to remember.

And what was it that Law exactly wanted, anyway? A big part of his uneasiness was because even he himself didn't know that. Or, if he knew, he didn't dare to admit it even to himself.

The story of his life tended to be him never getting anything he wanted. Wanting something was the most effective way of making sure that he was forced to see it slipping through his fingers, unable to grab it. Or alternatively, he got the thing in some ironically twisted way.

"Sometimes the thing you don't even dare to wish for is given to you out of the blue."

He couldn't keep thinking stuff like this without caffeine. It clearly was time to make an incomprehensible and awkward escape, again, so he gave Luffy's hand a tighter squeeze before letting go, mumbling that he would soon see him at the breakfast. Then he disappeared into the infirmary to gather his bearings.

At least talking about rings had made him remember that he had been too tired to struggle with putting his earrings back in their place in the wee hours. They were lying on the shelf near the bed as a golden heap, looking discouraging. He hated those fucking locks.

Perhaps busying himself with them would be therapeutic. Symbolical. Examining things carefully, cleaning and polishing, putting them in their place, becoming who you're supposed to be.

Law huffed at his thoughts but searched a bottle of antiseptic solution from Chopper's cupboard anyway, sitting by the desk. Doing something was soothing him more than he had been expecting, giving him something to concentrate on and letting him use his hands; enjoy how different the cool metal and a bit squeaky cotton balls felt in his fingers.

It might be that after Dressrosa he was even more fucked up than he had previously been, but he didn't need Chopper trying out his skills in psychiatry. Law had read his own books about psychiatry from cover to cover several times, and was pretty adept in therapizing himself, thank you very much.

Right ear was the easy one, his fingers settled naturally on the frustratingly tiny fasteners, succeeding in putting them in their place. He was once again aware of his tendency to start with the easiest tasks – that way there wasn't very much to do anymore after he lost his patience. That was encouraging.

He took an earring after earring from the shelf and repeated the process; meticulous sanitizing, putting the spike through the piercing, a couple of deep breaths and visualizing the fucking clasp, and finally fastening it with a slow, precise movement. He was working in concentrated, void mindset like he was operating on a patient, not at all realizing how much time he was using.

He was sanitizing the fourth and the last earring when there was a knock on the door leading to the kitchen.

"Traffy! Time to eat!"

"Okay!" he answered, to prevent Luffy from deciding to break down the door and drag him out. He hurried to finish, throwing the cottonball drenched in antiseptic into the garbage bin, and thrusting the earring in its place. Of course he couldn't get the clasp fastened now, because his concentration had been broken. His fingers were clumsy because of irritation and haste, and no matter what he did he
couldn't find the counterpart at all.

One minute later his earlobe was tender because of his fruitless fumbling, and Luffy's patience had run out; the knocking started again, forceful enough to have the door shaking on its hinges. Law sighed, getting up to open it. He was keeping the fucking earring in its place with his other hand in order to prevent it from falling.

Everyone sitting by the table was looking at Law, who felt quite silly.

"What exactly are you doing?" Luffy asked.

"Having a doomed struggle against my earring," Law admitted, because all the excuses he could come up with would have seemed even more stupid than the truth.

"Oh. I can help –"

"No, not you." If Luffy had tried fastening an earring even once in his life, Law was ready to even eat some bread. And he wasn't in the mood for being test material right now.

"Perhaps I could offer my help, mr. Trafalgar?" Brook offered.

Law really didn't know what to expect as he took the offer, but the sooner this would be over, the better. This morning nothing seemed to go his way, but that was to be expected after catching his royal about half an hour of sleep.

He was relieved to find out that Brook knew what he was doing, and his skeleton fingers had the delicate touch of a musician; and if Brook accidentally poked Law with his afro while leaning to take a closer look, it didn't last long. It was always weird for Law to feel short, but Brook made remarkably many people feel like that with his plenty over two meters height.

"Thank you," Law muttered, wishing fervently that the Straw Hats stopped looking at him. They didn't.

"That was a very tricky fastening mechanism," Brook commented.

"Yeah. Sometimes I hate them." But could they stop talking about this and not bring it up ever again, thank you very much?

"No you don't," Luffy said, stretching out his hand, and unexpectedly tugging at one of the earrings gently.

Law moaned before he could help it.

"Keep that behind closed doors!" Sanji exploded. "And Luffy, get properly dressed if you wish to eat, I'm not serving anyone half-naked! Except that half-naked ladies are welcome, of course..."

The ensuing chaos finally drew their attention away from Law – there were several voices accusing Sanji of being a sexist pervert, while Sanji himself was concentrating on staring at nothingness, hearts flashing in his eyes as he was thinking of half-naked women. Until Nami complained about being hungry, causing Sanji to start loading food onto the table in hurry. Seeing that, in turn, made Luffy pick his clothes off the floor of the infirmary and finally pull them on properly. Except underpants, they were left lying on the middle of the floor.

To Law a fully dressed Luffy didn't look even the least bit more chaste than Luffy wearing only shorts. An unbuttoned shirt was still revealing his slender body, with flat stomach and all, and the
sash seemed to be flirting shamelessly; he felt like tugging at it all the time.

Today the breakfast was one of those hurried eating contests you just had to get used to with the Straw Hat crew. Luffy wanted to get ashore soon to have an adventure, and tried to be quick with emptying the table; the others had to wolf their servings down like their life depended on it before all the food would be gone, poking the stretchy hands with forks to defend their own plates.

No one was talking before all the food had disappeared. Sanji poured more coffee for those who wanted it – in other words for Law and Robin.

"Sanji, the lunchboxes!" Luffy demanded.

"You really can't go and have an adventure without a lunchbox, isn't that right?" Law asked.

"Of course not! Or, well, depends on what kinda adventure it is." Luffy seemed strangely mysterious while saying that, and Robin was humming behind her coffee cup.

Once again Law was wondering if there was something he should have understood, but perhaps it was some inside thing. The ship was full of those, it followed the basic principles of group dynamics that it couldn't be avoided; certain individuals always had their own things. He still couldn't imagine what Luffy and Robin were talking about when there were just the two of them. Certainly it couldn't be about historical artifacts, otherwise Luffy would have fallen asleep.

That wasn't important right now, though. "I don't think we should drop the anchor, and go to the shore at the same time."

"Naaaah, Traffy –"

"I'm not trying to say you can't go ashore. I'm trying to say that let's do it sensibly."

The majority of the crew was strongly supporting Law's idea. There was a conversation of the most sensible strategy, and Luffy spent all that time by kicking Law's shin under the table, at times muttering that Traffy was so stupid.

Apparently Luffy had decided that thinking too much was a good criterion for being stupid indeed. Law would have thought it was hysterically amusing if he hadn't been so tired and suffering from a headache, but at least caffeine had almost returned him to life.

They decided that splitting into groups and going ashore one group after another would be a good idea, that way they hoped to avoid drawing too much attention of marines. The ship would keep sailing and be ready for an escape all the time, and they would be particularly careful with handling their hostage while they were near the island. Imagining that Caesar who was a Devil's Fruit user would try escaping by swimming if no one was keeping an eye on him was ridiculous, per se. Not thinking of that possibility would have been even more ridiculous, for predicting lunatics' moves was impossible. They didn't need any extra turns involving saving him from the sea.

"Boo," Luffy said as the plan had taken shape.

Law didn't even want to imagine what Luffy had wanted to do here. Storm into that Navy fort with all of them, demanding a fight and stealing all valuables and supplies just for fun? He wouldn't have been too surprised. Especially not when it came to those supplies.

Sometimes else the idea could have sounded quite fun to him, too, but right now he preferred avoiding too much attention, and he hadn't recovered from Dressrosa, either. Not even close to it.
He took Luffy's hand and gave it a squeeze. "You can go with the first group by all means."

"I will too! And I don't need you to give me permission."

"I didn't mean –"

At that moment Sanji slammed a full lunchbox onto the table in front of Luffy. "Shut up, take your lunchbox and get going onto that shitty island!"

It was absurd to see how quickly Luffy's eyes lit and the corners of his mouth stretched towards his ears. "Okay!" he shouted, and there wasn't a trace of pout to be seen anymore.

Law memorized the fact that waiting and being bored didn't bring out the most charming side of Luffy, but on the other hand he cheered up very quickly after getting to actually do something. The discovery might prove to be useful sometime.

While the others were eating, Franky had been steering the ship around the island, finding the most suitable place for disembarking. Two towers were guarding both ends of the island, and to Franky they seemed like some kind of vantage points of the Navy, but on the backside of the island there was a place that couldn't be seen from them because of a high ridge. There was a harbour town in between the towers, and they should be able to reach it without being seen by walking over the ridge.

Soon a shopping boat for four people had appeared from the depths of the ship, and Luffy jumped into it. Zoro stretched, muttering something about going for a walk before joining him, and Nami followed, wanting to 'buy some clothes'. After that no one seemed inclined to move even though there still was room for one in the boat.

"Traffy?" Luffy asked.

Law leaned over the railing a bit, looking at the boat rocking gently beside the side of the ship. He shook his head. "I'll go later."

"I don't really think you're stupid," Luffy revealed, shifting his weight from one leg to another, looking a bit uncomfortable.

"I know. I'm not mad, either." Geez, what the heck Luffy was thinking? "I'm tired, that's all, I want to sleep a couple of hours more before needing to do anything." Plus, there was no way Law wanted to go shopping for clothes at the same time as Nami; for some reason he was sure that he would be forced to carry her million packs and perhaps comment on her choices, which sounded like torture to him.

"I hope sleeping with Luffy isn't too exhausting?" Franky asked, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Law didn't comment.

Luffy opened his mouth to comment. Law couldn't imagine what Luffy might say, but luckily Nami hit him before any words had time to come out.

"Sanji!" Nami invited. "You're coming with me to be my pack mu- eh, to accompany me while shopping."

Law winced. He had succeeded in avoiding a terrible fate indeed by deciding to go ashore later and not now. It seemed that he had also accidentally made Sanji really happy, because he was downright
floating into the boat, assuring that there was no greater joy in the world than going shopping with Nami-swan.

Robin threw a small sack into the boat. "Use these to disguise yourselves before entering the town."

"Yup!" Luffy assured, such a wide idiot grin on his face that it didn't make anyone convinced.

"Nami?" Law said. "If you happen to come by a shop selling men's clothing looking like I could wear them, tell me where that is then, please?"

Nami nodded, smiling. "Sure. Are you going to buy some colourful hoodie, perhaps?"

"Might be." That was never a bad idea, he only had about two dozen of them. Unfortunately most of them were in his sub at Zou. "I'd be even more delighted if I found a new coat and a few pairs of decent socks."

"A long, black coat?" Nami guessed.

"Of course. I refuse to acknowledge that any other kind of coats even exist."

"All right, I'll keep my eyes open." Nami turned the boat, getting ready to steer it ashore.

"Wait!" Luffy's hands were suddenly stretching, grabbing the railing on both sides of Law, and soon Luffy stretched to press his mouth on Law's lips. The kiss was short but firm, and it took Law completely by surprise. He didn't have much time to kiss Luffy back before he already was snapping back into his actual height, calling out, "See you!"

"Yeah..." Law watched the boat moving away, hand on his lips, and pretty stupefied. Luffy had bumped into Zoro while shortening, accidentally tackling him onto the bottom of the boat, where he was lying under Luffy, scowling and threatening to cut Luffy in two. That kind of dynamics seemed very familiar to Law, and he stifled an absolutely ridiculous pang of jealousy; surely there was no reason for that kind of feeling.

"Let's hope they won't destroy the whole island before you get a chance to go shopping," Robin said.

"Let's... that sounds like a pretty plausible scenario," Law admitted.

"Luffy going somewhere with Zoro is always bad," Usopp said. "They're going to get lost for sure – not even a shred of sense of directions, unlike me – and it's a sure thing that they'll end up knocking onto the door of that fort, getting all the marines running after them." He was gnawing his nails for a moment. "Perhaps I should have gone too – they could need the skills of great Captain Usopp – like that time when I was battling those giant meat-eating snails –"

"I'm going to catch some sleep," Law announced.

Chopper didn't say a word about sleeping in daytime, but he seemed to be thinking of it as he squirmed in his place.

Law didn't actually think he would be able to fall asleep again, but at least he was going to lie on the bed for a while. When he had woken up, he hadn't been ready to face a new day and needing to do anything.

His brain had started working in such overdrive again that sleeping just didn't happen. Soon he
would be ready to knock himself out with the sleeping pills Chopper had given him, that would compensate the situation some.

And after that the rat race would start accelerating again.

He gave a heavy sigh, kicking his boots off and collapsing to lie prone on the bed. There was a distinct scent of Luffy in the pillow, which had millions of things spinning in his mind as a messed up tangle.

"... don't even do those things you wanna do."

Was it like he wasn't doing them? He was together with Luffy now, which definitely was something he wanted. That had proven to be even nicer than he had been expecting, and it got better all the time as they overcame that awkward fumbling phase in the beginning. No matter how ludicrous and incompatible their relationship seemed to be, there was something that felt right in it, somehow it was working.

Even while he was way too tired to really share Luffy's enthusiasm concerning a new island, and deal with the fact that his reason was ignored once again, and Luffy grew bored listening to his nagging.

 Fuck, we really are like an old married couple.

 And I'm that nagging hag who's waving a scoop around...

The realization wasn't stroking his ego the right way.

But still, even at times like that... it still worked. They weren't even close to being angry, and Luffy wanted to kiss him before leaving.

What else could he possibly want?

Except some courage to admit that it would be nice if it never ended. To say 'yes'. And even though they were not going to get rings, there certainly was something they could exchange –

No, he was being too macabre once again. Why the fuck would anyone want to do that? Why had Luffy asked him if it was possible? Now he couldn't help thinking of it all the time.

It seemed that he had kept his heart safe in its figurative box for a good reason. He was way too eager to give it away at the moment someone found out how to open the lock.

~*~

Zoro was rubbing a bump on the back of his head, starting to stroll along the streets beside Luffy. Luffy was doing exactly the same.

Nami's opinion had been that they were going to do something stupid in any case, deciding to hit them beforehand. That witch... Miraculous enough, Luffy had succeeded in pestering Nami to give them noticeably more money than their usual allowances. It was strange, but what was even stranger was that Luffy apparently wanted to buy something special, what with him needing that money. Usually they only cared about having enough for eating and drinking something.

Zoro didn't bother with asking about it. If Luffy wanted to do something, he would do it soon enough anyway, and then he was going to find out even without asking.
Just strolling around in easy silence was nice, getting to move a bit after the days spent aboard the ship. Having walked to the outskirts of the town, they had split with Nami and Sanji, Nami downright ordering them to head to another direction "and not wrecking the place before I've had time to buy everything these shops have to offer". As if anyone even wanted a shopping tour with the witch and the pervy cook eating from her hand.

Luffy's brand new boyfriend seemed to be sensible, because he had managed to avoid the fate of a pack-mule.

The thought had Zoro glancing at Luffy, who was walking with such carefree joyful steps that he was almost skipping, hands flailing here and there as he was pointing at this or that thing he thought was funny or interesting. Totally typical Luffy, regardless the fact that his notorious straw hat had been covered with a big blue scarf as a disguise, and there were red marks adorning the side of his neck and his collarbone. Zoro didn't need to ask where those had came from.

However, the most important thing was that Luffy was smiling like he usually was, if not even more sunny than that. That was everything Zoro needed to know of Luffy's relationship – it told him the most essential thing; so far there was no reason for him to cut Law in pieces. But he was going to continue keeping his eye open.

"This way!" Luffy called out, grabbing Zoro's arm and yanking him to the right direction.

He supposed he had been lost in thought because he had been about to lose Luffy. But it wasn't his fault that these streets kept moving!

The town was small but pretty lively, there was a lot of people on the streets, and no one looked at them twice. Zoro suspected it wasn't because of their disguises, they weren't anything special. He himself was wearing a curly brown wig so as to cover his noteworthy haircolor, but his swords were in their place as usual, visible for everyone. It was more their attitude as they were striding forward on the street, like they had every right to be there and nothing to hide. People tended to believe the impression they got, just passing by. Glancing furtively around, hiding and running away gathered a lot more attention and suspicions.

A couple of times he spotted marines in their blue and white uniforms among the crowd, and they didn't see two pirates passing by them; even though the walls of the buildings were covered with their wanted posters.

Zoro was somewhat disappointed with the lack of action, getting to cross swords with someone would have been nice. On the other hand, Luffy had a remarkable tendency to find a fight sooner or later, so the peace would probably be short-lived. He would be ready when it happened.

They had been strolling around for a good while when Luffy suddenly jumped at least a meter upwards, cheering loudly. "Over there!" He pointed at a small shop that seemed to sell all kinds of junk.

Before Zoro had time to ask what was supposed to be so awesome in the shop, Luffy had grabbed him, catapulting them through the open door. Luffy barely managed to brake before bumping into a bookshelf, so loaded with old maps and log books that it seemed ready to explode.

"Oh, look! Nami'd like these..." Luffy said.

Zoro grunted, shaking his head in order to clear it after their rush.

There was a tiny old woman sitting behind the cash register, looking at them pretty suspiciously,
which wasn't surprising in the least. She kept eyeing them carefully even as they started wandering in
the shop, obviously peaceful.

"Don't tell me you're going to buy that bronze statue," Zoro said. Luffy had been dreaming of such a
thing from the very beginning, one of those Luffy's peculiarities no one was able to understand.

Luffy's eyes lit in a frightening way. "You think they sell stuff like that in here? That'd be sooo
cool..."

"You would think so."

"That'd look so cool in the middle of the deck! I wanna have a really big and manly one."

Zoro regretted bringing bronze statues up. "You know how Franky is when it comes to decorating
the ship." If Franky thought that something didn't fit the style, it wasn't accepted. A bronze statue in
the middle of the deck would never be accepted by him, and he had a lot of say when it came to the
ship.

"Naaa," Luffy whined, but cheered up soon. "But good thing then that I'm not looking for a statue!"

"What is it that you're trying to find here, then?" Zoro was inspecting a barrel full of old swords, but
all of them were beaten-up and of poor quality. It seemed like one of them had been used for
chopping wood, very unskillfully; he shook his head sadly as he put it back among the others. Poor
sword.

"I need an armour."

And there was another one of those peculiarities Zoro found impossible to understand. Luffy wore
an armour with great joy anytime an opportunity presented itself, but so far he had never been
actively searching for such a thing or claimed that he downright needed one. "Why?"

"'Cause I wanna reduce my boyfriend, of course," Luffy announced, like it was the most obvious
thing in the world.

Zoro wished that this was Luffy getting words messed up like he occasionally did, because 'reducing'
sounded pretty horrid. He could have lived without the mental image where an armour-wearing
Luffy was 'reducing' Law somehow. He doubted that Law would like it much, either, even though it
seemed like he had some pretty disturbing interests.

Zoro thought a while what word was close enough and could be associated with an armour in
Luffy's mind. "You mean seducing?" he asked.

"Yup. That's what I said."

"No you didn't."

Luffy didn't answer in favor of slowly moving between the shelves, inspecting a thing after another.
So far they hadn't seen any armours, luckily. Nor bronze statues.

Now Zoro was seeing a mental image of Luffy, wearing an armour and trying to seduce Law.
Somehow it was even more disturbing than the previous image, and he didn't believe it would work
like Luffy hoped. Law didn't seem like a guy with any kind of armour kink, but on the other hand,
how could you know by just looking at him?

"Why do you need to seduce him?" Hadn't Luffy done that already? It seemed to have been
effective, if the things Zoro had seen were any indication.

Luffy didn't answer, he was absorbed in trying a selection of bracelets on. "Hey Zoro, isn't this one cool!" Luffy asked, showing a bracelet made of steel and strips of leather.

In fact, it really was... and it also was way too big for Luffy to wear it around his skinny wrist. Zoro repeated his question, getting Luffy to finally leave the bracelets alone and move forward on the aisle.

"I wanna be irresistible," Luffy said.

Zoro didn't bother with asking whether he meant irresistible.

"You feel like he doesn't think you're charming enough?" he asked, trying to understand how on earth he had ended up having this conversation. He wasn't one for being an advisor in romantic things, but on the other hand he often understood Luffy. Perhaps that was why they were talking about this.

"Hmm... nope!"

Zoro sighed. "Why do you need to make an effort, then?"

Luffy opened his mouth to tell, and snapped it shut right away. He was squirming on his place, seemingly awkward, looking at the shelves and ceiling and floor and everything else but Zoro, opening and closing his mouth a couple of times more without saying a word.

"Luffy, what's the matter?" Luffy refusing to talk was always alarming.

"Traffy probably doesn't want me to say," Luffy said, finally.

Probably not, considering how much Law seemed to appreciate privacy and how withdrawn he seemed to be. But if this, whatever this was about, was bothering Luffy... well, then it was Zoro's business.

He also was quite sure that the so far unidentifiable problem wouldn't be solved by kinky armour sex, no matter what Luffy thought about it. He dragged Luffy out of the junk shop, and into the small restaurant on the other side of the street, where they found a nice secluded table for themselves, and ordered about half of the menu.

After all, they did have loads of money that wouldn't be used to buy an armour for a means of seduction.

They had their lunchboxes, too, but Luffy was capable of eating almost unlimited amount of food, and getting to taste something new always cheered him up. Zoro hoped that feeding would make him slip it. Besides, he himself was in need of some drinks after those mental images. Or just for the heck of it. As if you needed an excuse to down some alcohol.

There was a ringing silence surrounding them while they waited for the food. Luffy was bored, twisting his fingers in a way that would have broken every single bone and joint if he didn't have his Devil's Fruit power. Watching that was pretty disturbing.

"Have you talked with him about it?" Zoro asked. That felt like the most obvious thing to do if something was bothering – ask first and then cut in pieces if you don't like the answer.

He was answered by a shake of head.
"Luffy..." Zoro was taken by an almost irresistible urge to cover his face with his hand, followed by a completely unexpected feeling of sympathy for Law.

"But I thought that if I look cool enough things just kinda happen!"

"What things?"

"Not telling you!"

Zoro gave up with asking about that. He wasn't even interested, really, and if Luffy had decided to not tell, there was nothing he could do. Luffy couldn't lie worth shit, but he knew how to be silent if it was important. Apparently Luffy considered Law's opinion very important, if he decided to not talk about intimate details.

Well, that was a promising sign in itself, at least. Law better appreciate it, because that was rare as hell.

Three waiters came and loaded the table with food. Luffy attacked it with his usual enthusiasm, declaring how good everything was with his mouth full.

Everything seemed to be well... Zoro decided to have a chat with Law once the opportunity presented itself, anyway. He had been longing for someone with whom to cross swords, after all.
“Nothing More Than Words”

Chapter Notes

This took me longer than I had hoped, but I'm dealing with a shitload of stress right now. I eventually got it done, though.

Thank you readers, your support has cheered me up greatly. <3

Usopp made use of a peaceful moment and beautiful weather by moving his workshop onto the deck, where he was sitting on a tool box, wondering what it was that he was doing wrong while developing new kind of ammunition. Spikes popped out at the right moment, but the projectiles were flying more heavily than they should; perhaps their changing shape was affecting the air resistance too much? It made the trajectory regrettably short, but they could be used if the target was close enough.

He could have asked Franky's opinion of the matter, but he was crawling somewhere in the bowels of the ship, checking structures after the storm, so painstakingly meticulous and careful that the task would take hours for sure.

Perhaps he should just make more similar projectiles, a bit different shapes and adjustments, and try out which one of them worked best. 'Trial and error' was a somewhat working way of developing weapons, and there was no need to hurry.

It very rarely was this peaceful aboard Sunny, Luffy's absence really made a noticeable difference. Robin and Chopper were lazing in deck chairs, absorbed in their books, and Brook was leisurely steering the ship here and there, staying behind the island all the time. Brook was concentrating more on music than steering, practising playing a flute for a change; its soft tones reminded of birds' singing.

"Looks like those would make some nasty wounds," said a voice suddenly.

The fright made Usopp jump up before he even had time to realize that Law had apparently had enough with sleeping. Or maybe it was more like trying to sleep, because Law didn't look the least bit refreshed. It was creepy that he was able to move so silently if he wanted to, not even his heels made any sound on the lawn deck. Had he even walked here, or had he used his Power and just appeared?

"That'd be the intention," Usopp said, looking at the spiky little pellet lying on his palm. "If they managed to hit the target, that is..."

"There's no denying that hitting seems to be an essential factor in producing a wound."

Usopp huffed. Most of the time Law was talking so damn flatly that it was a challenge to interpret if he was trying to be derisive or funny, or was it just him thinking that Usopp simply was an idiot.

He still didn't understand how Law could fit together with Luffy, despite having seen them together quite many times already. If he was safely accompanied with the others he could joke about them resembling an old married couple – because they really did – but every time he was seriously trying
to understand, their relationship was evading all common sense. All of it was absurd.

Sure, you could expect absurd of Luffy, also when it came to relationship stuff, but still...

"What do you want?" Usopp asked, as the silence had started getting to him. He and Law didn't have amicable small talk with each other, meaning that Law had to have some business with him. It wasn't like Law seemed to loathe or avoid him in any way, it was more like Law considered him just as interesting and worthy of attention as some insect just happening to be there. That suited him just fine. He preferred keeping his distance to a guy who had the habit of ripping hearts out of people's chests, including *his own*.

"Take your weapon and come with me." Law turned around, starting to stride who knows where, without bothering to wait or even think whether Usopp was going to do like he was told. Why bother when he was well aware that Usopp didn't have courage to not obey. In addition to being damn creepy, Law also was an alliance captain and thus the second highest authority in the group, right after Luffy.

"W-wait!" Usopp yelped, pushing his ammunition into his bag in haste. He grabbed his slingshot before hurrying after Law.

There was no need to ask where they were going, because very soon Law had arrived at the door leading to the storage room currently serving as a cell. Usopp hadn't needed to see their hostage for days, and he didn't want to see him now, either, but it seemed like Law had other ideas.

"It's too bad that we need to let him go to toilet despite the island being so near," Law said. "So, you make sure that he doesn't try anything desperate."

Usopp swallowed. "Why *me*? If he does something you can't deal with, what do you expect me to do then? Unlike some, I'm totally ordinary—"

"You seem like a smart guy. Do you really need to be reminded that I happen to have a weakness?"

Indeed, the Devil's Fruit. The Sea Stone cuffs were keeping Caesar in check, but at the same time it also was an item Law definitely didn't want to touch. It really was a weakness. And Law believed that Usopp would be able to take it if something unlikely happened...

He was downright puffing with pride, standing as straight as possible. "Don't you worry, the great Captain Usopp is ready to have your back anytime!"

"How reassuring." One corner of Law's mouth rose slightly. "I'm going to open the door now, ready?"

Usopp gave a tense nod, drawing his slingshot.

Caesar Clown was sitting on a mattress in the corner of the room, leafing a book. He looked pitiful; his nose was never going to recover after meeting Luffy's fist, and he didn't seem willing to try attacking Law in any way.

Usopp wasn't fooled by his appearance at all – in addition to being unpredictable Caesar also was intelligent and deceitful. That was the reason for not including Luffy into the group taking care of the hostage despite being more than strong enough to handle him. But Luffy was way too easy to irritate, lead astray and manipulate if you found the right buttons to push; it was too much of a risk.

"Get out," Law ordered, drawing his sword just in case. The blade seemed to be disturbingly long, and inconvenient to use; Usopp couldn't help thinking if the weapon wasn't quite impractical. On the
other hand he knew nothing of swords besides them being sharp. This one was bound to be sharp, too; following the slightly curved blade with his gaze almost felt like his eyeballs were slashed in two. The sword gave him an unnerving, strange feeling, giving his arms goosebumps.

Caesar came out slowly, keeping his hands properly visible all the time. The chain connecting the cuffs was longish, which had both pros and cons. On the other hand he was able to manage various tasks by himself, so that no one needed to help him too intimately; there was no way anyone would have wanted that. On the other hand the chain could be utilized as a weapon if Caesar dared to try and strangle someone with it, for example. Law was looking at it like it was an alive and venomous snake.

The atmosphere was so tense that Usopp found breathing difficult. He tried to inhale more deeply, worried that he might start hyperventilating, but managing to keep the slingshot steady in his hands. So far everything was going fine, the tip of Law's sword settled between Caesar's shoulder blades after he had passed by, surely dampening his will to try anything funny. No one said anything on the way to the nearest toilet, where Caesar was heading to without being prompted. This seemed to be a routine thing already.

"Don't even dream of locking it," Law warned, as Caesar closed the door after him. "I do know, there's no need to remind me every single time! Unlike some aboard this ship, I'm not mentally challenged. But this is improper, perverted, insulting my privacy... Do you happen to have urophilia or something like that you're trying to satisfy, Trafalgar? Just wait for Joker get out of the jail, and then..." Caesar's grating flood of whining carried from behind the closed – but not locked – door. Usopp had had time to blissfully forget how annoying their hostage's voice used to be, it made him grit his teeth, suffering.

Law's face remained blank, but the knuckles of the hand holding the sword went white. He took a deep breath, apparently deciding that chatting with Usopp was a better way to spend time than listening to Caesar. "On his first day as a hostage he decided to lock himself in, refusing to open the door... Franky detached the hinges to open it and drag him out."

Usopp hadn't heard even one word of the incidence. Probably the same went for everyone who wasn't responsible of the hostage. Perhaps even Luffy. It might not be his business, in this crew he was used to not getting involved in someone else's tasks if they hadn't asked for help, but it still made him feel like useless outsider. Even though he really didn't want to get more involved with this particular task.

"Why would anyone want to lock themselves into a toilet?" he asked.

Law raised his bony shoulders. His posture really was terrible. "Maybe he wished for finding a razor or some caustic detergent or something else he could use as a weapon, if there was time to search thoroughly. Maybe it was just in order to be an asshole. He definitely nailed the latter."

There was nothing you could add to that. Usopp just nodded, trying to understand why his chest was feeling so tight. He was nervous, of course, he always was during difficult moments, but this was something else. His knees weren't even shaking so much this time. This enraged anxiousness didn't feel familiar at all, and it made no sense. Once again he was suspecting that he was going crazy because of too much stress, perhaps he should talk to Chopper again.

"But he didn't try pulling that trick twice," Law said. One corner of his mouth was twisted into a very unpleasant smirk.
"Um, why's that?" Usopp supposed he didn't want to know, but if he didn't find out the truth, his imagination would offer some even nastier alternatives.

"After that I cut his heart out."

A violent shudder went through Usopp. That he had known, after that heart episode. No matter what Luffy said, he still considered that creepy as hell. The ghastly impression was further emphasized by Law's flat tone while he was talking about it; apparently he didn't think it was a big deal. 'I just severed his heart and stored it in my own chest, so what?'

"And you're going to pay for that!" Caesar shouted from behind the door.

"Remember to wash your hands," was Law's answer.

Usopp tried to hold in a snort of laughter, the answer was so hysterical. If Caesar's cursing litany was any indication, he didn't appreciate it very highly, but after flushing there really was the sound of water running.

The way back to the storage room was just like it had been to the other way; silent, slow, and the tip of the sword between Caesar's shoulder blades. Once Caesar tried stopping to take a look around himself and at the island that was quite near, earning him an impatient poke with the sword.

"Owwh!" Caesar yelped. "You should treat my great brain with more respect. I'm going to send a complaint to the Committee of Prisoner Management --"

"Feel free to try. I'm well aware that such a thing doesn't exist, so if fantasizing makes you feel better, be my guest. Now move!"

Caesar moved. But he didn't stop talking even for a moment. "You always were too smart to use, on Punk Hazard. But have you forgotten how beautiful miracles we accomplished together, at that time when you treated my cute subordinates --"

"Who you tried to kill with poisonous gas yourself," Law interrupted.

"Inevitable sacrifices in the name of science. If we were to work together again --"

A poke with the tip of the sword. "Get going."

"Aa-ah, am I sensing slight tensing of your nerves? Owh, all right, all right, I'm going! How dearly I wish to see the day of your doom, Trafalgar. I'm sure Joker will forgive me everything if I hand you to him by the scruff of your neck. He wants you. Your Power and you."

Usopp dropped onto his knees; the flood of emotions coursing through him was so thick and paralyzing that he couldn't even breathe anymore. He didn't even have time to take in every word Caesar had uttered before he was hit by those feelings, so why was he so unreasonably enraged that he wanted to murder their hostage even if he had to gnaw him to death with his own teeth? His lungs didn't have room to get filled with air in his too tight feeling ribcage.

"You don't want to make me angry, Caesar." Law's voice was extremely strained, and his face was white. "Who knows what might happen to your heart..."

These feelings are HIS.
The epiphany was clear now, as Usopp was right next to Law. No wonder that these sudden bouts of emotions didn't seem to follow any logic; they weren't even his own. He wasn't going crazy, after all. Suddenly he had a million things he wanted to ask Law, but not right now. Not before they had tossed Caesar back into his storage room, and Law had calmed down some.

Usopp strived to get on his feet, doing his best to take some breaths and follow the others, knees shaking. But he kept his aim at Caesar all the time, trying to get some confidence from the knowledge that even in a situation like this he could hit just where he wanted to. He might be a chicken, he might have a too big mouth, he might not know what the fuck was going on here, but as a sharpshooter he was the best.

Threatening Caesar with his heart shut him up. If the interaction between Caesar and Law was always like this, Usopp suddenly understood the reason for Law thinking that keeping that heart at hand just in case was a great idea.

And yeah, it still was creepy as hell, but he felt like he had been somewhat unfair to Law anyways. Caesar didn't try to pull anything on the way to the storage room, and Law shut and locked the door. It closed with a determined click – Law probably would have wanted to slam it off its hinges, but was refusing to reveal to their hostage how badly he was shaken mentally. It was admirable.

After locking the door Law sheathed his sword, marching away without saying a word. Usopp had to force his shaky legs to run in order to follow, second guessing whether following was a good idea at all. However, he had too many questions.

Law walked to the stern, where he slumped to lean his elbows on the railing, burying his head into his hands. "Would you be kind enough to bug off?"

"Right now I don't think I can," Usopp said, sitting on the railing some distance away. He needed all of his courage to say that.

Law didn't cut him in two, just letting out a frustrated sigh and starting to massage his temples. The uncomfortable silence lasted several minutes, until Law finally spoke. "What if we abandon all of our strategies and just use him to bait some Sea Kings?"

"At least that way he'd be useful. Luffy'd be delighted if he got tons of meat to eat," Usopp said.

"It's clear that kidnapping him was one of my worst ideas. And there have been quite fucking many of those bad ones."

Usopp hummed, not knowing what to say. Before Dressrosa the idea had seemed very brilliant to him; who could have guessed that Doflamingo wouldn't play according to the same rules as the others, in the end leaving them with a useless – and really unpleasant – hostage. That had been impossible to predict, and that was just where the problems had started from. "Hey, you can't plan things perfectly if they have anything to do with Luffy. It's not your fault."

"It is, actually. Everything always feels like it's my fault."

He couldn't find anything to say, because the idea of him trying to comfort Law was way too absurd. Perhaps he should just move further away, continuing with developing his ammunition, but that felt like a cold alternative. Thus he was just sitting there on the railing, swinging his legs and trying to really understand everything that had taken place a moment ago, and what Caesar had exactly said.

Remembering made Usopp's stomach trying to turn upside down, even though Law's emotions had already settled so that he didn't have any clue of them. Or perhaps his uncontrolled ability had just
stopped working again.

He was feverishly thinking of something to say, but no words came out of his mouth. As he tried, his jaw was just getting firmly locked, refusing to open.

The uncomfortable silence was broken by Law. "Don't tell Luffy a word of that bullshit our dear hostage keeps spouting, okay?"

Usopp hadn't had time to think so far, but he fully understood why Law asked for it. If Luffy heard of this, he would explode worse than ever before, and there was no one capable of predicting where that would lead to. Still... "Doesn't he kinda have the right to know what's going on, after all he was the one fighting Caesar that time –"

"They were nothing more than words," Law interrupted.

"He might feel like he's responsible and –"

"And that is a fabulous reason for keeping quiet." Law raised his gaze from the sea, looking seriously at Usopp. "We don't need Luffy striking a Caesar-shaped hole to the side of the ship by throwing him through it, and after that trying to break into Impel Down in order to kick Doflamingo's ass again. It's not like I wouldn't enjoy seeing that, but it'd be so dangerous that it's not worth it. Making him worried and angry over a few words spoken by a lunatic would be useless."

"Are they surely nothing more than words?" Asking this wasn't the least bit sensitive, but Usopp needed to know, and his big mouth had just opened and spurted the question out before he had time to think whether it was a good idea. "Weren't you captured by Do-doflamingo...?" About half of the inhabitants of Dressrosa had happened to see Luffy running through the island, carrying the shackled Law. Those handcuffs had needed to come from somewhere.

Damn, it's no wonder if he doesn't want to be near similar ones right now...

Law nodded. "He only had time to give me a good beating."

Right, that wasn't a big deal at all.

"And tell some of his plans concerning me. But nothing happened. So, I appreciate you keeping you mouth shut."

Usopp was ready to bet that those plans had been extremely disturbing to hear, perhaps the kind that gave you nightmares for years.

And Luffy had saved Law from that monster. The whole Dressrosa incidence started sounding really romantic when you thought at it like that; like a version of those fairy tales where a knight saves a princess from a castle guarded by a dragon. Usopp had always known how to appreciate a good story, that was why he told them all the time himself. Anyway, he didn't believe that Law would appreciate getting the part of the princess.

It was clear as water that Luffy had gotten overprotective when it came to Law – and not without a reason too, and it wasn't a surprise either, Luffy was protective of them all. And in this situation the only way to keep him from doing anything stupid was keeping their mouth shut. That seemed like the most sensible choice, and keeping out of danger was a tactic Usopp liked to prefer.

"Fine. I don't like this, it seems like even worse mess than I imagined at that time when you proposed an alliance –" He had known there was going to be problems but he hadn't expected things turning out like this. "But I don't want to be forced to break into Impel Down with Luffy, so, okay."
"Great, thanks. It's unfortunate that you needed to hear it – had I guessed that Caesar decides to get eloquent, I'd have dealt with him alone."

"Are you totally out of your mind!?" Working alone was a ludicrous idea, especially after Law himself had emphasized being careful near the island, reminding of his weakness. Besides, that wasn't something anyone should go through alone.

"Yes, thank you for asking." Law sounded amused in a painful way. "I thought it already went without saying."

Well, at least Law seemed much more like himself now, having gotten his sarcasm switched on again. He was staring at the wake of the ship, starting to toy with the rope adorning the sheath of his sword, looking like he was bored.

Usopp tried adding the new sides he had found out this morning to the man he had avoided for a long time. There was no way Law was ever going to stop being creepy and cold, but he also was a person. Someone who had emotions like everyone else, who couldn't get his own earrings fastened, and got confused when Luffy kissed him goodbye.

"Don't look at me like that, I'm totally fine," Law said.

Usopp didn't have the heart to tell that he had felt exactly how much Law was not fine. Not right now, anyway, it seemed like today was a bad day.

~=*

Shopping for clothes was always a painful and boring ordeal, but at least the shop where Nami had directed Law was just what he had been hoping for. Finding out that Nami was perfectly aware of what design Law preferred when it came to clothes was a bit disturbing, but maybe it didn't take more than a glance at his build and some interest in clothes to notice that. The most commonly used sizing looked and felt awful on him, those clothes always were too loose at his waist, not to mention too short sleeves and pant legs.

Thus Nami had told him not to waste his time in a large brand store closest to the ship, recommending a little shop further away with a more specialized selection.

"How about this one?" Chopper asked, pointing at a yellow and red shirt with long sleeves.

"Charming," Law said. He didn't mind Chopper deciding to come with him, at least it kept him from thinking too much. But Chopper's eagerness to point at every colourful piece of clothing had him missing Shachi, who loved making fun about his ironic taste in colours. He used to answer by wearing the ghastliest of his smiles on his lips and stating that bright colours matched with his cheerful personality elegantly.

"Or this?" Chopper had succeeded in finding a totally absurd piece of clothing, it was blue, red and orange.

"Urgh." There was a limit to everything. One of his golden rules stated that there shouldn't be more than two different colours in a piece of clothing, more than that was too much, it looked like messed up patchwork quilt.

Chopper was snickering while hanging the shirt back.

Some foolish behavior was actually welcome just now, it made Law feel little bit lighter, which was what he desperately needed. He hadn't succeeded in catching any more sleep in the morning, it
wasn't a surprise but it still was unpleasant. As he had crawled out of the bed, deadly tired, he had remembered it was his turn to deal with Caesar. That had really went well this time.

He didn't have the strength to start wondering why Caesar was aware of Doflamingo's will to get his hands to Law. Doflamingo liked to talk, maybe Monet was the one who had gossiped... suddenly he wished for having had the pleasure of piercing through Monet's heart himself, but the bitch was dead now and that was it. If he really wanted to know he could threaten and torture the answer out of Caesar, but it didn't feel worth the trouble. Besides, he didn't want to give Caesar any extra ammo if it had been only a lucky guess. After all, Caesar had tried getting under his skin and getting a grip of him since he had arrived at Punk Hazard, so he had tried different approaches and saying all kind of things to see what was working.

This hit was just a coincidence, he needed to believe in that and not react to it; just a coincidence, just a coincidence, just a coincidence. Caesar had just happened to hear too much and gotten an inspiration. There were things more important than that.

Fuck, he could have lived without someone else than Luffy, Chopper and Robin finding out what a wreck he was. He hadn't much enjoyed Caesar's threat of handing him to Doflamingo as a plaything, either – but somehow it was even more humiliating when someone else had happened to be there and hear it.

Usopp was overreacting to everything, turning even a cut in his finger into a drama, but this time his startled and queasy shaking had seemed like too much even according to his own yardstick. He had seemed to feel just as terrible as Law had been feeling, and that was insane, of course.

Luckily every *Haki* user had been on the island at that moment, because Law probably had been flooding the whole ship with some hellish angst once again. Luffy might have felt it a good distance away, though; at least Luffy had grabbed him into a quite stifling hug right after returning to the ship, asking whether he was all right.

Of course he was totally fucking all right, thank you very much for asking. Why on earth he wouldn't be. He had just been awake almost all night, seasick; been really slow and clumsy and useless all morning, without succeeding in getting more sleep anyway; plus he had been reminded of some very vivid threats of rape.

He had never been better, and fuck you all.

*They were nothing more than words. Desperate blathering of a cowardly man who is captured by his enemies. Stop thinking of it. Right now.*

*Doflamingo is in jail. He's not going to appear suddenly to save his mad scientist, no matter what Caesar says. Nothing more than words.*

Law didn't need to worry of anything, he was totally fucking all right. Not anxious or irrational in the least.

He was tossing clothes into his basket, hardly glancing at their sizes. A pile of boxers, a bundle of absolutely charming yellow-and-black-striped socks, an electric blue hoodie with an orange hood and zipper. They matched with his cheerful personality. He was about to burst into hysterical laughter.

"Are you not going to try that on?" Chopper asked, looking at the shirt.

"Nope. That's my size."
"Nami's always complaining about how much the sizes are varying –"

"I don't have strength to deal with my trauma-induced claustrophobia right now," Law grunted. If it was a good day, he was capable of going into a cramped changing room without having a panic attack, acting like he was totally normal. Today wasn't a good day and he really didn't have any intention of forcing himself go through that agony too.

Chopper's mouth snapped shut, and he was just tiptoeing after Law, silent and shoulders sagging.

Law took a deep breath, and slowly let it out. Like always happened, snapping at Chopper made him even more miserable; only an utter monster was capable of being mean to someone so insanely cute. He seemed to be talented at that, which wasn't particularly making him any happier with himself.

"Sorry," he said. "This is starting to get out of hand again. I need to get some sleep tonight." More sleeping pills, wasn't that great. The side effects next morning were always so delightful.

He expected Chopper to say something about sleeping, or telling that he really looked tired; that would have irritated him out of his mind, because oh really? Instead, Chopper just suggested visiting that coffee shop they had seen while searching for the clothing shop.

"Sounds good," Law said. Coffee always soothed his nerves. "I only need a coat, if there are suitable ones available here."

Chopper found a rack of coats in a corner of the shop. Going through them was quite an easy task because Law knew exactly what he was searching for – he wanted his coats to be black, and with long and wide hem. A hood was a welcome extra, but it wasn't absolutely essential if other parameters met his standards. He found two decent alternatives and ended up with the thinner one of them, there would probably be more use for that.

Law felt slightly better after exiting the shop, three shopping bags on his arm. Not a long time ago he had thought he would never need new clothes again. But he was alive, meaning that he needed them. Understanding the fact still gave him trouble at times.

_I am alive._

The Navy and the Government would be more than happy to separate his head worth more than five hundred million berries from the rest of his body. Law spotted a group of marines in front of the coffee shop, quickly pushing his hat into one of his bags, for it was pretty easy to recognize especially because it was also seen in the picture in his wanted poster.

"Keep still, you are a plush toy," he said, grabbing Chopper who was even easier to recognize.

Chopper let out a startled squeal, but stayed in a frozen state on Law's arm. Law marched by the coffee shop and the group of marines like he was just minding his own business, and no one gave a second glance at a man carrying a plush toy and a bunch of bags from a clothing store.

He turned to a side alley, trying not to look like he was slipping away. The coffee shop needed to wait for a moment. It was a lucky incidence that there happened to be a pharmacy by the alley, reminding him that he also needed to visit one.

He put Chopper onto the ground after getting securely behind the corner. "Sorry about that, but at least they didn't realize who we are."

"It's fine, I don't mind. Oh look, a pharmacy! I need to refill my storage."
"Me too," Law said.

Their visit in the pharmacy was quite a lengthy one, and after that they returned to the previous street. The marine group wasn't in front of the coffee shop anymore. It felt like the day was finally getting better as Law sat by a table on the terrace of the coffee shop, drinking his coffee while happily chattering Chopper attacked his orange cake.

He had found everything he had needed and then some from the pharmacy, and now he was prepared for just about anything.

That was what he imagined, at least, until Franky found them and sat by their table too.

"It's super good that I found you. Because we happen to have a problem."

~*~

Getting stuck at Carata for two nights didn't sound too bad to Luffy. Franky wasn't willing to leave before they had restocked their fuel, and there hadn't been enough cola on the island. They were waiting for supplements to arrive the day after tomorrow, so they weren't going anywhere before that.

Perhaps tomorrow Luffy would find an armour somewhere. Today he hadn't had any luck with it, but he hadn't had time to visit every shop in the town before Zoro had reminded him that there were other people who wanted to go ashore today as well.

Not everyone in his crew had been delighted by the delay, the Navy was making them nervous; on the other hand some were eager to plan shopping trips for tomorrow. Especially Sanji, who had spent all his time as Nami's pack-mule and hadn't had time to buy any food. Having heard that, Luffy had exploded, because refilling their food supply was important! Running out of meat was the worst.

Law had only let out a tired sigh, going to call his crew and tell them they were delayed.

It might be selfish of Luffy to be happy about getting to keep Law aboard his ship for two extra days, but being selfish was quite all right. Otherwise you never got what you wanted. Even though he could understand Law missing his own crew.

After the dinner Law immediately excused himself, saying he was going to catch some sleep. Luffy followed him into the infirmary because it was weird – Law never went to bed this early.

"We're gonna play cards, don't you wanna join us?" he asked. There was plenty of time to kill, because they had dropped the anchor and there wasn't anything to do besides being in watch.

"Too tired," Law said before pushing his toothbrush into his mouth.

Luffy hummed. Law had looked tired all day long, and tense in other ways, too. He would have wanted to ask what had happened, but he wasn't going to pry if Law didn't wish to bring it up himself. Perhaps nothing had even happened, and Law had once again thought of something unpleasant; he definitely was inclined to do something like that.

So he was just sitting on the edge of the bed, watching Law brush his teeth and wash his face before taking off his clothes until he had only boxers on. All of it was really great to watch; the way Law's ass was sticking out while he was bent over the sink and the way his abs tensed while he pulled his shirt off.

He might appreciate the view too visibly, because Law glanced at him, frowning, and gave an
endlessly deep sigh.

"I meant that I really am too tired to do anything else than sleep," Law said.

"I'm just watching, how's that tiresome?" Luffy changed his position so that the bulge in his shorts wasn't quite as obvious as it had been, if Law didn't want to see it right now.

"I suppose it isn't. Uh... I'm just not..."

"Hm?"

"You make me feel like I'm a terribly lousy boyfriend."

Luffy burst laughing, it was just like Law to think something so funny. Surely no one wanted to do something all the time, no matter how nice it was? Besides, he had already noticed that having sex required pretty much energy, so doing it while not having enough energy to enjoy it didn't make any sense. "Don't worry about it. If you're tired then you need to sleep."

"You make it sound like it's easy."

"Yup, because it is --" Luffy bit his tongue, interrupting himself by force. He had already learned many things about Law, and one of them was that Law actually was really bad at sleeping. He himself suffered from insomnia very rarely, and at those times he always had something really big to worry about. Anyway, based on those very rare experiences he knew that it was really annoying if you weren't able of falling asleep despite wanting to – that seemed to happen to Law every single night.

"Can you even fall asleep this early?" he asked.

Law crouched to dig through his package, looking at him over his shoulder with a thoughtful expression until making some decision. "Yes, because Chopper gave me some sleeping pills."

"Is it the same thing he makes Zoro take every time he's injured and still doesn't wanna stay in bed?"

"I don't know what he uses in those kind of situations, but possibly." Law seemed amused by the idea. He had found the bottle he had been searching, popping one pill into his mouth.

"That's gonna put you to sleep?"

"Yeah."

"Okay."

Law seemed to be surprised as Luffy didn't have anything else to say. Law put the bottle back into his package and dug out another jar, considerably bigger this time, it seemed to be full of some kind of ointment. He scooped a generous amount of it, starting to spread it onto his nape and shoulders.

"What's that?" Luffy asked. "It smells interesting." Pretty minty, but in a warm and spicy way. It was a pretty nice smell, despite making his eyes feel like they might start watering.

"This? It's supposed to make tense and inflamed muscles relax. I'm not sure it's effective... I found it in a pharmacy today and thought I'd give it a try."

"You like massage it into your muscles, right?"

"Yeah."
"Can I?"

Law was scrutinizing him for a while, until putting the jar back into his package and coming to sit on the bed. "Sure, if you really want to."

Luffy was more than happy to take any opportunity to touch Law, and soon he was continuing spreading the ointment. He had never done anything like this, but he soon found out that pressing lightly with his fingertips and moving his hands in circles had the ointment absorbing well, and Law let out some appreciative noises.

"You're really tense," he said.

"I'm aware. One of my basic features." Law snorted. "Tense both mentally and physically. I said I'm not going to make a good boyfriend."

"And I said that's not for you to decide. For I don't want any other kind of boyfriend. By the way, you could lie down? If you're gonna fall asleep soon."

Law did like suggested, inching mostly under the blanket and lying prone, so that it was easy for Luffy to continue with his nape and shoulders. He was pressing, rubbing and sliding his fingers on Law's skin, following the tattoo on his back as much as he could see it peek from under the blanket, wanting to press a wet kiss onto Law's nape but remembering their shower and the soap and suspecting that the ointment wouldn't be delicious.

Little by little he felt the muscles softening under his fingers – was it because of his caresses or the relaxing ointment, he didn't know, but the result was good in any case. Law's eyelids started drooping.

"How're you feeling?" he asked.

"Wonderful." Law almost sounded intoxicated, like he didn't have strength to speak properly. "I really might fall asleep if you slow down a bit."

Luffy changed his touch to light, peaceful petting, just enjoying feeling the skin under his hands. "Can I sleep here again?"

"Mmm... yea..."

They didn't talk anymore. Luffy realized he had never before seen Law falling asleep, he himself used to do it so quickly. It was nice, seeing him relax and his breathing become even. It gave Luffy that strange protective feeling again, that need to keep Law safe, even though he knew he wasn't going to try doing it. Adventures were a part of life and they weren't safe, so why was he feeling like this? You couldn't prevent anyone from living their life, such a thing was wrong and really stupid.

He liked Law being so strong. Equal with him – even though he was going to be the pirate king, there was no doubt of that.

He still couldn't help thinking that everything that dared to even try hurting Law needed to deal with him first.

He knew his crew was waiting for him to come and play cards, but still he remained a long while sitting on the edge of the bed. His hands were resting still on Law's shoulder blades while he was just watching him sleep, and feeling him breathe.
This didn't take as long as I had been fearing despite life still being too busy for my tastes. Well, I'm definitely not feeling great at the moment, but this pairing just cheers me up and your comments and kudos have been a great support too. <3

Law slowly drifted into awareness. It was too hot, and his head had been turned to one side for too long time. He kicked the blanket off his feet to cool off some, turning to lie on his other side, and fell asleep again.

As he woke up the second time, more perfectly this time, he became aware of a tickly sensation on his neck. There was something warm and alive in between his thighs, as well as pressed against his chest and stomach. The excess warmth that had been bothering him was caused by this, because that something was radiating heat.

Luffy, he realized after waking up some more. One leg between Law's own, and that tickling on his neck was caused by Luffy's hair. It felt like there were limbs everywhere, both of theirs – especially under Law, which was highly uncomfortable. He didn't get how he had succeeded in rolling onto both his own and Luffy's arm, but unergonomic sleeping was one of his special fields, one that didn't make him very proud.

He had been sleeping soundly, for he didn't have any memories of Luffy crawling into the bed beside him. It couldn't have been silent and elegant, he definitely had been poked and kicked by accident as Luffy had been making himself comfortable.

With those sleeping pills it wasn't a wonder that he hadn't woken up; they could have knocked out an ox. Too bad that waking up after using them wasn't the least bit as comfortable as sleeping, but at least this time the headache seemed to be absent. So far.

Opening his eyes didn't feel like an appealing idea. He tried shifting so that Luffy's arm was pressing more into his waist than his ribs, and let himself drift somewhere between sleep and being awake, wishing to fall asleep once more. It wasn't possible for him to sleep too much, that wasn't something he needed to worry about; every second of sleep was always sorely needed. And if Luffy hadn't woken up yet, it was one hundred percent sure that the breakfast wasn't served yet.

Law didn't succeed in falling asleep anymore, but he was quite happy to just lie there, lazy and not needing to move a muscle. His arm was aching and growing numb, and he was still boiling, but he couldn't bring himself to do anything about neither of these issues, it wasn't so serious. Thus he was just floating in half-awareness, enjoying the feel of Luffy's chest rising and falling in the rhythm of peaceful breathing.

Perhaps it had been a minute, or it could have been an hour, but suddenly he startled into full awareness. It had been like he had been falling from some high place. He hated coming to like that, it always left him feeling uncomfortable and alarmed.

Luffy was still sleeping, despite Law's violent twitch, and was lightly puffing air onto his collar bone. He also could hear a couple of silent slams from behind the wall, perhaps caused by kettles, there had
been a metallic tone in those sounds. Preparations for breakfast had started, so it seemed.

In other words, it wasn't too early to wake Luffy up. Law surrendered to the lazy urge to stroke the body pressed against him, fiddling with the hair that was a total mess, and going lower along the spine, feeling its bulges.

He soon found out that Luffy was naked. Perhaps considered sleeping like that comfortable. It made him wish that he had taken his own boxers off before crawling into bed last evening.

He remembered going to bed, and Luffy's hands on his shoulders. That had been the most pleasant surprise in so many ways – how easily Luffy had accepted that he only wanted to sleep, and on top of that had offered to make him comfortable. He appreciated it greatly. It also might be that his shoulders didn't feel as hopelessly stiff as usual.

Luffy made a sleepy noise, starting to shift a bit, feeling and waking his limbs up after sleeping. The way the blanket was moving at the foot end of the bed had Law guessing that Luffy was curling his toes, and that seemed insanely cute for some reason.

"Morning," he said.

Luffy's answer was a wordless hum, sounding quite satisfied with the way he was feeling.

Law caressed Luffy's hip and the curve of his waist, then his hand wandered to the backside, stroking his firm buttoc. He couldn't help digging his fingers into it, because it was malleable in a perfect way under his touch, downright inviting to squeeze.

Luffy didn't seem to mind; his hips jerked forward, pressing his crotch harder against Law's thigh. Apparently he didn't have any reason to stop something that was feeling so good, because he repeated the movement several times, rocking his hips and quickly starting to get hard.

Law really hoped of being naked, too. His cock had taken interest of the atmosphere getting more heated, trying to nudge Luffy's abs through the fabric of his boxers. It didn't go unnoticed; Luffy's fingers were inching under the waist band from behind, remaining to play with it.

"Is it better today?" Luffy asked.

"Mm," Law said, desperately trying to connect the question to some sensible topic. His brain was still groggy with so much sleep and not helpful at all, but at last he realized the question was pretty much in order after he had made his uninterest known last night. "This day seems very promising so far." He backed the words up by poking Luffy's stomach with his hard-on.

"These off?" Luffy stretched the waist band of the boxers and then let go, making it snap hard against Law's ass, waking him up some more.

"Mm yeah."

Law forced himself to lazily lift his hips from the mattress so that Luffy could yank his boxers off. He was expecting Luffy to sit up in order to reach, and felt stupid as his arm was just stretching and stretching towards his toes until the piece of clothing slid off him altogether. He still hadn't gotten used to that, and he really wasn't completely awake yet.

Luffy crawled higher, so that their groins met, and pressed them together. Small movements of their hips had their shafts lightly rubbing against each other. Law considered this sensation one of the most frustrating ones in the world – it would be impossible to get their dicks really stay together without helping with a hand, not to mention getting any kind of satisfactory pressure, it was mostly just
clumsy poking, slipping off-target. It was even more torturous because the idea was so arousing, and well, any kind of touch did feel good down there.

He could enjoy it for a moment, but he would go crazy if Luffy intended to continue it for a long time.

"Naaaawww..."

Luffy sounded even more frustrated than Law was, making him realize that Luffy actually didn't try to be a tease, it was just that he had never done this before and hadn't found out how it worked yet. Sometimes Law tended to forget it, as Luffy didn't show any hesitation or insecurities, and in his lazy morning state he had been more than ready to just follow.

He wrapped his fingers around Luffy's shaft, squeezing it gently and causing a helpless moan and jerk of his hips. It made his own cock throb demandingly, so he was relieved as he got to thrust into his hand too. Sliding between Luffy's hardness and his own fingers forced his eyes to flutter closed, and he was sure they were about to roll around behind his closed lids.

It was definitely better this way. It would have been better still if he had realized to lick his hand before grabbing them, but apparently he wasn't aware enough to think before it was too late yet. The sensation was pretty dry, but on the other hand intense.

"Oh," Luffy said, having tentatively rocked his hips a couple of times.

The realization and surprised bliss in Luffy's voice made Law smile slightly, and made him feel ridiculously warm in a way that had nothing to do with sexual pleasure. He... admitted liking the way Luffy was, with his idiocy and all, and he definitely liked how uninhibited Luffy was as he started thrusting against Law, not holding back either his movements or the moans escaping him.

Law hurried to answer the rhythm which was going to make him come so quickly it would be embarrassing, but he didn't have enough presence of mind to care. Throwing those kind of thoughts aside was liberating; not caring about how the other one would see him, and just doing what was feeling best right now. It also felt very probable that Luffy fully supported that kind of philosophy.

Suddenly there was a hand on Law's nape, firm and possessive, making his squeak as the last of his thoughts were shattered into a million shards. They didn't matter, not right now.

"I like it – when – ah – you make that – no-noise, Traffy," Luffy managed to say in between his pants, then starting to nibble Law's neck.

Law didn't want to think of the noises he was making, especially the ones that didn't sound like they were escaping him at all, like the one Luffy was referring to. But Luffy hadn't meant it in a bad or teasing way at all, instead he was only saying what he was meaning, and Law had felt Luffy's cock downright jumping in his hold, so maybe he could try being a bit less self-conscious.

He tightened his hold of their shafts, squeezing a thin, surprised groan from Luffy in turn. The wheels of the bed were squeaking in a grating way as their rhythm accelerated, until after some thrusts Luffy exploded mostly onto Law's abs, fingertips digging hard into his nape and a tight noise somewhere in between a shout and a vail stuck in his throat.

Law didn't last more than a moment after that, and soon they were lying on the bed, facing each other and trying to get their breathing even. The bed kept creaking a moment after their stopping, and he couldn't help thinking whether they managed to break the thing before getting to Zou. He snorted with laughter, imagining what Chopper would say to such a thing.
"You're in a good mood today," Luffy said.

"Why wouldn't I be? I've gotten to sleep, and this was a very pleasant way to wake up."

"Yup, it was!" Luffy shifted closer, pressing himself against Law, not caring about the mess between their stomachs. "We haven't done it like this before."

"There's the first time for everything," Law said, running his fingers on Luffy's back absentmindedly. He was feeling so limp that maybe he could have fallen asleep again if the need to get clean hadn't been so strong. However, he didn't want to move for a moment; he just leaned his cheek against Luffy's hair, trying to settle so that it wouldn't tickle his nose. It was frighteningly pleasant.

Luffy didn't say anything for a long time, and as he finally spoke again, he sounded thoughtful. "There are some other things we haven't done yet, right?"

"That's true," Law answered, thinking about the tube of lube he luckily had found in the pharmacy. He wished they would find use for it soon, but he wasn't going to hurry despite being curious.

"Are we gonna – do you wanna do it or not?"

"Are you talking about anal sex?" It was the first interpretation crossing Law's mind, but maybe it was just because he had been thinking about it a moment ago. Besides, Luffy's thoughts tended to jump from one thing to another so incomprehensibly that making sure they were on the same page felt like a wise thing to do. Who knew what kind of things he might agree to, if he only imagined he knew what Luffy was talking about, and said yes without making sure.

"Apples? What have they do with anything?"

Law was so dumbfounded he couldn't utter a word. Luffy seemed to take the silence as a request to continue. "You know, once Sanji made really good ice cream with apples in it. I wanna have more of it, I wonder if we have any –"

"No apples," Law interrupted. Great, he was never again going to be able of thinking about apples without this association. "I mean –" How to say this without those clinical terms he so much liked to use but weren't part of Luffy's vocabulary? "Do you remember that pamphlet?"

"Yeah. But why? You said I need to forget it." Luffy sounded very confused.

Law took a couple of very deep breaths, deciding not to get stuck to the reason he had wanted that. It didn't matter. If Luffy remembered it, this was going to be much easier. "In any case, it was described there how guys can have intercourse with each other."

"Yup, you put it into the butt, right?"

So he really does remember. Good.

"Exactly. Did you mean that?"

"... Huh?"

Of course. As their discussion had been sidetracked all the way to apples and ice cream, Luffy had already had time to forget where they had started from. Law scraped his nerves back together, and answered, "You were talking about things we haven't done yet, and asked whether we're going to – did you mean that by it?"
"Ah. Yeah! I did." Luffy pulled further in order to look him in the eye, unusually serious. "So, you wanna do it or not, Traffy?"

Law tried to decide whether Luffy made things extremely awkward or extremely simple. This discussion felt to be both at the same time, too, but at least there wouldn't be need to guess. If only he knew what Luffy was thinking of it. As an idea, thrusting your penis into your partner's anal aperture sounded quite dubious and more than a little weird in the beginning... "If it sounds like something you want to try too. But it's not like it's –"

"Of course I do! It sounds really fun." Luffy captured Law's lips by a quite eager kiss.

"But not right now," Law said, having gotten his mouth free. It seemed like Luffy was quite ready to have another round right here and now, but Law wasn't awake enough for anything like that, and he really wanted to get some caffeine into his system. "In the evening."

"Okay. I bet you wanna have some coffee, right?"

"Indeed."

Luffy burst into laughter, maybe because he thought the way Law consumed coffee was hilarious, or maybe because he could predict Law so well, or perhaps he was just in a good mood; Law really couldn't tell. He just sighed, watching how Luffy was rolling on the bed, clutching his stomach and kicking the mattress in the midst of his joy so that the wheels started complaining again.

The door was kicked violently, making Luffy freeze.

"Oi!" Sanji shouted. "That's enough for one morning! Be a bit more quiet!"

Law suddenly remembered he had heard some clangs of the kettles, but forgotten them altogether. And they really had been quite vocal – especially Luffy and the bed. Well, he hoped that Sanji had appreciated the audio show. Probably not.

"Sanji, food..." Luffy whined.

"Fifteen minutes! And don't you dare to show up without getting properly dressed first." Soon there were annoyed footsteps, stomping further from the door.

Law and Luffy were staring at each other, blinking. There was something so hysterical in the snappy cook that as Luffy burst in another bout of laughter, Law found himself chuckling too.

~*~

As the door connecting the kitchen and the infirmary opened, Sanji looked at it, cautious. He wasn't so sure whether he wanted to know what Luffy looked like, considering what had taken place earlier, but he was relieved to find out that this time Luffy was properly dressed.

Luffy sat down by the kitchen island, where he could easily watch how cooking progressed, and steal everything that Sanji wasn't guarding carefully enough. He was leaning his elbows on the counter, a smile that was even more idiotic and happy than his usual one on his face. It surely was nice, getting laid before breakfast.

"Food?" Luffy asked, his tone hopeful, almost sing-song, it was irritating and overly cheerful as hell so early in the morning.

"Wait ten minutes." Sanji supplied himself with a fork so as to keep the rubbery fingers off a plateful
of cold cuts. "Where's that undoubtedly coffee-starved boyfriend of yours dawdling?"

"Traffy's always slow. But yeah, he wants coffee. Lots of it."

Sanji started making some, not the least bit surprised. So far there were only the two of them in the kitchen, and there was a comfortable silence for a moment, broken only by the sizzling on the frying pan.

"Don't," he warned, as Luffy's arm was stretching towards a plateful of small fish in a way that was supposed to be sneaky. "I haven't even fried them yet."

The hand changed its target, starting to reach for the cold cuts. Sanji poked at it with his fork.

"I'm hungrily-yyyy..." Luffy whined, rubbing his hand.

Sanji really could have done without knowing what Luffy sounded like while having sex. It was worse than a cat in heat, listening to it while cooking had been quite an experience, and he had also made some horrified guesses about how monstrous appetite Luffy would have after his activities. Right away he had decided to cook even more than usually, he had a sneaking suspicion it was going to be needed. Sure, Luffy always was ready to eat even more, but if he really remained hungry, his whining was something no one was able to tolerate.

"I know, I know," Sanji grunted. "It's going to take less time if you don't disturb me."

Luffy huffed, but lifted also his legs on the bench, leaning on his knees relaxedly. He seemed to have accepted his fate and made himself comfortable while waiting, soon starting to hum one of Brook's awful wake-up tones by himself.

Sanji poured fried vegetables from the pan onto the plates, starting to deal with the fish next. He also tossed a slice of toast with toppings onto each plate. Except one – once again he had needed to come up with some replacement for mr. Picky, and considering how much extra cooking he needed to do now because of Luffy, it really felt like the pair was trying to kill him by overwork.

In addition to that there was the extra work they caused him to do without even knowing it. Sanji still wasn't sure how he had ended up being Nami's spy in a matter he didn't even want to know anything about, but when a beautiful lady asked him, there was no way he could say anything else than "Yes, Nami-swan!"

Nami had probably chosen him exactly because of that. Because she knew he would do it.

He didn't understand why Nami wanted to know. What was so interesting in the things two guys did in the bed? But, on the other hand, if it had been about two ladies... yeah, Sanji would have wanted to know, really badly. It only took an image of two pairs of round breasts pressing against each other to cause a twitch in his pants...

He shook his head in order to clear it, turning the fish over on the pan. But well, perhaps it worked in the same way for females. Or maybe Nami was just curious, and greedy for any kind of information that could be considered secret.

In any case, Sanji was a spy now, whether he wanted it or not. Trying to get anything out of Law had already proven impossible, and he didn't want to try that again; he didn't particularly want to see his own lungs. Perhaps the moment he had chosen had been particularly bad, because hardly no one was at their sweetest while being seasick, but he was still sure that Law had been meaning his threat. Opening Sanji's chest might not harm him in any way because of that creepy Power, but it would be an experience disturbing as hell, and might make him want to stop smoking. Better not risk it, he was
enjoying his bad habit.

If asking Law wouldn't do, it left Sanji with two alternatives. Either actually peeping – which he really didn't want to do – or asking Luffy.

Luffy, who was currently alone with him in the kitchen, and used to blurt out all kinds of things, not giving a shit of his privacy. This almost seemed to be too easy.

"You seem to be in a good mood," Sanji said, starting to peel some tangerines. Some vitamines were good in the morning.

Luffy stopped his off-tone humming, laughing briefly. "Yup! Waking up was nice."

*And I don't want to know anything about it!*

"I could tell," Sanji said tentatively.

Luffy's smile just widened. Apparently he wasn't the least bit bothered by being heard, it was more like he thought it was hilarious. Sanji supposed that Law wasn't sharing his thoughts.

Sanji deduced that poking some more was safe, because Luffy didn't seem to mind. "What were you doing then if it was so nice?"

"Stuff." Luffy avoided looking at him while giving his ambiguous answer, that was uncharacteristic. Had Law succeeded in pounding it into Luffy's thick skull that keeping his mouth shut was good sometimes? It would have been a great thing indeed if it hadn't been working against Sanji right now.

"Why?" Luffy asked a moment later. "Some time ago you said you don't wanna know or see anything."

*Can the tendency to think be transmitted via mucosa!?*

Sanji turned the heap of small fish over again, it was frying beautifully and filling the kitchen with delicious aroma. He didn't need to look at Luffy if he was looking at it. "Just wondering which one of you tops," he said casually, like that was the most natural thing for an outsider to wonder. He could have used the same tone of voice to wonder whether Franky had gotten his cola compressor to work.

The silence was his only answer, so he glanced over his shoulder. Luffy had fully concentrated on drooling over the frying fish.

"Luffy?"

"Ah... yeah. What's that supposed to mean?"

The spatula fell from Sanji's hand because of sheer surprise. He cursed, throwing the spatula into the sink and taking a new one. Luffy looked at him curiously, head tilted.

How was it possible that the terms were unknown to Luffy? On the other hand... Luffy had never needed to know the name of any dish in order to devour it. With great enthusiasm.

Sanji really didn't feel like answering Luffy's question, but now he had succeeded in making him curious. Luffy opened his mouth, ready to insist and demand for an answer, and Sanji was almost relieved as Law finally dragged his ass into the kitchen.

Law looked like Luffy had tried satisfying his greatest hunger by eating him for breakfast. There
were loads of marks on his neck, and the collar of his hoodie wasn't even trying to hide them. And that hoodie in the first place... it's hood was orange. Sanji feared his retinas were never going to recover.

He didn't need to wonder what the couple saw in each other. Both of them were crazy.


Like he needed to even say that aloud. Sanji said him good morning back, grousing that this wasn't the counter of some cafeteria and he was trying to cook some breakfast. But the coffee was ready, in any case, so he poured some into a cup and put it onto a saucer. He added a spoon onto the edge of the saucer, and thrust it in front of Law. Despite Law drinking his poison black and not necessarily needing a spoon to mix it, he still used to occupy himself by playing with it – a good cook noticed things like that and fulfilled wishes without even asking.

"Traffy?" Luffy asked. He had shifted so close to Law they were touching, and taken one of his hands.

"Hm?"

Sanji was listening with keen ears while arranging two fish onto each plate beautifully, selecting the most aesthetic ones for Nami and Robin. The rest he poured into the seconds bowl, most of them were undoubtedly going to end up into Luffy's bottomless stomach.

"What topping means in sex?"

Law had been intelligent enough to not sip his coffee while waiting for Luffy's question, avoiding spurting it all over the place. Sanji was grateful, it made cleaning up that much easier. He could feel a somewhat murderous glare on his back as Law guessed why Luffy suddenly decided to ask something like that.

"I'll tell you in the evening, it that fine?" Law asked, having finally given a resigned sigh.

Luffy nodded. "Evening." Having said that, he looked like he had just won a ton of meat in a lottery.

Of one thing Sanji was sure. After the dinner he wouldn't want to spend even a second in the kitchen, unless he found a way to persuade Franky to soundproof the kitchen wall.
It was a peaceful day. Law was relaxing on the deck, leaning against the mast and reading an extremely interesting book about regeneration of neurons. Luffy had gone ashore again, this time with Robin, Sanji and Brook, and there was no one aboard the ship who wanted to disturb Law. Luckily Chopper had given up trying to get him to try some trauma therapy, too, and was now concentrating on taking an inventory of his medicine storage while Law wasn't occupying the infirmary.

His assessment of the day being peaceful proved to be wrong, as Zoro distracted him from the wonderful world of neurogenesis by a strike of his sword, stopping half a centimeter away from his throat. It was close enough for him to feel the blade even though it wasn't touching his skin; its cold, sharp and blood-thirsty threat. He had been in the middle of a sentence, and having finished reading it he looked up without moving anything else than his eyes, because leaning forward would have been stupid and leaning backwards would have been cowardly. He waited for Zoro to talk, because apparently he had some business with him.

"You're totally open," Zoro pointed out, grinning. "I was expecting something better, based on your bounty."

Law sighed. "Why would I bother with evading a blow not intended to hit me?" It would have been much more dangerous to move, and perhaps get slashed by accident.

Zoro's grin grew wider as he pulled the blade away. "Not so bad after all."

"I'm starting to get the impression you want to fight."

"A new opponent to train with would be welcome. I want to see whether that overly long nodachi is an usable weapon or a dick compensation."

Law felt a grin spreading onto his own lips as an answer. He was starting to get interested in this challenge, it came so conveniently after he had decided that his arm needed more exercise. Besides, a new opponent in training was a welcome thing once in a while. Good ones were rare to come by. "If the latter is correct, what is it saying about you that you have as much as three blades in your possession?"

Zoro barked a short laugh, stepping a bit backwards and giving Law some space to get onto his feet. "Shall we?"

"Why not." Law's gaze lingered longingly at the book that he had put onto the bench, very slowly and reluctantly, mostly in order to be annoying. "You'd better be more interesting than neurogenesis, as you have distracted my reading now."
"We'll see."

Having stood up, Law shook his hands tentatively. The right one wasn't feeling any worse than the left one, but he needed to start cautiously and keep observing how it felt.

Kikoku was a lot louder than usually, before it was even unsheathed. Impatient.

"That's cursed, isn't it?" Zoro asked.

"Yeah, what about it? I can tell one of yours is, too." Law couldn't have mistaken the sharp, inhuman presence hanging around Zoro, not after spending a decade accompanied by his own.

"This one." Zoro pulled a katana in its deep red scabbard off his waist. "Sandai Kitetsu."

Law tried to not flinch visibly. He had read a few books about swords after ending up to own Kikoku, trying to research its curse, but all he had found was a single superficial footnote. In the end he had lost his interest, because it seemed like Kikoku wasn't doing anything he needed to worry about, and he had more important things to study. Anyway, he could remember reading more about Kitetsus than he actually had wanted to know. "That's a familiar name."

"And what's yours?"

"Kikoku – 'Demon's Wail'." After considering a moment, Law handed the sword to Zoro. He had no idea where this conversation was going, or whether Zoro wanted something else than to spar, but he was getting curious. They had hardly talked with each other, because there just hadn't seemed to be need to do so, and neither of them was one for empty babbling unless their company definitely wanted to have some meaningless small talk. If there was one topic that was guaranteed to make Zoro talk more, it definitely had to do with swords – and Luffy was counting heavily on this man; so perhaps it would be wise for Law to stay on his good side, just because it would be more comfortable for everyone.

Besides, the way people reacted to Kikoku tended to be amusing. He also was honestly interested in seeing what someone also possessing a cursed blade would think about it.

"Does it mind?" Zoro asked.

"Not as long as it remains sheathed, no."

Zoro carefully took the sword, just holding it, eyes closed. About a minute later he handed it back. If his expression was any indication, he had heard it, but thought it was more interesting than creepy. "Charming."

"Isn't it?" Law gave a joyless smirk. "I'm flattered it likes me."

"I'd like to hear how you met, but this really isn't the best way to get to know a sword, right?"

Honestly speaking, no. The most effective way to get acquainted with a sword was blade first. Law moved in the middle of the deck, where he had more space, and drew his sword, throwing the scabbard aside. Using both of his hands to hold it in the beginning felt sensible, not trying to pull off anything too burdensome.

He tested a couple of moves slowly, so as to make sure there wasn't too much tense pain in the nerves of his arm in any position. It was like Kikoku had gotten heavier, a certain sign that he wasn't at his best in the least, but there wasn't any other way to help it than training and rehabilitation. He had had enough of being careful with the injury.
"Ready?" Zoro asked, having watched for a while, unsheathing two of his katanas.

"Yeah. It would be best if we take this easy; we wouldn't want to damage the ship."

"Nice try. Is that arm giving you much trouble?"

Law cursed silently. Trying to keep facts from too perceptive individuals was useless, even though the point concerning the ship had been totally valid, too. "At least not right now. Plus, it's about time to whip it back to shape."

Zoro nodded, looking like he liked the answer and putting the last of his katanas in between his teeth.

There wasn't time for more than one clash of steel against steel before they were interrupted by an enraged, shrill shout.

"WHAT DO YOU BLOCKHEADS THINK YOU'RE DOING!?" Nami had bolted from the library room, leaning fiercely over the railing in order to glare at them.

"Just some rehabilitation," Law answered.

"Light sparring," Zoro said. He succeeded in talking very clearly with the handle of the sword in between his teeth, something Law didn't understand.

"NOT ABOARD THE SHIP! If you want to fight, you swim ashore and then fight!"

"Very amusing." Law didn't much appreciate quips concerning swimming.

Nami took a deep breath, continuing after thinking for a moment. "I'm so sure Luffy wouldn't want you two to –"

"Don't even try," Zoro interrupted. "He never gets involved in other people's fights. He might be vexed because he missed seeing this, but that's all."

That had Law smirking, because he really could imagine Luffy being pissed about missing such a cool match.

"Because he's an idiot!" Nami shouted, pointing at them with her finger. "You should be – well, maybe not Zoro – Law, at least you should be more sensible –"

"Training is a perfectly sensible thing to do," Law said. "How else are we supposed to keep ourselves in shape?"

"You two – gah! – do what you want, then! But if you put even one scratch on the ship, I'll use those steel sticks of yours as lightning conductors!" Having said this, Nami marched back into the library room, muttering unflattering things about males as she went.

"Your crew has a frightening navigator," Law said.

Zoro nodded. "You're right. It's best if we take this easy, because we wouldn't want to damage the ship."

"That's something you really don't wanna do," said Franky, who had just appeared from his workshop. "Otherwise I'll be super angry." He settled onto stairs to watch, squeezing his giant hand into a fist a couple of times. The gesture had a surprisingly threatening effect if you happened to have mechanic grabs looking like they could squeeze a cannonball into an even more compressed mass.
After that their sparring turned into remarkably light and careful exchange of blows, more like dancing with swords than anything resembling a fight. The tension was so non-existent that neither of them even bothered with provoking their opponent verbally, which Law thought was kind of shame – at first Zoro's challenge had been so promising – but on the other hand, his arm appreciated starting easy.

Law had never before dueled with someone using three swords, and Zoro's movements were so surprising and unusual that almost all of his concentration was required to block every blow. Finding an opening and attacking was even more difficult, but it wasn't any surprise. He didn't usually fight without using his Power, but right now this was a good physical exercise.

He was dimly aware that they gathered more audience in addition to the shipwright worrying about the apple of his eye. Usopp and Chopper appeared from somewhere, too, watching the sparring and whispering who knew what to each other. Law supposed this was sufficient entertainment, too, despite not being romantic drama.

He wasn't delighted noticing how quickly his arm grew tired, even though neither of them used any real force in their blows. It started aching and shaking with strain before he was even seriously out of breath, until he had to step back and lower his sword.

It was embarrassing, but he wasn't stupid enough to ignore the warning signs his body was giving him; trying too much would only delay his recovery. He reminded himself that there was one kind of courage in admitting the facts. Besides, Chopper was there, and he would definitely get involved if Law wasn't sensible on his own. That would be even more embarrassing.

"I'm afraid we need to put an abrupt stop to our sparring."

Zoro nodded slightly, sheathing his swords, his face expressionless.

Law didn't have anything to say, thus he went to the railing to watch the island. It was just standing there, ridged and seemingly peaceful, but you could never know when the marines would awaken and notice them; and they couldn't leave before tomorrow.

And he was more useless than he had expected. He glared at his disobedient limb. He should be grateful that he still had it at all –

– insane spear of agony penetrating him as Doflamingo's string was cutting neatly through his whole arm, bone and all, and then that laugh – there was always THAT LAUGH –

– but it didn't comfort him as much as it should have. There was nothing wrong with his muscles after the miraculous healing, but apparently his nerves were still in mild state of shock, not bothering with properly directing those muscles to move. On top of that, it seemed like the pain nerves were oversensitive.

"Need more whipping tomorrow?" Zoro asked, having come to lean on the railing, too.

The question took Law by a total surprise. He had expected Zoro to lose his interest in the matter after the previous fiasco – he had been under impression that Zoro liked strong opponents. Right now Law couldn't count himself as one.

He shook his hand a couple of times, his fingers were prickling like they were awakening after going numb. It was certainly going to ache tonight, after this exertion. But it wasn't too bad, meaning that he could continue training tomorrow.

"Yeah." He nodded. "I'd like to, if you feel like wasting your time."
Zoro shrugged. "Maybe I wish I really get to fight you if I whip you back to shape first. At Zou, then we don't need to worry about the ship or the nagging witch?" He glanced in the direction of the library room.

It was an extremely interesting, extremely dangerous idea. Law liked it immediately, grinning and nodding. "Deal."

Zoro sat onto the deck, leaning his back against the railing and placing all of his swords comfortably onto his lap. Law expected him to start napping now, as the entertainment was over for now. That was what Zoro mostly seemed to do – napping, training, and just following Luffy.

It made Law miss Bepo.

*A few days to go to Zou.*

"By the way, what do you think of armours?" Zoro asked.

"*What?*" The question had been so unexpected and surprising, Law didn't think he had heard it right.

"Armours. Do you like them?"

"I have never thought that developing some specific opinion about armours is necessary. At least wearing one wouldn't suit my style of fighting, they seem too heavy and clumsy to me. Why the heck are you asking something like that?"

"Luffy said in the morning that he had ditched his plan to buy one. At least for now."

"Oh?" It felt like there was some actual thread in the conversation, but despite trying with all of his might Law couldn't grasp it. It was extremely frustrating.

"So you just continue like this."

"...*What?*" Law uttered, even more helpless. He didn't have any idea of what the heck Zoro was talking about. If he continued like this, Luffy wouldn't buy an armour? Was it some kind of a threat, perhaps?

"Yeah." Zoro nodded like he had actually answered to question. "I don't know what you've done after yesterday, and I have no need to get to know, but whatever it is it's working. So keep doing it."

Law froze completely as his brain desperately tried to put the pieces together. They didn't fit – he was lacking some relevant information. As he finally had found out what he wanted to clarify, Zoro had already nodded off, snoring softly.

After this highly disturbing exchange of words Law decided to give his brain a rest by doing something he was capable of understanding, and went back to his reading by the mast. The applications of neurogenesis were mentally relaxing, and he suddenly had a reason to wonder whether he could somehow help the nerves in his arm to regenerate.

He didn't have time to read much before there was a cough nearby. It's tone was careful and drawing attention – like it was meant to get his attention, but at the same the coughing person wished it wouldn't work.

"What is it?" Law asked Usopp, who was restlessly shifting his weight from one foot to another.

"I – may I sit?"
"This bench is not owned by me, and there's plenty of room on it."

Usopp carefully sat on the edge of the bench, looking like he was ready to bolt onto his feet for a
tiniest reason. Apparently he wanted to say something, because it was obvious he didn't think Law's
company relaxing enough to seek it without a reason.

"Did you have something to say?" Law tried to be patient, even though he had a sneaking suspicion
he wasn't going to like this. He hoped it had nothing to do with Caesar, but he couldn't imagine it
being anything else.

They were silent for a long while. Usopp was restlessly swinging his feet back and forth, but finally
he spoke quietly, so that his voice couldn't be heard over the deck. "I think I might have Haki."

"Hmm?" Law had no idea why on earth Usopp wanted to discuss this with him, but it was an
intriguing topic. And quite surprising, he hadn't been expecting this. "Luffy failed to mention it to
me."

"He doesn't know."

"... Ah. Something new, then?"

Usopp gave a sharp nod, his long nose accentuating the movement as it drew a wide arc into the air.
"A strange thing happened on Dressrosa. I mean, everything that happened there was really strange,
there was absolutely nothing normal there, so maybe this isn't any stranger than everything else,
but..."

"Go on." Law stopped glancing lazily at his book while listening, putting the tome onto the bench.

"There was a situation where I had to hit – I had to, absolutely had to – but the target was too far
away. I couldn't even see that far really, but I just had to do it, and then –"

Law waited for Usopp to get to the point, as patiently as he could, but did Usopp really need to use
at least three times more words than what was necessary? It made listening to him exhausting. He
could guess where the story was going, though, and he wanted to hear it.

"Something happened. I don't know what it exactly was, but suddenly it was like... I just saw her, or
something like... a presence. Despite her being so far away. I suppose this sounds totally crazy –"

"Not at all. It sounds like Haki awakening. If it's going to happen at all, it tends to happen in the
worst possible pinch where you simply can't afford failure."

Usopp gave a deep sigh, slumping to sit in a lot more relaxed position, visibly relieved that Law
believed him. "It was just that kind of situation. The worst kind. But well, it was strange."

"And you hit the target," Law said. It wasn't a question.

"I did." Usopp answered it anyways.

Law waited for a moment, but apparently Usopp didn't feel like boasting about his hit, even though
he usually was more than happy to take any opportunity for acting like that. It seemed like it really
had been an important hit... If the events were big enough, they tended to silence even the ones with
the biggest mouths, make them humble with the severity.

"Hm, congratulations, then," he said, feeling awkward. He was bad in discussions like this. "It's
surely a practical skill for a sharpshooter." A lot of work would be needed before Usopp could use it
as a reliable tool, it took time to learn the necessary control, but it was doable.

Damn, Law wanted to have a sharpshooter with the observation Haki in his crew, too. Perhaps he should try throwing Vince among some crocodiles and wish for the miracle of awakening his ability.

Usopp was silently squirming in his place.

"Why are you talking about this with me? Why haven't you told Luffy yet?" Law asked. "It's essential that a captain knows what their crew is capable of doing."

"I didn't know what it was! Nor did I know whether it was some once in a lifetime thing that's not going to happen ever again, some desperate strike of luck or something, so I – so I didn't do anything about it. I already thought I was going crazy!"

It made sense; in the middle of the chaos, and injured, it was sometimes difficult to know for sure what had been perfectly real and what had been imagination going overdrive, or make difference between a coincidence and something happening for a reason.

In other words, assuming that something had happened recently was logical. Something that had convinced Usopp he wasn't actually going crazy, giving him an idea of what was going on.

Something...

Perhaps something like standing right next to Law at the moment when Caesar made something snap in his head?

Oh fuck, tell me this isn't real. I don't need this.

Law decided to speak before Usopp had time to confirm he had been flooded by a shitload of hard-core angst-rage-anxiety. "Well, you're not going crazy. It's only a matter of whether you wish to train this skill or not."

"Of course I do! I want to be as strong as possible." Usopp had finally properly straightened his posture, starting to sound enthusiastic. "I want to do my best to support this crew and help Luffy to fulfill his dream. And become a brave warrior of the sea! No one could do anything less and call himself a man!"

Law smiled at that slightly. "Good. In that case I really recommend that you talk to Luffy. Someone needs to teach you, and arranging that is his responsibility."

Usopp nodded eagerly. "Yeah. I can do it now, as I know for sure I didn't just imagine the whole thing."

"I... appreciate you confirming this with me. Instead of telling someone else about yesterday –"

"Oi! I might like talking, but I promised to keep my mouth shut, didn't I? And the brave warriors of the sea do not break their promises!"

Law hummed ambiguously.

"I wonder who's going to teach me?" Usopp asked, sounding like he was mostly just thinking aloud. "Sanji's supposed to be good in that particular colour of Haki, but he's often busy and I guess he doesn't want to. And Zoro would probably make me evade swords blindfolded or something like –"

"That is an effective method indeed," Law interrupted.
"Iagh, is that something people do for real? I thought it was just some tall tale that's told just to make the training sound cool."

"Yes, it's a real thing."

Usopp started graving his nails, not seeming so enthusiastic to learn a new skill anymore. "Maybe... maybe I should ask Luffy to do it..."

Law couldn't imagine Luffy being a good teacher, despite being undeniably the strongest Haki user of them. It was also a matter of personality, and with Luffy's way of thinking, explaining things logically to a disciple might be... a bit of a challenge. But this was Usopp's problem, and the Straw Hat crew's problem. Not Law's.

Noticing that there were some other problems in the world than Law's was comforting. There had been too many times when he had been feeling like he had gathered every problem in the world.

But he hadn't. He was just feeling like that, especially now, as the contents of his head still were such a mess after Dressrosa.

*And I am such a terrible boyfriend.*

He suddenly realized he hadn't bothered with thinking outside his own problems. Luffy had been comforting him several times, or just been there when he had needed it, while he himself hadn't done anything like that.

Like bothered with asking how Luffy was doing after the Marineford.

Fuck, he hated himself.

Luffy had appeared at Punk Hazard, a smile on his face and a chaos on his heels, and Law had diagnosed by himself that the patient seemed to have made a fine recovery. He didn't need to concern himself with it more than that, not as a mere ally, and then his own problems had totally gotten out of hand, making him to forget it altogether.

But they weren't mere allies anymore, and it actually was his business. Quite fucking spectacularly.

They needed to talk. He suspected that Luffy didn't like to think serious things, concentrating only on good things and the current moment, and it was a good thing to a certain extent – he was envious of the ability of doing that – but still. *Law had been there to see it*, so maybe Luffy would talk to him if he asked about it. He needed to ask, because there was no way that comforting only worked in one way in this relationship.

He could wait for a suitable opportunity. And when it came to suitable opportunities, and understanding Luffy, he happened to be sitting next to a person who clearly was close to Luffy. You could often see them fishing or being ridiculous together, and it seemed like Usopp understood some of Luffy's peculiarities pretty well.

They had drifted into a surprisingly nice silence, and Law felt like he had nothing to lose if he asked. "By the way, do you happen to know why Luffy might want to buy an armour?"

Being suddenly spoken to startled Usopp, but he recovered quickly. "Does he need a reason? He loves them."

"Why?"
"Why?" Usopp sounded absolutely baffled, like Law had been asking the reason for water being wet. "Armours are cool! It's manly romance to wear one. How can you consider yourself a man if you don't know even that much?"

"Easily?"

Usopp gave Law a funny look.

"Um," Law said. "If he thinks armours are so great, then, can you think of any reason why he might decide he doesn't need one after all?" The whole topic was giving him a massive headache, but this level of absurdity would be too disturbing if he couldn't find out some answers.

Usopp shrugged. "Perhaps he didn't feel like he needed to be as cool as he had been expecting?"

Law leaned more relaxedly against the mast, putting the pieces together in different ways. Zoro had said that something he had done was working... and it had apparently gotten Luffy to ditch the idea. He had done something so that Luffy didn't need to –

*That idiot.*

It was somewhat disturbing to realize that Luffy had been close to attempting to seduce him, utilizing an armour in this endeavor. After their discussion this morning Luffy had decided it wasn't necessary anymore.

Law was eagerly waiting for the evening in order to show that there was no need to impress him by some manly romance, which he understood just as well as Luffy did sarcasm.
Carata had proven to be a surprisingly placid place, and it seemed like the peaceful position had convinced the marines of being so safe that it was fine to be lazy. No one had gotten into any kind of trouble on the island.

Even a skeleton who was over two meters tall went totally unnoticed, which seemed a bit weird to Brook, but he had gotten to enjoy his shopping trip without any blunders. Unless you counted in the incident where he had happened to wander into a laudry, just by accident of course. A pretty young woman had been there, hanging a charming assortment of pastel colored panties to dry.

Seeing the underwear had made him incredibly happy for the rest of the day, even though the woman had thrown a bottle of fabric softener at him.

He had found more music paper he had desperately needed, and in addition to that especially cool sunglasses. There was no way a romantic musician could ever have too many shades with heart-shaped lenses. If you were trying to compose a masterpiece inspired by your captain's romance, using them was a must.

There certainly was something to looking through pink lenses.

Right now Luffy and Law weren't very inspirational. Having come back to the ship all Luffy had done was dragging Franky into his workshop, apparently he had come up with something to tinker; and Law had occupied himself with his Great Battle of Chess against Robin. If Brook had gotten it right, Robin currently had seventeen wins to Law's four, plus two of their games had been stalemates.

Anyway, it was the best resistance anyone had offered Robin, at least aboard this ship, and their games had started to attract an audience. This time it meant Brook and Sanji.

"Are you quite sure you want to make that move?" Robin asked.

It looked like a pretty good move to Brook. He was staring at the gaming board with Sanji and Law, trying to understand what exactly Robin was talking about. There was a complete silence for about half a minute.


"Check." Robin was leaning her chin on her hand, smiling slightly. Law succeeded in making Robin smile often, without even looking like he tried. Brook found that pretty unfair. Beautiful women's smiles were the enjoyment of his life, and just like with panties, seeing them was very pleasant indeed, but coaxing them to appear by himself was even better. He tried, but he wasn't as successful in the least.

"That's what you get when you don't think," Law groused, covering with his rook.
"I don't believe you weren't thinking," Robin said. "I do believe you weren't thinking of the game, though."

"I have to admit that, I guess."

"What's going on in your mind, then?" Sanji asked Law. "The evening and the explaining session to come?"

"I don't think that's something you need to hear," Law said.

"I wish that would be the case, but I explicitly do hear it. Literally. Through the wall."

"Oh goodness. I might have seen some earplugs in one of Chopper's cabinets, should I find a pair for you?"

Brook didn't know what was this explaining session they were talking about, but otherwise the topic was clear as water. It was loud. Well, at least Luffy was. A couple of days ago Brook had been standing at the stern, watching the wake, it tended to give him melancholic kind of inspiration like looking back into history. He had been quite near the infirmary, but still all he had heard had been Luffy and the bed. Those had been very clear, though.

He didn't mind – young ones were supposed to be lively if they were newly fallen in love, that was absolutely right and natural thing.

"One of the best attributes of our captain is that he doesn't hide and keep it a secret if he's happy or miserable, or anything like that. Don't you agree?" he asked.

"I'm not so sure whether more than half of that is true," Law said softly.

Robin nodded at the statement.

Their discreet mutual understanding made Brook feel like an outsider, but despite trying he couldn't grasp what it exactly was that Law meant.

"He'd better rein in that great joy of his a bit if he wants to eat," Sanji said. "I want to cook dinner in peace, not listening to something that's like a bagful of yowling cats –"

"It's not that bad," Law interrupted. He didn't chance looking up, keeping his gaze at the gaming board, and his cheeks were glowing slightly with embarrassment. "As far as I know, I already offered to search some earplugs for you?"

"It'd be more effective if –" Sanji interrupted his speech as Luffy suddenly leapt onto the deck, without further ado attaching himself to Law's back.

No one seemed to find it surprising that Luffy was very touchy-feely in a relationship. He liked to keep even his friends close enough to touch them, tending to nod off leaning against whoever; it was expected that now it was hard to stop him from clinging to Law. Brook wondered what was the best way to express that trait by music, some kind of lingering echo perhaps?

"What is it, Straw Hat?" Law asked.

Luffy stretched his arm around Law so that all of them could see a bracelet adorning his wrist, it was a sturdy thing made by weaving steel and leather together. "Isn't this cool? I went back today to buy it, but it was too big for me, but I thought Franky knows how to make it shorter, and then he did it, and it's so great now!"
Law touched the bracelet lightly with his fingertips. "It's nice."

"It suits you," Robin said.

"It's very rock," Brook said.

Luffy looked expectantly at Sanji, who hadn't commented yet.

"Yeah, it's fancy," Sanji said, having lost the staring match.

"Yup, that it is!" Luffy beamed at them from behind Law's shoulder. "More handy than an armour."

None of them could come up with anything to say to that, thus they fell silent. Law concentrated on the game of chess again, but he was very near to being destroyed because of the bad move he had made earlier.

"Is it evening now?" Luffy asked.

"Definitely not," Sanji said.

"Some people would say it's early evening now," Robin said.

"I was about to go and start making dinner, so it's not allowed to call this evening yet," Sanji said.

"Okay it's evening now," Luffy decided. "Traffy, you hear that? It's evening, so let's go —"

"I did hear, but we have a game going on."

"You already have much less pieces than Robin, so make sure you lose it quickly, okay?"

"That wasn't a very nice thing to say," Law said, but he didn't seem to mind.

"I just wanna get you to bed with me."

Law's cheeks reddened a bit more. Brook couldn't help a surprised chuckle escaping him, and Robin gave a soft laugh.

"And you expect me to cook meanwhile, don't you?" Sanji asked.

"Yup!" Luffy's grin was splitting his face. "Of course, 'cause I'm gonna be so hungry."

Law gave a heavy sigh. "Would someone please be kind enough to kill me right now?"

"Not in the middle of the game. And it's your turn," Robin said.

Law was doing his best, but it seemed like concentrating on the game was totally impossible for him, especially with Luffy pressing his lips on Law's nape and thus pushing him towards loss. Soon it was revealed to them that Law made some noise after all, whines that were so quiet they couldn't be heard through walls. He didn't lift a finger to prevent Luffy, but tried with all of his might look like this wasn't happening at all, keeping his face blank.

"Checkmate," Robin announced, smiling. "And it's my eighteenth win."

"Someone was distracting me," Law said.

"You were about to lose even before it," Sanji pointed out.
"All right then, we're leaving now!" Luffy lifted Law from his chair like he was light as feather, sprinting towards the infirmary with his load before anyone had time to say anything. Law's legs seemed very long as they were awkwardly sticking out over Luffy's arm.

"Let's say we didn't see that, okay?" Sanji asked.

"Yo ho ho, I hardly believed my own eyes," Brook said. "Even though I have no –" Sanji kicked him.

"They're adorable," Robin said.

"Someone's seriously under a certain rubbery thumb", Sanji said.

Brook laughed, it looked like that for sure.

"I'm sure Trafalgar can come up with a way to get his way when it really matters," Robin said, starting to put the chess pieces back into their box.

"I did want those earplugs." Sanji started calming his nerves by smoking pretty vigorously. "No one wants to go to the infirmary now and ask for them."

"Brook," Robin started. "Would you please play something for us? I believe all of us would appreciate some loud music right now."

"Of course! Playing for a beautiful lady is always a pleasure."

Robin smiled at him; plus this would be an excellent chance to test what the first half of his composition sounded like and practise a bit. Life was good.

Even though he wasn't alive.

~*~

Law grunted as Luffy dropped him onto the bed, making it creak in a grating way. He found it difficult to believe that he had just been carried to bed like some delicate girl, but he supposed Luffy considered him light. Besides, Luffy didn't give a shit about how ridiculous they were looking, so... perhaps this was exactly what he should have been waiting for.

"Lock the doors," he said, starting to take his shoes off. Even though locking the doors might not be downright necessary this time, because Luffy had made it damn clear to everyone that it was sex time now, and there were very few of those who wanted to get an eyeful of that. It still felt more private with the doors locked.

Luffy did that, stretching his hand to lock both doors and shaking his sandals off before climbing onto the bed, sitting astride Law's hips. The position made some particularly delightful mental images cross Law's mind, he couldn't help rubbing his crotch against Luffy's bottom.

Right away Luffy started wiggling on top of him in a way that made him hard very quickly. He was quite worked up already, due to the attention Luffy had generously lavished his nape earlier.

"Am I like 'topping' now?" Luffy asked.

Oh, we still need to have that discussion.

"Well, I guess that would be one way to look at it." Law sighed, thinking how he was supposed to
say this in order to be as clear as possible. He had a bad habit of slipping into doctor mode if he had
to talk about intimate things, and then he used some incomprehensible terminology, making the act
sound about as arousing as removing a wart. It was amusing to him, but in this case it would hardly
be appropriate.

"Yes or no? Speak clearly." Luffy was frowning, even though his hands were inching under the hem
of Law's shirt at the same time, starting to caress his abs. His fingers were warm, and doing their best
to distract the conversation.

"You're on top, but especially when it comes to males having sex with each other, you don't usually
use 'topping' and 'bottoming' in this sense."

"What is it, then?"

"The one thrusting his penis into the anal aperture of his partner is topping." Law almost made a face
at what it sounded like, but there was no way to say it that was both beautiful and clear.

"Thrust... where?"

Law sighed, even more heavily. "Ass."

"Ah, all right." Luffy grinned, enlightened, which felt somewhat disturbing in this kind of situation.
His fingers had crept higher under Law's shirt, reaching to tease Law's nipples now. "So, is this
'topping' more fun, or what's the reason for everyone making it such a big deal?"

"I don't think so," Law answered cautiously. He was aware of how quickly this discussion could go
awry if Luffy decided to jump into some hasty conclusion, thus he tried to choose his words as
carefully as possible.

He very much wished they would switch. Both options sounded damn good, so why the heck they
should stick to one?

"Is it more fun to be the one bottoming, then?" Luffy asked.

"I don't think so, either."

There was a painful pause as Luffy counted what one plus one equaled, but it didn't take long. "So
it's like equally fun?"

"I would say so."

"Hmm... why people are talking like it matters, then?"

"Well, it's different." Law inched his hand into the leg of Luffy's shorts, caressing his thigh; the act
was mostly thoughtful as he was thinking of the right words. The atmosphere had calmed down
some, which was beneficial to the discussion; some blood was circulating into their brain, too. They
probably needed to go through this at some point. "It's like... salty and sweet delicacies? There are
some people who definitely prefer one over the other, but there are also many enjoying both."

"Aah, that sounds so sensible. I wanna eat everything!"

Law smiled, this was going better than he could have imagined. He was pretty proud of the
comparison he had come up with, it both felt appropriate and suited Luffy's way of thinking. He was
slowly becoming good at coming up with food comparisons about all kind of things.
"Me too," he said. "I've never been able to understand why some people are so eager to get stuck into particular roles and stereotypes, even though they don't want to eat the same dish every day, either."

"I wanna eat meat every single day."

"I know, but it's still cooked in different ways and there are different side dishes to go with it."

Luffy tilted his head, thinking. "Yeah, that's true. I could eat only grilled meat every single day and be perfectly happy with it, but whenever Sanji makes something else out of it, it's often even better."

"So you think it's good to have some variation."

"Hm, yeah." Luffy was silent for a while, and his hands had stopped moving on Law's stomach; the touch was a pleasant warm weight, feeling close. "What's bread, then?"

"What?"

"I mean, if we're comparing food and sex —"

Wow, when you put it like that it sounds so fucking absurd.

"— which I like, by the way, it's so easy to get... then, what's bread? That thing you just can't stomach?"

Law blinked, dumbfounded, because actually it was a damn good question. It didn't mean answering it was easy, though.

He looked back at the previous times he had had sex, but couldn't think of any particular action that was repulsive to him in itself. Everything had been all right.

There was also a bunch of things he had never done before, but was quite open to trying. For instance, he had never given oral sex to a man, but it wasn't about fellatio itself, it was just him being a bit of a hygiene freak. And with a partner he had met only a moment ago there was no way for him to know where that had been. Thus putting it into his mouth wasn't ranking very highly in his list of things he wanted to do.

He was very much ready to try it with Luffy in very near future. Once he had been about to do it while they were taking a shower, without having any problem with it, but Luffy had had other plans. He was curious about it, and he didn't think he needed to wait for an opportunity very long.

He couldn't think of any activity that could represent bread. If there was something he couldn't stomach, it had to be a certain attitude that was badly stroking him the wrong way.

"Perhaps getting my mood and opinions ignored," he said. "If I'm not in the mood for something, then insisting and pressuring me... Yes. If we're to use this comparison, that would definitely be my bread. Lathered with some poison, too."

Luffy burst into delighted laughter, making Law frown. "You think that was a funny answer, Straw Hat?"

"It's so very you! I like it." Luffy smiled, making it impossible for Law to be angry with him.

"What about you, then?" Law placed his hand on Luffy's, interlocking their fingers. "Is there something you think you wouldn't like in sex?"
Having thought about it for a moment, Luffy shook his head. "Can't think of anything. Anything like that hasn't happened yet, and if I think of things I could do with you all of them just seem really nice."

"If something like that occurs sometimes and you don't want to do it, just tell me, okay?" Law didn't actually believe anyone was capable of pressuring Luffy into something he didn't want to do, not intentionally nor by accident, but saying this aloud still felt like a right thing to do, taking some weight off his shoulders.

"Yeah, sure. I don't wanna do anything that I don't wanna do, so doing something like that would be really stupid, right?"

It sounded so stupid that it was almost philosophical. Or other way round, Law wasn't sure which one it was. He gave a laugh.

Luffy grinned, revealing every single tooth, before leaning closer to Law, cupping his cheek and kissing him briefly. "I like it when you laugh."

Law almost wanted to start laughing more just because of this, but there were very few things in the world he found so funny. It was plenty that he had laughed aloud several times recently. Sometimes several months passed without him even smiling.

Luffy clearly was good for him, and he wrapped his hands around his neck, pulling him into another kiss, remarkably longer than the previous one, and with much more tongue. Luffy didn't waste time before starting to grind their hips together, making both of them moan or whine at times.

They had gotten through their essential conversation in a pretty satisfactory way, and taking some clothes off started to look like the next step. Law, at least, had way too much of them; it was hot and Luffy's thighs on both sides of his pelvis were almost burning. He couldn't wait for the moment he would get between them without any clothes separating them.

He had a complete list of totally logical reasons for why it would be best if he topped first. The most essential one being that he knew what he was doing while Luffy didn't. Thus he wanted to be in control. They could switch next time, after Luffy had experienced what it exactly was like.

Personal reasons were even more plentiful, but he tried keeping it rational and not think of them.

He buried his fingers into Luffy's hair, letting its familiar, slightly coarse feel reassure him as their grinding teased him to full hardness again, so that his cock was uncomfortably pressed against his stomach in tight jeans. Having kissed for a good while, he battled Luffy's tongue out of his mouth and took a deep breath.

"All right," he started. "Want to do it now?"

Luffy nodded eagerly, rocking their cocks, trapped in tightened pants, against each other.

"Ah!" Law started kissing Luffy's neck so as to smother his noises there, and couldn't help moving his hips along Luffy's movements. It started to feel like controlling himself was going to be a challenge, too bad that it was necessary.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to start by simply rubbing their cocks against each other and coming like that; and after taking care of the most desperate heat, proceed without needing to hurry? He already knew both of them recovered pretty quickly after an orgasm. At least if it was the first one, they hadn't had time to experiment more than that.
"Okay, what do we do first?" Luffy asked.

Apparently not the thing Law had thought a moment ago, at least, not if Luffy was that enthusiastic to get to it. Well, that was fine with him, too. The idea about needing to wait longer before getting to come sparked an angry throb in his groin, but he was very good in controlling himself.

"Stripping off is generally a good way to start," Law said. "This is the first time, so it's probably best if you bottom, because –"

"Why?"

"I was in the middle of explaining!"

"Oh." Luffy shut his mouth tightly, but didn't seem ready to listen to any kind of explanation. There was stubbornness ready to go through fire in his expression, making Law smell difficulties.

"It would just be easier like that," Law said.

_Easier to show than to explain. Easier for my mind. All in all, simply easier._

"How do you know that?" Luffy asked.

Law stared at Luffy, mouth gaping. It was like the question was referring to something he didn't even want to think about, because if _that_ was going to be another mess, he could kiss his erection goodbye for a while.

"How do you know that?" Luffy repeated, as there had been no answer. "Have you tried this sometime, or something like that?"

Fuck, sometimes Law really hated being right.

He gave an extremely heavy sigh, bracing himself to have a discussion instead of rolling in the bed. He took a proper hold of Luffy's hand, squeezing it. "I'm sure even you are aware of the fact that there are some people who sometimes have sex, even though they are not in love with their partner? Even though they actually don't have any feelings for them?"

"Yeah, there are some who do that. I never get what's supposed to be fun in that." Luffy seemed confused, not knowing what this had to do with their situation.

"Well, I've done it too." Why admitting it was making him feel so bad? He didn't think he had done anything wrong – not when it came to sex – but he still wished to be swallowed by the bed. Preferably he could sink through the bottom of the ship as well. Perhaps it was Luffy's adorable naivety that was making him look really awful in comparison.

"Oh." Luffy blinked. Sometimes it made Law think of owls, those eyes were so very big and round.

"I thought you had guessed it ages ago," he said.

"Why did you say you're bad in this, then?"

Law took a deep breath, gathering his thoughts and wondering just how many times that misinterpretation was going to come back and haunt him. "I was talking of relationship things back then. I've never had a romantic relationship before you." He tried a small smile, and to his relief Luffy smiled back.

"What relationship stuff?"
"Everything... holding hands and other kind of small caresses, caring about the other, having feelings." This was so excessively sappy, Law felt his face heating with embarrassment. "That's totally new to me, so I'm bad at it. Actually, I probably will always be bad at it despite getting some practise." He simply was an awkward complex on legs, nothing was going to change it.

"You're just as you are," Luffy said.

Law's heart felt like exploding in such a painfully happy way that he feared the pressure was going to tear its chambers. "Thank you. I... also like the way you are."

Luffy gave a joyful laugh at that, looking at him, wide smile on his face.

"Anyway, back then I meant that I'm bad at everything like that. I didn't intend to make it sound like I've never had sex. I've had some. Does it bother you?"

Law could already envision the coming awkward conversation about his sexual history; how much he had done it, with whom, what kind of things he exactly had done, and whether those previous partners had been better at it than Luffy; and everything else a jealous boyfriend might want to know. He was aware of how bad it would seem that he had already lost the count, though using rough approximation he supposed the number of his partners was about forty; he had been going about it for nine years at steady, albeit also lazy, pace.

"Nah, it was before we got together, right?" Luffy shook his head carelessly, but then frowned. "I was just somewhat surprised, it never crossed my mind that it was something you liked to do."

"I'm not so sure I liked it in the first place." Being always so cautious as he needed to deal with a new person. Besides, there were bound to be some surprises, even though he really wanted to avoid them. And most partners didn't make much effort to figure out what he liked, after all they would never meet again... For the sake of being fair, he had to admit he hadn't bothered with it much, either. Pointless one night stands were their own, pretty repulsive kind of thing.

"Yeah... I guess I kinda knew that. You don't like to be touched by random people. But why did you then...?"

"Perhaps I was curious? It's not like I'm quite sure of it myself." And there were times when he really missed being close to someone and getting some human contact, which was easier if he used sex as an excuse. Besides, he knew how easy it would have been for him to become a hermit half by accident, if he didn't push himself to have some contact at times. "Anyways... I don't have any regrets because of it, but I really don't feel like doing it as long as I have you."

There was more delighted laughing, then Luffy leaned closer to rest his head on Law's chest, on his heart. "You'll always have me, 'cause we're gonna get married."

"That remains to be seen." Law was stroking Luffy's nape, very relieved as they apparently had avoided drama. He didn't understand what good he had done in his life to deserve Luffy.

They were lying down a long time in a comfortable silence, just enjoying being close. Finally Luffy talked, thoughtful. "So, this thing with topping and bottoming, is it like you've tried both?"

"Yeah."

"And you liked both? As much?"

"I'd say that, yes." It pretty much depended on what kind of person his partner was, and also his mood, but he couldn't say he found one option more pleasurable than the other. And with Luffy, he
definitely wanted to try both.

"Why does it matter to you which one we try first, then?"

"I did say it's different, didn't I? And I really think that me topping would be easier." Law gave a millionth sigh. They had ended up with this question again, but on the other hand, Luffy did have a point. Especially after remembering all the people with whom he had happened to sleep – not that he had even heard the names of half of them – spreading his legs now should be no problem to him. At least Luffy cared about how he was feeling, so damn much; therefore it should be very enjoyable. Even though the preparation might prove to be fumbling.

Luffy continued lying on Law, but also started caressing his side under the hem of his shirt. One of Luffy's hands was leaning comfortably on his hip, and as he was thinking all the things Luffy could do with those hands – holding his hips tightly, grabbing his knees and pushing them apart, sliding them higher along his inner thighs... His arousal had been slumbering for a moment, but now he felt it slowly stirring awake in his groin, making Luffy's touch feel more electrifying than soothing.

Maybe he should simply say it. Something like, 'Well, I'm already on my back, so what do you say if...'

"You're not telling me everything," Luffy said.

"What, why's that?" The change of topic was so sudden, Law couldn't follow.

"If it was only a matter of taste, no one would care about how we're doing it. No one ever wants to listen to me talking of food, either, and that's a matter of taste too. So there's something you're keeping from me, right? Otherwise it wouldn't matter to you either, if you really like both. What is it?"

Law groaned with sheer frustration. It was ironic; usually he wished that Luffy thought more, but as it now happened, he apparently didn't like it. At least the timing for it was awful, as he had just managed to make a turnaround in his mind, adjusting himself to a new plan. Plus, this wasn't a question he wished to answer in any way.

He didn't want to admit being a bit nervous about letting Luffy push his fingers into his ass, not before Luffy had some experience of what it actually felt like. It would sound like he didn't trust Luffy, which wasn't true. Even less he wanted to talk about the fact that imagining what kind of mental images might pop into his mind during sex really scared him.

Extremely unwanted mental images concerning a certain man wearing a tasteless pink feather coat. Caesar had effectively poked at that fear far too recently. And Law had unpleasant experience about being broken enough to flip out of the reality right now, if even one minor thing felt similar to his recent nightmares.

Fuck, he felt like some filth floundering in the bottom of some cesspool, because his mind was even capable of making such a bloody insulting comparison between Luffy and Doflamingo. Like he could ever think that Luffy –

But if these kind of thoughts crossed his mind, even involuntarily, didn't it mean that he actually was thinking of it?

There was no way he could ever say it aloud.

"Traffy?" Luffy sounded worried, propping himself up in order to really look at Law. "Hey? What is it? You feel so..."
I'm starting to be so fucking tired of that fucking HAKI. Can't even have a panic attack in peace.

"Let go and get off me," he said tensely. He needed some space and he needed it now, and if he didn't get it, he would warp somewhere else in the course of next five seconds. He didn't care where it would be. Away.

Luffy scrambled aside hastily, like he had just noticed he had been sitting on glowing embers.

It made Law feel even worse, how ready Luffy was to listen to his totally incomprehensible wish. He sat up, wrapping his arms around himself and trying to squeeze himself back together. The guilt because of his terrible thoughts felt like it might very well kill him.

Maybe he wished for it.

Having taken a few very deep and calming breaths, he dared to glance at Luffy, who had wrapped his arms around his knees, watching Law with wide eyes, understandably so.

"I'm stupid and thinking too much, sorry about that," Law said. "It's not your fault."

Luffy didn't say anything, but nodded slowly.

"I'm still a wreck after Dressrosa... It takes more time to heal a mind than a body." And sometimes the mind didn't heal at all, but at least it could be glued together, so that it was still usable and not leaking much. But the cracks remained.

"Yeah," Luffy said softly. "I get it. It was awful after Marineford. And whenever I thought I was doing better already, there was some thing that made me remember and all of it came back." There was a long silence. "Sometimes it still happens." Something in his quiet tone of voice made Law suspect that this was something Luffy hadn't told anyone.

"When it comes to that kind of experience, two years isn't a long time." Law stretched out his hand, and Luffy took a tight hold of it.

Marineford still haunting Luffy was something Law had expected, despite Luffy not showing it to anyone. But now Law didn't have a clue about what to say or do. And trying to continue talking of that topic felt pretty inappropriate right now, it kind of didn't mesh with their sex talk very well.

He didn't even know whether they were trying to get into each other's pants or understand each other on some really deep level. In this point both alternatives felt weird.

Law hoped he could slip away somehow, because he had way too much to think right now, and if there was something he did even worse than letting someone comfort him, it was comforting someone else. However, this was a really bad moment for slipping away if he didn't want to be a prick; so he was just sitting on the bed, squeezing Luffy's hand and wondering what he could say next.

'It's a lovely weather today, don't you agree?' seemed like a really undying classic.

"You still wanna have sex, Traffy?" Luffy asked.

The corners of Law's mouth were twisting upwards involutarily. That lightened the atmosphere very effectively. "Definitely. But not right now, I need to... get a grip of myself. I assume the dinner is already on its way, so what do you say if we eat first?"

"I never say 'no' to eating." Luffy grinned.
"I knew it. All right, we could go to deck or something." Law pulled his hand back from Luffy's grip, feeling painfully awkward, and started pulling his boots on.

"Yeah, I guess."

"I hope no one's going to jest." When you took into account how Law had been carried into the infirmary, that might be too much to hope for. "If someone utters even one word about topping, I'm probably going to slice them into ten pieces."

Luffy burst laughing. "That's a really cool thing to see every time."

"Straw Hat. You're weird."

"Yup! But hey, you didn't answer my question. Why are they caring so much about how we're doing it?"

"It's only a stupid stereotype I don't particularly like."

"What ste- ste-"

Law sighed as Luffy struggled with the difficult word. He didn't particularly feel like answering, but if Luffy decided to ask someone else, he might get an answer that was even more suspicious. He didn't want to know what someone like Sanji or Franky might say, if Luffy made the mistake of wanting to hear some of their wisdom. "Well, if it's a man and a woman having sex, the man is naturally penetrating the woman because he happens to have an organ meant for it. You can't really assimilate it to homosexual –"

"So it's like more manly to top?" Luffy interrupted.

"There are some who think so," Law admitted. He was already envisioning the rocky shallow where they would shipwreck right about now, and suddenly he was unbelievably tired.

"I wanna do it. I've decided." Luffy crossed his arms, making his declaration.

... Wow. That was even more irritating than I had imagined, even though I guessed he's going to say something like that.

"It's a really old-fashioned and narrow-minded way to look at it," Law said, despite guessing it would be no use. He grabbed Kikoku, that had been leaning against the wall, and was prepared to march out. His nerves had been about to snap for a too long time already, it was almost soothing to know they couldn't take even one stupidity more before giving in. Then the tension would finally be over, and he could start collecting the shards.

"So what? Being manly is really cool."

"If that's the way you're going to see it, you need to have your fun while topping someone else than me. It's not my intention to be anyone's bitch."

Law didn't stay to see what kind of impression his words made; he marched out, slamming the door shut after him.
Law marched into the kitchen, where he was greeted by the sound of a knife rhythmically tapping against a chopping board. There was something bubbling on a stove already, smelling salty.

Having seen him, Sanji raised his brow, surprised. "That definitely was an unexpectedly quick and quiet –"

"Finish that sentence, and I guarantee your limbs are going to feel quite off after that," Law interrupted, tightening his hold of his sword so that his knuckles were turning white.

"... Fine." Sanji shut his mouth, sweeping a heap of perfect carrot cubes into the kettle before looking at Law more carefully. "What is it you want, then?"

Law relaxed a bit. He liked it if people realized when irritating him wasn't a good idea, and kept it businesslike at those kind of moments. "Is there any alcohol available here?"

"Pretty decent stock, yes. You want something?"

"Yes, I could use a drink." He sat onto the bench by the kitchen island, as it seemed like he wasn't going to leave the kitchen for some time. Not without that drink, at least.

"What kind of drink?" Sanji asked, washing his hands. "Beer? Sake? Wine?"

"Some cocktail, if that's doable."

"That wasn't very informative, too many possibilities. What kind of cocktails you like?"

Law gave a frustrated sigh, fiddling with his hair. He had never considered remembering names of cocktails necessary. He didn't believe that Vince's mixes even had names in the first place, and it had been a long time since he had bothered with wondering what Vince exactly put into them. There had been one time when Law had been mildly traumatized because of celery juice, and after that he had decided he was happier if he didn't know, thus he didn't ask anymore. "It seems like my self-proclaimed bartender has been spoiling me rotten – he tends to just mix something for me whenever I happen to feel like it. Tends to make it suit my mood, too."

"Sounds like a challenge." Sanji seemed to like the challenge. "In that case I assume that anything overly sweet doesn't hit the spot right now?"

"Nope." Law smirked dryly. Sanji was following quite promisingly. "Something bitter and bleak? And I'll be very delighted if you can make it have some nasty colour."

"Has anyone ever told you that your taste is fucking disturbing?"
"For some strange reason I tend to hear that a lot. It's ironic."

Sanji hummed. Having thought of it for a moment, he opened a cupboard that had been locked, starting to take bottles from there and pour their contents into a shaker confidently, like he spent most of his time by a bar counter instead of by a stove in a kitchen.

Soon a tall and narrow glass was put in front of Law; there was some see-through, pale purplish liquid in it. It looked like the liquid detergent Tab used when scrubbing the windows of the submarine, in order to prevent moisture from condensing to them even in cold water. A half-raw strawberry floating in the liquid was very effectively perfecting the bleak look.

"Yum," Law commented, impressed. A cocktail looking like this was bound to be an experience.

"Is one enough for you?"

"Yes, thank you. Drinking larger quantities doesn't really suit me." He just wanted to loosen his nerves a bit while doing some thinking.

Sanji glanced at him curiously, but didn't ask; instead he concentrated on locking his bar again and cleaning up before going back to his chopping board and dinner preparations.

"When I start getting intoxicated, I tend to get angsty, too," Law said.

"And that's something you usually aren't –"

"If you think I'm bad in general, you don't want to see me after about my eighth beer." Law was fiddling with his delicious looking drink, watching the strawberry bumbling in the glass. "It's more merciful for everyone if I won't go there."

Sanji hummed, dropping a big chunk of meat onto his chopping board and starting to cut it into strips. "Well, it's not a bad thing if a captain likes to keep his head clear. Luffy's not one for drinking, either."

_Luffy_.

Law wasn't pleased as he was reminded of Luffy just yet. Sure, the topic was looming in his mind as a persistent shadow all the time, but he hadn't properly settled to sip his drink yet; after doing so he would have been ready to go through the whole mess in his mind. Right now he wanted to put it off just a moment more.

"I'd like to drink some more because I like the taste, but what do you do." He sipped his cocktail for the first time, and it was everything he had been hoping for. The taste was intense and pungent; there was some nuance that had him thinking of a pesticide and a metallic box that had been hermetically sealed for years. "This is exactly what I needed."

"It's probably best if I don't even try understanding," Sanji said, muttering something about shitty taste.

"Probably."

"But it's all good if you find it pleasing."

It was silent in the kitchen. Law wondered whether to go to some solitary place to wallow in his thoughts, but being here wasn't half bad. The silent, rhythmical tapping of the chopping was quite pleasant as a sound, and Sanji wasn't too disturbing company, especially while concentrating mostly
on cooking.

"Did you have a fight?" Sanji asked.

*And there goes that peace.*

"You can't exactly call it a fight," Law sighed. No, it hadn't been anything as fair as a fight. He just happened to be a prick with way too many sore spots, and he didn't want to reveal them, not even to Luffy. Plus, his nerves had been wrung too tight during their conversation, as he had been wondering all the time what was going to explode and when. Sure, Luffy had been an idiot, and inconsiderate, but that was hardly enough to justify Law striking below the belt with the precision of a surgeon.

Law thought it was comparable to a situation where someone accidentally hit him painfully, and he decided to cut the whole arm of that person off as a revenge.

He was so fucking proud of himself, once again.

And he felt like being acerbic, because he was feeling bad. Currently Sanji was the only one in the line of fire. Plus a good target anyways; he had forced Law to think of Luffy, which wasn't appreciated right now.

Sanji had gone annoyingly quiet, though, like getting that Law didn't want small talk, and that leaving him alone was a wise thing to do right now.

"This is really tasty," Law said, swirling the cocktail in his hands. At times the strawberry was floating the red side up, sometimes the pale side up; and he kept staring at its slow turning around, mesmerized. "But I guess it's a good thing that you can't drink this stuff enough to get smashed."

Sanji hummed, showing that he was listening while rolling the strips of meat in spices.

"Last time I really was smashed – years ago – I thought that cutting my own legs was a brilliant idea."

"I get what you mean by drinking not suiting you," Sanji said. "What the fuck gave you such a shitty idea?"

"I wanted to make them shorter." Law smiled, as creepy as possible, the expression was spreading onto his face very easily. "There are many other people seeming to think there's a reason to do that, too, considering that I mostly resemble some kind of a... hm, *panda-spider?*"

Sanji froze for a while, like caught red-handed doing something bad, until sighing. "I don't know how you heard that, but I didn't mean to offend. But if you want to fight –"

"My sense of hearing is better than most people give me the credit for," Law interrupted quickly, so as not to get a challenge he didn't want. And that hearing was making him grey from time to time, as he heard some things he didn't want to hear, and even some little sounds heard through walls were sometimes driving him out of his mind.

That was how he had been forced to became aware that almost everyone aboard the ship was speculating about topping and bottoming, the conversation was so lively that it was a wonder Nami hadn't managed to set up a betting pool. He found the speculations irritating, but they didn't actually have anything to do with him, not so much that he was affected by them. At least he had thought so.

The limit of his tolerance was crossed at the moment when Luffy decided to be an idiot about it, too.
That definitely had to do with him.

But he still had overreacted. Also, he was a prick.

"Well, sorry about that, then," Sanji grunted, apparently taking Law’s gloomy expression as anger directed at him. "Better?"

"Worse," Law answered. Taking his sour mood out on bystanders never worked, why hadn't he learned it already? "I'm a prick."

"For the sake of politeness I should probably reassure you that it's not true, but you're damn right."

Law snorted, amused.

"Probably not as big as you think, though," Sanji added.

Law couldn't come up with anything to say to that, not anything he wanted to say aloud, at least. He didn't particularly feel like assessing his self worth with Sanji or demand some reasonings for his argument; it didn't matter, because Sanji didn't know him well enough to evaluate how big a prick he was. That was something he knew himself. It seemed to go worse all the time, approaching infinity.

He was leaning on the kitchen island, discouraged, staring at his cocktail; there was more than half of it left. It wasn't the type of drink you can gulp down very quickly.

The silence in the kitchen wasn't pleasant. Law was almost relieved, when the door was opened and Robin entered.

Suddenly Sanji was all helpfulness and some hearts erupting from him, asking whether Robin-chwan possibly wanted something while waiting for the dinner.

"I do, thank you for asking." Robin flashed a smile at Sanji, seeming to turn him to jelly quite effectively. "It occurred to me that it might be nice to have a small aperitif before the dinner, so would you mind mixing something for me?"

"Of course, Robin-chwan!" Sanji interrupted his cooking right away, hurrying to fulfill the request and moving so quickly that he seemed to be just a flurry of a black suit. Very soon he handed Robin a goblet in which there was something golden-red.

"Thank you, it seems to be my favourite," Robin said, accepting it.

"But of course, only the best for a beautiful lady!"

"I plan to enjoy it in the aquarium bar, it's so lovely and peaceful in there." She glanced at Law, like she supposedly had noticed him at that moment. "Would you like to join me?"

It wasn't only a question, even though it seemed like one. Law had a sneaking suspicion that refusing wouldn't be a very healthy thing to do; Robin had her ways to get what she wanted. He had had time to hear some stories from the Straw Hats, and he didn't want to experience those things himself. It was also possible that Robin's company would actually do him some good, so he accepted the invitation, following her downstairs.

It was pretty dim in the room, but apparently neither of them felt like switching more lights on, as they weren't about to do any presicion work or reading, for instance. The lighting was pleasant for conversing. They sat down onto the half-circle shaped couch, pretty far from each other; both of them liked to maintain their personal space.
"That drink looks very interesting," Robin said, tasting her own, which seemed to not be quite as... challenging for taste buds as Law's.

"Its taste is very interesting, too. But it's precisely what I asked for."

"What did you ask for, then?"

"Something bitter and bleak. And having a nasty colour."

Robin gave a laugh. "Perhaps I should start being a bit more creative while ordering drinks, if the results are that interesting."

"Your cook seems to enjoy challenges in kitchen, so why not."

The silence settling in the room would have been pleasant, if Law hadn't needed to wonder the reason for Robin wanting to talk with him right now. The timing hardly was a coincidence. He waited for a while, looking at a school of fish with blue-striped fins swimming around in the aquarium; they had been caught yesterday. Finally he couldn't take it anymore.

"Are you going to bully me for some answers?" he asked.

Robin seemed to give the idea some serious consideration. "Hmm, that wasn't my intention, but that can totally be arranged if you like."

"Don't bother with it just for my sake," Law hurried to say.

"Seriously speaking. Considering Luffy currently sulking on the figure head, and the fact that you were sitting in the kitchen, needling Sanji and drinking something 'bitter and bleak', the first assumption that crosses my mind is that there's some kind of a conflict going on."

"I had already stopped that needling, just concentrating on feeling like shit, when you entered," Law pointed out.

"You're not the only one with better sense of hearing than people give you the credit for."

"Or ears all over the ship?"

"Same thing in the end." Robin shrugged.

"I don't like being called 'panda-spider'," Law announced. Mostly in order to prevent the conversation from progressing towards that conflict, or Luffy sulking on the figure head.

He should have guessed that was where Luffy had gone. What on earth Luffy might be thinking right now? Had Law's point even gotten through to him? Was Luffy thinking that he was extremely angry? Was Luffy feeling bad?

Law felt bad as he kept thinking of it. Why did he need to be so fucking difficult? But he wasn't quite ready to face Luffy yet.

"What's wrong with it?" Robin asked. "It sounds quite cute."

"But I'm not cute."

"Objection rejected. We've been through this already."

And that conversation wasn't something Law wanted to go through again, so he accepted reluctantly.
that apparently there was someone thinking he was cute, moving on to the next point. "The moniker in question is a nifty way to highlight those features of mine that make me way too self-conscious all the time as they are."

"That is an understandable argument." Robin nodded.

"People tend to very helpfully suggest that sleeping might help in getting rid of these circles... I hate it." As if sleeping was so easy that he could just decide to do it more. Were they thinking that he enjoyed staying up and that it was some kind of a choice? Besides, the shadows didn't diminish even if he managed to catch a good night's sleep. They had appeared as he had been suffering from Amber Lead Syndrome, and even though he had been cured in the end, they just never went away after that.

A permanent reminder about the fact that he had practically dragged himself up from the bottom of his grave, all by himself, and with bleeding fingers. Sometimes he wondered why he had even bothered with it.

"People say hurtful things sometimes, if they aren't aware of everything you haven't told them; blindly poking at a sore spot," Robin said.

"Indeed."

And wasn't this whole conflict based on that? Law hadn't told.

He hadn't told what exactly had been the fate from which Luffy had saved him, dashing to untie his shackles from the Heart seat. He hadn't talked of nightmares and fears he had because of the incident, either. It had felt too difficult and humiliating. Besides, nothing had even happened in the end, so there was no reason to not try holding it in even though it made bile rise up his throat.

He hadn't told that he was a bit oversensitive to begin with, because of realizing that when it came to that – spot on – comparison to an old married couple, it was obvious that he totally fit in the role of a nagging wife. It was just a stupid little thing, wallowing in it any more was no use, so why to bother with mentioning it?

He also hadn't told that maybe there were times when fantasies were something more than just fantasies; that there was a part of him wanting to submissively throw himself onto his back in front of Luffy, to be pressed into the mattress under him. He wasn't even close to accepting that realization, worrying of what Luffy would think if he knew. Perhaps consider Law disturbingly perverted?

So many things he hadn't told.

As Luffy had inconsiderately announced wanting to be 'manly', leaving the opposite to him... it just had been the final straw he couldn't take anymore.

"You seem to be doing some deep thinking," Robin said. "I think we were about to get to that conflict before you tried diverting the topic somewhere else."

"You mean that bullying me for some answers is your intention, after all?"

"Not at all, unless you insist. But I don't mind listening, if putting that tangle of thoughts of yours into some sentences you can speak aloud is making things a bit more clear."

Law gave a heavy sigh, not knowing what to do. He wasn't used to talking of his problems. The closest thing to doing that happened whenever he was leaning against Bepo, while there was no one else around and he wasn't reading a book. Those times he tended to say whatever crossed his mind,
without much censoring, even though he had a habit of avoiding the most personal topics even then.

He didn't talk of his problems. He thought of them. There were times when it was neither pleasant nor effective, he kept going in so many tiresome circles that sometimes he ended up with an even worse tangle than the original problem had been.

Perhaps he could try it, just a little bit. Start talking of the topic in general, not his personal situation.

He steeled himself by a generous gulp of bitter and bleak, about a third of it still remained. Staring closely at the strawberry, he asked, "What do you think of equality of the partners in bed when speaking of homosexual relationships?"

"That question is broad enough to write an essay about it," Robin said. "Narrow it a bit, if you please?"

Law rolled his eyes. It felt like Robin was easily following him, she just didn't want to reveal it. "I supposed it was quite clear that I'm talking of that topping and bottoming issue everyone seems to find so extremely interesting."

"That's what caused your fight, wasn't it?"

"I didn't say anything like that. Perhaps I just feel like I need to discuss the topic right now on a perfectly theoretical level."

Robin gave him a suspicious look.

"Seriously. It'd be interesting to find out if I'm all alone with my opinions, and thus some kind of an idealistic idiot."

"All right. It has always been quite amusing to me when some people try to speculate on the dynamics of any relationship just based on who happens to thrust what and where."

"It's amusing as long as they don't speculate on your relationship," Law said.

"I understand how that kind of thing might feel disturbing." Robin offered a kind little smile from behind the rim of her glass before continuing. "In any case, my personal opinion is that drawing some conclusions based on just that thing is about as spot on as claiming that a man is leading a woman in a relationship just because he happens to have a penis. That would be just as logical."

Law snorted into his glass. "Indeed. As far as I have seen, it's usually the other way round."

"Besides, as I see it, the question about your favourite food has no meaning except while eating, and it doesn't define you in any way."

"It's a relief to feel like I'm not the only intelligent being in the whole universe, after all," Law said. He wondered briefly if Luffy's company tended to make everyone use food comparisons. When you had interacted with Luffy for a while, you were forced to start analyzing things in a way that made them more likely to get through to him.

"I know what you mean."

Law felt a bit better, just by knowing that someone was thinking in the same way as he. That someone being Robin wasn't surprising to him. He didn't actually feel like he needed to continue this topic, just leaning more comfortably against the backrest and watching the fish, the unanimous movement of the school was quite mesmerizing.
"May I ask how you ended up fighting, if you think like that?" Robin asked.

Having considered a long time, Law answered. "I guess it's less about the issue itself and more about how you say it. *That* was seriously rubbing me the wrong way."

"Ah, I can see that happening. He tends to blurt things out without thinking what it sounds like for the other."

"Indeed."

"If it's any consolation, he seemed pretty remorseful. Didn't want to tell me the reason, though."

"So you decided to try me, instead?" Law guessed. Hearing that Luffy was remorseful really was a consolation. It had him hoping that Luffy would be willing to be reasonable once Law was ready to go to him.

"Naturally." Robin smirked.

There was a long silence that wasn't awkward at all. Law was swirling the liquid at the bottom of the glass; it became even nastier as it got warmer, the bitter nuance of the sealed metal box becoming more emphasized.

He had been wanting to ask Robin something for a while, but had never had the nerve. Now they had already had an awkward discussion, and the atmosphere was quite nice, so he thought he wasn't going to get a better chance.

"May I ask you a very personal question?" he asked.

"I suppose, because I'm quite curious to know what on earth you might want to know."

"Okay. This is a background question: how old were you when you got your Devil's Fruit Power?"

"As a little kid. I don't even know how old I was then. Feels like I've always had it."

Law nodded, not knowing how to comment.

"That's why I was being bullied all the time," she said.

"That's terrible, I'm sorry to hear that." If Robin had been living on some remote little island where people hardly ever saw any Powers, a little child who was a Devil's Fruit user would surely be considered a freak there. At least Law's involuntary pirating had had the upside of Powers not being so rare at sea.

"What about it?"

"Yeah, your Power..." Law gathered his thoughts the best way he could. "Do you ever feel like its messing with your subconscious? For example, giving you dreams or... well... *thoughts*... disturbing ones... and I'm not talking only of nightmares?"

*Or is it just me being a nutcase?*

"Sexual kind of thoughts?" Robin took a guess.

"Among other things."

"Yes. It does."
Law sighed, his shoulders relaxing and dropping lower. "Good. I mean, it's not good in itself, because it's really disturbing whenever it happens, but perhaps it's kind of a part of a package if you happen to have a weird Power. Sometimes it makes me seriously doubt my mental health, but if I'm not the only one..."

Pretty close to him, there was a leg growing out of the couch, looking exactly like Robin's. A bare, slender ankle, wearing a purple sandal with a tiny heel. The leg straightened, poking at his calf before disappearing.

"Is my Power supposedly weird?" Robin asked.

"Somewhat. Though it's not as bad as mine."

"When it comes to those thoughts twisted because of it... I'm sure yours are interesting." Robin raised her brow curiously, like expecting Law to tell her more.

There was no way in hell that Law was going to describe them, ever, to anyone. "Not the first word I'd use myself, but yeah. Really interesting. Or perhaps creepy and deranged as hell."

Robin hummed, thoughtful. "I can imagine. But wouldn't it be pretty strange if a thing like a Power didn't affect your mind in any way?"

"Yes, that's true." On some level eating a Devil's Fruit could be seen as any big change and crisis happening in your life, and things like that always had some consequences mentally. It still didn't mean that Law appreciated all of those directions into which his jerk off fantasies tried to run away sometimes. Sick things were sick.

Perhaps he still could stop panicking every time it happened, thinking that he was about to lose it once and for all. That was a relief, one thing less to worry about.

Now he could concentrate on getting a grip of himself, so that he could face Luffy.

~*~

"It's not my intention to be anyone's bitch."

The last words Law had said were echoing in Luffy's head in a nasty way as he was sitting on the figure head, staring at the sea. They were anchored, and the sea wasn't quite as interesting as it was while they were sailing, but there was always something fascinating in watching waves.

Right now he hoped that some kind of an exciting sea monster would pop up, raising its ugly head to the surface of the sea and trying to capsize the ship. Then he could hit it. It felt like he needed to hit something. Or maybe he needed to be hit by someone.

He didn't have any idea how on earth Law had come up with that sentence, but what was clear was that somehow he had managed to insult Law. As Law had been marching out, Luffy had immediately wanted to run after him, controlling himself at the last second.

He didn't think he knew all sides of Law yet – perhaps he was never going to know all of him, Law wasn't an uncomplicated person – but Luffy had found out that he had a tendency to distance himself. Sometimes Law simply wanted to be left alone, and got tired and cranky if he needed to deal with some company then. Sometimes he wanted to be away from some person or situation in particular, in order to think of them. And because Law had now marched away from Luffy, assuming that this time Law wanted some distance to him felt pretty sensible. Probably he wanted to sulk and think in peace.
Letting Law do as he would felt like a good idea. Luffy didn't think Law's mood would improve even a bit if he forced his company before Law had done his thinking. Trying to make Law laugh by tickling him or something like that would probably just worsen his mood. He was weird like that.

Thus Luffy had ended up on his special seat, staring at the sea, and perhaps even doing some thinking. What the hell had happened a moment ago?

He hadn't said a word about any bitches, let alone meant that he wanted Law to be one. Of course he didn't! He liked Law as he was, a guy. It was like those words had came totally out of the blue.

He had just wanted to top because it was manlier –

... Wait a second.

If there were two alternatives, and one of them was more something, it meant that the other, in turn, was less of that something. Even he understood that much – if someone got a bigger piece of cake, it meant smaller one for someone else. Because the size of a cake wasn't infinite. Too bad.

In other words, bottoming was unmanlier... like, more feminine? Like it was about a man and a –

*Oh.*

Yeah, he definitely needed to be hit by someone.

Law had said he didn't like thinking of it in that way. Luffy thought that now he understood the reason for that. It didn't feel quite fair.

But, like he tended to do, he had gotten excited, not listening... Why had it felt like it was so important?

He wasn't used to thinking so thoroughly, not if he didn't absolutely have to do so. But perhaps he 'absolutely had to' right now, because he wanted to tell Law why he had said it. Law liked it when things had *explanations*, but he couldn't present one if he hadn't realized it even himself.

*Robin was right. Love really is like an adventure.*

And now they were at that part where Luffy had not listened to the others, dashing off somewhere and succeeding in getting into trouble. Obliterating a house by bumping into it, awakening a herd of napping monsters, saying something inconsiderate and making someone angry – he was damn good at things like those. It made the others angry, and then he just had to try showing them that he was sorry.

What was the best way when it came to Law?

Luffy was leaning his chin on his knees, enjoying the soothing rocking of the waves. Before meeting Law it had never occurred to him that movement like that might make someone sick. At least if the waves were bigger. He thought it was fun, but Law wasn't sharing that opinion. It was so manly of Law to persist sailing even though he knew it made him sick at times. And it was just one of those numerous things that made Law so awesome.

Luffy wanted to be as good boyfriend to Law as possible. And manly things were the ones he did best – kicking some enemy's ass, adventuring, protecting other people, and stuff like that. He was great at that kind of stuff. Maybe that was what he had been thinking.

At the same time he had totally forgotten what they had been talking about earlier. He had to admit
that first finding out about what was 'bread' and then offering exactly that was a pretty stupid thing to do.

It didn't fly very well, if you were in a miserable mood to begin with. And he had felt that Law was. He always got a stomach ache whenever Law's mood was bad enough, and he was flooded by Law's emotions even though he wasn't even actively using Haki. Law had been very angry, but it was turned inwards; it had been a feeling Luffy found difficult to understand, but very hurtful all the same. For some reason Law had been loathing himself deeply.

Luffy closed his eyes, concentrating. Nowadays it was very easy to 'listen' to all of his friends aboard the ship, as well as confirm there were no monsters in the vicinity he could have hit. He sensed Law being somewhere around the aquarium bar right now, and there was another presence with him, deep and curious in a deliberate way – that was Robin.

Robin had come and asked him if he was all right, checking whether she could do something for him. She was really kind like that, and it felt like she always understood everything he told her, but this time Luffy had wanted to be left alone.

He would have concentrated on Law more closely, had he not sensed Zoro currently getting closer to him. He stopped 'listening', turning to look over his shoulder, and soon Zoro was peeking from behind the mane of the lion.

"Am I allowed to cut him in two already?" was the first thing Zoro uttered.

Luffy shook his head. Knowing that Zoro was always ready to defend him gave him a warm feeling, but there really was no need for that. "Not his fault. But you can hit me."

Zoro did. Hard enough to make even his rubber skull hurt, not asking for the reason. Trusting that Luffy had deserved it for sure. Zoro was great.

"Ouch," Luffy said, rubbing his head where soon would be a bump. "Thanks."

"So it's you who's been the idiot?" Zoro asked, settling to lean against the mane comfortably.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Going to fix it?"

Luffy liked Zoro's way of solving problems. Along with Robin, Zoro was his favourite person if he needed to solve problems. The conversations with Robin sometimes got quite complicated, making him understand things, and that was a good thing sometimes. Zoro, for his part, didn't much care about things like that, going straight to the solution. That was a good thing sometimes, too.

"Yeah, sure," he said.

"Do you know how to go about it?"

That was an important question. Luffy shrugged. Having had enough of sulking, Law was probably going to search Luffy, and then he probably should say that he hadn't meant it like that, and then he was going to see what happened and do what he always did, meaning that he improvised according to the situation. "Yeah."

Zoro nodded, not asking more about it. They were looking at the sea in a nice, companionable silence.
"Hey Zoro?" Luffy started, after some time had passed.

"Well?"

"Do you think it's manlier to top?" He really wanted to know what Zoro's opinion might be. Zoro was always so cool and manly. Even though their opinions about what was manly were different to some degree, as Zoro didn't get armours, for instance.

"I don't know," Zoro said, having thought for a while. "I don't have any experience in this."

"But what if you think about doing it?"

Zoro was silent for a long time. Luffy knew there would be an answer in due time, because there was nobody else around to hear them. It would have been no use to ask something like this if someone like Sanji had been present, Zoro would never tell what he was thinking. As he was waiting, Luffy fiddled with his new bracelet. He liked cool accessories, but tended to break or lose them pretty quickly, and for some time he hadn't had any. It would have been so nice to get a couple of tattoos, those could not be lost.

"I think it probably takes a lot of balls to let anyone put... that... into there," Zoro said.

That kind of aspect had never even crossed Luffy's mind. He hadn't thought that sex was something to be nervous about. But he had to admit that there were very few things he was nervous about, and that many people claimed his nerves were nowhere near normal.

"I also think that thinking of that is a waste of time," Zoro continued. "You and Law? It's pretty hard to imagine anything making either of you look like a pussy."

Luffy just had to throw his head backwards, laughing loudly for a long time, because yes, that was true and he hadn't thought of it, and realizing it was a great relief. "Thanks, Zoro," he said, as soon as he was able to talk again.

Zoro just grunted. For a while there was an even more comfortable silence.

"Everything all right?" Zoro asked.

"Yup."

"Good. I'm going to nap until dinner." Zoro stretched his neck a couple of times, his joints making some popping sounds, and slouched some distance away, where he sat down leaning against the railing, hands comfortably behind his nape.

Close enough to keep an eye on the bow.

It may be that Luffy also nodded off for a few minutes, exhausted because all the hard thinking. Now, as things were clear in his mind, he wasn't feeling restless and uncomfortable anymore and it didn't keep him alert. He decided to close his eyes just for a little moment, that somehow turned to a longer time than he had intended.

He awoke as someone poked at his shoulder, and he didn't need to turn around to know who it was.

"Don't sleep on the figure head, it's too easy to fall into the sea from there," Law said.

"Zoro's over there," Luffy answered. It was a perfectly good reason to not worry about something like that. He didn't think he would fall even if he was asleep, and if he fell he probably would wake
up in the air, having time to twine his arm around something and save himself, and if it happened that he fell into the sea after all, it would still be all right.

"... Yeah." Law seemed like he wanted to give him a piece of his mind, but was holding his tongue.

"Come here?"

Law did, settling beside Luffy. They needed to sit side by side, leaning against each other so as to fit the highest and most even spot on the figure head, but neither of them seemed to be sorry about that.

Luffy almost started with his apology right away, but he didn't have time to speak before Law did.

"There were three human beings and one reindeer staring at me pretty grimly as I was walking here," Law said. "They are probably wondering which one of us is going to push the other into the sea."

"Can we skip that?" Luffy wasn't feeling like pushing Law into the sea at all, and Law didn't seem like he had such intentions, either.

"I'd prefer that too, yes."

The brief silence was broken by Law again. "I apologize."

"Huh?" Luffy hadn't been expecting that, not at all.

"For leaving like that. And for just happening to be an incomprehensible and brittle prick."

Luffy didn't know what to say to that. Law blaming himself was a sad thing to hear, but he didn't exactly feel like getting stuck in trying to claim that Law wasn't those things – and reveal that he didn't actually know what Law meant by 'brittle'... Did Law always need to use such monsters for words?

Luffy liked sea monsters way more. They were easier to handle and understand.

"You are yourself," he finally said, making Law let out a painful sounding little laughter. "Besides, I knew you were gonna come back."

"... Yeah. I did."

"I decided to wait for that."

"That was a smart thing to do." Law took a hold of his hand, squeezing it. "Would you kindly do that next time, too? There's no doubt there's going to be next time. I don't think I'm capable of changing this habit."

"I don't even want you changing any of your habits. I like you, and that's how you are."

Law froze for a moment, and Luffy thought that he had said something very wrong again, but after recovering Law pulled him even closer, wrapping both arms tightly around him, and there was some part of him leaning on Luffy's head. Perhaps it was a cheek, but it was hard to be sure through his hat.

Perhaps he had said something very right after all? Anyways, somehow it felt even better than usually to press himself against Law, hugging him tightly, too.

"I don't even get how you can be so..." Law got quiet in the middle of his sentence.
"Idiotic?" Luffy filled in.

"That wasn't the word I was searching for this time."

"But I am, too. I... I didn't finish thinking. I don't think you're... that. Sorry." Getting that out, and off his mind felt pretty good.

"I actually guessed that much already." Law sighed. "I just snapped."

"That happens."

"Indeed."

They were quiet. Luffy was inhaling Law's scent deeply and thinking. He had never before analyzed his own way of thinking very closely, let alone tried expressing it verbally, but Law was so different to him that maybe it would be worth it.

"I'm not so great at keeping many things in my mind at the same time," he said. "If I'm really concentrating on something, it might happen that everything else just disappears. And then I just can't think of anything else anymore."

"One-track mind," Law said.

"What?"

"Nothing, don't mind it."

"Okay."

"May I slap you if you're doing it at a particularly wrong moment?"

"Sure, feel free to." Almost all of Luffy's friends did it already, without asking for his consent. He was downright counting on them snapping him out of it if he got stuck to something too much. That was a nifty way to get his attention, plus it was very difficult to hurt him by any blunt thing as the hits tended to just bounce back.

It seemed like neither of them had anything to add to the conversation, thus they were just sitting there in silence. Luffy realized his hand had inched under the hem of Law's hoodie, to the small of his back, just to feel some skin. He kept it in place, even though moving it downwards was a very tempting idea. He didn't know how Law was feeling.

"How're you feeling?" he asked.

"Weird."

That wasn't the answer Luffy had been expecting. It might be either good or bad. "Like how?"

"It's starting to feel like this might actually work after all." Law was smiling while saying that, you could hear it.

"This?"

"You and me. Us."

Us sounded nice. Luffy still had to give a little laugh. "Of course! I've known it all the time, but you're so slow. At least when it comes to getting dressed, and these things."
"It's just that I'm not used to expecting anything good in my life."

That was just too sad. Luffy raised his head from Law's shoulder, cupping the back of his head and pulling him into a deep kiss. It tasted pungent and alcoholic and like Law had been licking a steel roof that had been warmed by the sun.

"Were you expecting that?" he asked.

"Nope, but I probably should have."

"Yup. You can start expecting it, 'cause I'm gonna do it again. Many times."

The corner of Law's mouth twitched as an answer.

"By the way, you taste funny," Luffy said.

"That's something I can believe. Your cook mixed quite an interesting aperitif for me."

Luffy blinked, opening his mouth so as to repeat the word.

"It's a drink you drink before a meal," Law clarified.

"Hm," Luffy commented before kissing him again. For a longer time, and with even more enthusiasm.

He totally lost his sense of time as he got absorbed in kissing and petting and the need to get even closer. In the end it was Sanji who startled him back to reality.

"Oi, food's ready, so you don't need to suck each other's face on the deck, okay?" Sanji snapped.

As the food had been mentioned now, Luffy noticed being extremely hungry. He quickly disentangled himself from Law, jumping onto the fore deck, just to collide with Sanji's foot that was raised angrily. It sunk into his diaphragm, preventing him from going towards the kitchen.

"And there's no way you're entering my kitchen in that kind of state," Sanji snapped.

*State?*

The direction of Sanji's glance gave him a hint about what was the state in question, and finally Luffy took a notice of his bulging shorts. Yup. Come to think again, not a surprise after their recent bout of kissing. He had forgotten about it.

Law muttered something about one-track minds, facepalming.
Chapter Notes

This was a bad week again. Nothing works like it should. I also got some feedback that made me doubt my English again, and I'm so anxious about it that I got a panic attack when I thought of having to publish this chapter. Sweet... I'm not sure I feel like publishing but I also think it's better to get it over quickly. Then I can go hiding under my bed or something like that. That said, I still liked writing this chapter a lot, despite being unsure. This pairing is just so... <3

Thank you for all lovely readers who have left me kudos or kind comments. <3

The dinner had been quite an ordeal for Law for several reasons, mostly because there were *looks* directed at him, and because his thoughts kept drifting towards his groin all the time. It seemed like Luffy wasn't having the same problem, concentrating only on eating – his ability to concentrate wasn't enough to deal with anything else besides food, and at times Law was envious because of it.

Having finished eating, Law tried to do some reading in the library room so as to digest his meal a bit. He also hoped that Sanji could get the kitchen cleaned up before he ended up in the bed with Luffy. He had been a big enough nuisance for the cook today even without making loud noise, plus, he liked his privacy and knowing that there was no one right behind the thin wall. However, he had difficulties in concentrating on the text; there seemed to be absolutely no logic in the method described in the book. Finally it dawned to him that he had mixed up atriums and ventricles of a heart, trying to think the problem backwards. It was no wonder that the method hadn't seemed to make any sense.

Luffy sat down next to him, taking a hold of his hand. He allowed Luffy to have the control of his limb, but tried persisting with his reading, just to look like he was calmer than he actually was.

His efforts went down the drain at that moment when Luffy raised the hand onto his lips, starting to kiss and suck it here and there. Apparently Luffy had noticed what kind of effect having his hand licked had on Law when he had tried shutting Luffy's mouth the previous morning, and was now shamelessly utilizing the observation.

Luffy wrapped his tongue around a couple of fingers, moving it in a way that had Law involuntarily getting hard. Now he might not be able to see the difference between a heart and a liver, let alone be capable of showing the location of the former in his body. It *felt* like it was located in his groin, which was throbbing with raging lust. The sensation got even worse – or better – as Luffy gently sank his teeth into the fleshy part below Law's thumb, advancing to the wrist then.

All of those numerous little taste buds of the tongue caressing Law's sensitive inner wrist in a slow, wide lick. Law squeaked, feeling his balls tightening, knowing that he wasn't very far from coming into his pants unless he found out some way to stop Luffy; which was something he didn't actually want to do because he was enjoying this too much.

"Perhaps it'd be best if you got a room?" someone asked.

Law startled. He had been fully concentrated on his book and the distraction that was Luffy, and in
the middle of it Usopp entering the library had went totally unnoticed.

"Trying to find some bed time reading," Usopp explained.

"I'd totally go, but Traffy wants to keep reading," Luffy said.

Law hadn't even been able to read a word from the page for several minutes, let alone understand their meaning. For a while he wondered whether Luffy's comment was some kind of needling; it would have been if any other person had said it, but in the end he supposed that Luffy was being serious.

"I think I've done enough reading for today," he managed to say. His voice sounded more out of breath than he would have liked.

Usopp went back to going through a shelf that had been stuffed with all kind of books about technology, plus do-it-yourself guide books. Law supposed they belonged mostly to Usopp and Franky.

"Let's go," he said, yanking the hem of his shirt as low as was possible before getting up from his chair.

Luffy didn't let go of his hand, dragging him along as he raced to the infirmary. He didn't need to remind Luffy about locking the doors this time.

Law got rid of his shirt at the moment they were in the infirmary. He had been thinking of sex almost the whole day, since they had talked about it in the morning. Then they had talked about it some more, and gotten into a conflict, leaving him full of unresolved tension. When some nervous anticipation, a hard-core kissing session on the figure head, more waiting, and the attention Luffy had given to his hand were added to the equation...

He wasn't in the mood to go slow. He wanted to start now. Luckily, he already knew Luffy well enough to know even without asking that he fully supported the idea. Luffy tended to get excited quickly as hell, and now he was bound to be at least as impatient as Law was.

He placed the shirt to the backrest of the swivel chair, starting to take off his shoes.

"So slow," Luffy commented.

Law glanced at him. All of Luffy's clothes were lying on the floor as messy heaps – except the hat, it was neatly placed on the desk – and Luffy himself was lying on the bed, naked, grinning, and off-handedly playing with his hardening shaft while watching Law stripping off.

Law was staring. It seemed like he really didn't need to guess whether his opinion about the pace was shared by Luffy.

It had been his intention to leave his pants on so far, but what the fuck. He squirmed out of them as quickly as possible, throwing the rest of his clothes onto the chair too before digging the lube from his package.

"What do we do with that tooth paste?" Luffy asked, looking at the tube.

"This is personal lubricant, or lube," Law said, pretending he hadn't heard the silly question. He started to be good at letting them go over his ears right away. "You use it in anal sex. Every single time. Is this clear?"
"Ah, it's that stuff! I read about it from that pamphlet – uh, it seems like I can't forget all of it even though you said I should – sorry about that – but it sounded so difficult and –"

"It's not," Law interrupted. He had just taken a guess that Luffy wasn't particularly good at perceiving and applying the things he had read about, let alone remember them. "I'm sure you figure it out as soon as you try it."

"Okay."

He climbed to the bed, putting the tube onto the edge of the mattress so that it was at hand. However, as impatient as he was, some thorough kissing was still the first thing to do, so he straightened himself on top of Luffy, pressing their lips together.

Luffy's hand found its way onto his nape right away, squeezing gently; there was just enough possessive dominance in the gesture to make his body hot all over, switching his brain off and centering all of his thoughts to his hardening cock which was nudging Luffy's groin. Not enough to make him feel forced in any way, which would have put him on the alert immediately. He didn't even believe that Luffy thought of it like that or realized what kind of buttons he happened to push, just doing it instinctually and because he noticed Law liking it.

Anyway, Law was jelly and his cock was throbbing and he wanted to do this. He didn't have much experience in what he was about to do, and had always thought that relaxing in the situation was an almost impossible feat, but if Luffy was going to handle him like this, he didn't believe it was going to be a problem this time. He felt safe.

They were drowning in a long kiss. Finally Luffy withdrew, attacking Law's ear right away, starting to play with his earrings and tug at them lightly.

"Ah... damn... you're starting to be almost too good at finding all of my weak spots," Law said.

"Oh, you mean like this one?" Luffy was stroking his nape a couple of times before squeezing it a bit.

Law's hips jerked forward by force, and he rubbed himself against Luffy. "Exactly. Or my hand – how on earth it occurred to you to do it in the library earlier? It's not like I'm complaining..."

Luffy shrugged, it looked somewhat amusing while he was lying on his back. "Just happened to see you turning a page. Your hands are pretty. And then I remembered and come up with it."

Had almost anyone else said it, Law might have taken offense because of 'pretty hands'; it sounded like a suspiciously feminine feature, but Luffy's vocabulary was what it was. In any case it clearly was an expression of appreciation, and that was the most important thing. Besides, he was quite fond of his hands, too.

"I like doing things you like most," Luffy continued.

Law couldn't come up with an answer, but his chest felt a bit tight as he wondered how on earth he had happened to get this lucky for once. Being treated like this was quite a different thing than those one-night stands where you didn't really care for anything else than your own pleasure, and getting treated with some kind of courtesy was the best thing you could expect.

He tried making some sort of a wordless point by spending a good while kissing Luffy's neck thoroughly; it was something he had noticed Luffy enjoying much in turn. Luffy reacted by moaning loudly, making Law realize he couldn't take any more foreplay right now.
"Well, I guess it's about time..." He raised himself so as to look Luffy in the eye.

"I guess you wanna top, then?" Luffy guessed. "It's fine. I don't care how we do it anymore."

"Actually, no." Law hoped they wouldn't have a tussle for getting to bottom next, but to him it seemed like Luffy still preferred topping even though he was ready to be flexible. He also had gotten a new idea, starting to like it, and he wasn't the least bit willing to change the plan once more.

"You mean I really get to?"

Law wasn't quite sure if he liked the way Luffy's eyes were shining like he had just seen the coolest laser beam ever, but if Luffy still had some stupid stereotypes in his mind, Law's plan should get him cured of them pretty effectively.

"Yes, but you need to follow my instructions," he said.

Luffy nodded eagerly.

Law rolled next to Luffy, silently cursing the bed being so hopelessly narrow. Luffy sat up in order to watch more closely how Law snatched the lube, squeezing a generous amount of goo onto his hand and touching himself between his legs.

The gel was cold. It also felt incredibly embarrassing to be watched while spreading lube between his buttocks, and finally pressing the first finger in. And Luffy wasn't only watching, no, he was staring, seemingly mesmerized by the scene.

Anyway, it was easier like this. It had been far too long a time since he had done this, and getting used to the feeling was easier if he knew that no surprising movements were to be expected. It was just his own fingers, and soon he got the second one in. He was more sensitive than he had even remembered, starting to breathe heavily soon.

Luffy started caressing his hips and thighs, which was very welcome. It felt more like they were doing this together and less like he was giving a show, it made everything much easier for him.

"Does it feel nice?" Luffy asked, trying to get a better look between Law's legs.

"Quite. But it's going to get better still."

"May I do that?"

He considered for a moment, nodding then. The sooner Luffy got a handle on this the better. At least Luffy didn't find the idea of pushing his fingers into him unpleasant, and he could settle a bit more comfortably if he didn't need to do this by himself. "Take some lube."

"It's really slick," Luffy said, having inspected the gel for a moment.

"Yes. That would be another word for it." Damn, in this situation it seemed like Law couldn't even come up with decent sarcasm.

"Is this edible?"

I should so have known this.

"It doesn't taste like much of anything so I don't understand why you want to eat it, but it's not harmful to swallow." Law made a mental note to never buy any flavoured lube, because Luffy would apparently eat it. Memorizing the fact was pretty much waste of time, because he couldn't
stand their scent anyway.

Luffy just had to make sure Law had told the truth, licking his finger. "True. It's so bland."

"Told you so. Get between my legs."

Luffy obeyed with amazing speed, not hesitating to spread Law's thighs more in order to make more room for himself. The treatment had Law's cock throbbing even more demandingly, and the way Luffy was looking at him was just adding fuel to fire. Like wanting to eat him, as the taste of the lube had now proven to be a disappointment.

"Am I gonna put them in now?" Luffy asked, caressing Law's inner thigh.

"One at a time and carefully, yes." Law shut up as he was touched behind his balls. Luffy was feeling him curiously, moving further between his buttocks and stopping for a while to massage the entrance he had found.

"Here?"

Law nodded. He didn't get much possibilities to think after that, because fingers felt totally different when they weren't controlled by himself, and he couldn't expect what they were going to do next.

~*~

Law had been right. That 'preparation' that had seemed really complicated based on the pamphlet wasn't difficult at all in practise. It didn't take a long time before Luffy already had pushed two fingers in, carefully twisting and moving them back and forth. Finding out how hot and slick and soft it felt inside of Law had his mind spinning.

"Good," Law said. His voice had once again gotten hoarse in that funny way that Luffy liked so much, it kind of made him tingly all over. "Stretch." Law clarified his order by demonstrating a scissor-like movement with his fore and middle finger.

Luffy did like he was told to, wondering how on earth books succeeded in making everything always seem so difficult. But he got this. He couldn't spread his fingers much before the channel stopped giving in, and if the noise Law let out was any indication, pushing more might be uncomfortable; so he moved his fingers back together, thrusting them a couple of times back and forth. With the next scissor-like move it felt like the channel was stretching a bit more.

So, it worked like this. After he had done enough of this, his cock would fit in nicely. He wondered whether he needed to be stretched like this, too; probably not, he supposed that this part of him was quite elastic too because of his Power. Perhaps that was what Law had meant by saying this would be easier if Luffy bottomed. Perhaps he sometimes should do things like Law said.

Anyways, Law was obviously enjoying the treatment, rocking his hips to meet the movements of Luffy's fingers, and letting out some quiet but hot ah and uh noises. His cock was straining towards his abs, twitching and looking uncomfortably hard, and because one of Luffy's hands happened to be unoccupied, he decided to grab it and fondle it a bit.

Law groaned in a low voice, thrusting better into Luffy's hand. "Too goo-oh... All right, you can put in the third one..."

Luffy did. It was fascinating to see the entrance that had felt tight for two fingers in the beginning now swallowing three with ease. He was getting desperately hard, almost aching with anticipation, but ignoring it was pretty easy while he was so fully absorbed in fingerling Law, exploring whether
those walls felt the same everywhere. It was like slippery silk as he was curling his fingers gently in order to caress it with his fingertips.

"Ah fuck!" Law hissed, jerking so violently that he startled Luffy to move his fingers further away from the spot he had been touching.

"Sorry," he murmured. He didn't think he had pressed harder than previously, but that had seemed painful, and he tried to make amends by concentrating more on caressing Law's cock, wrapping his fingers more tightly around it and pumping the foreskin back and forth.

Law propped himself up on his elbow so that they could properly look at each other, reaching to stroke Luffy's cheek.

"It felt good, not bad," Law said.

"Really?"

Law nodded. "That was the prostate. Or, to be precise, the part of prostate that you can – nh!"

As nice as listening to Law's voice was, Luffy actually didn't want him to start being a doctor right now, giving some lecture about anatomy. So he decided to probe the mentioned spot more carefully if it felt that good, which shut Law's mouth very effectively, making him wholly collapse on the bed again.

The spot felt a bit different to the walls elsewhere. Luffy tested some different ways to touch – very light stroking over it, rubbing with a bit more force, gentle pressing with a fingertip. At that point Law was moaning brokenly, being louder than Luffy had ever heard him, while his hips kept rocking against Luffy's fingers.

So, it was obviously feeling good. Law looked awesome like this, his long legs as widely spread as possible, tattooed chest rising and falling with heavy breathing, and his head tilted backwards. Luffy was watching, mesmerized, as a droplet of pre-come beading from the tip of Law's glans dropped onto his stomach; he couldn't help leaning down to lick it off.

Having sat up again he saw his fingers disappearing into Law and it was... wow, he had never even imagined anything like this. He pushed them in up to his knuckles, feeling the cock jerking in his other hand like it was about to explode.

"Ah... you – you'd better –" Law seemed to have considerable trouble talking because of being so out of breath. "– stop before –"

"Why? It's obvious you like it." Luffy was never going to understand why Law so often neglected to do things he liked. Like he was thinking that he didn't deserve any good things for some reason, or at least it was like he had been so long time without any good things that he didn't know how to receive them anymore. That didn't do, because Luffy wanted Law to feel good, and it meant doing things he liked.

"– I cum, I can't –"

That sounded like a thing Luffy definitely wanted to see, so he pressed the sensitive spot a bit more relentlessly while starting to pump the shaft. "Why's that a bad thing? I wanna watch you come."

Law didn't answer, trying to resist with all of his muscles tensing. However, it didn't take Luffy a lot of coaxing and pressing before Law was suddenly melting into his hands, coming onto his stomach, biting his lip.
It was an even more arousing sight to see than Luffy had been expecting. The channel was clenching tightly around his fingers as Law was coming, and that was when he remembered to think of his own cock again. It was so eager to proceed it was hurting.

Apparently it should wait a while still, because Law had gone totally limp, concentrating only on gasping for breath. Damn. That was another thing he hadn't thought through.

He carefully pulled his fingers out, crawling on top of Law as comfortably as possible, so that his cock was nestled against Law's groin. Pressing it against something was a bit of a relief, but resisting the urge to rock his hips and rub himself against the lubricated skin was a very difficult feat. There was no doubt he was going to come very quickly if he did that.

He started kissing Law's neck as he was waiting for him to return to the reality; light and gentle touch of his lips and some small licks, that might be a bit tickly. Soon Law wrapped one of his arms around Luffy, giving a content sigh.

Luffy pressed his face snugly against Law's neck, inhaling deeply. Sweet. He always liked the way Law smelled, wishing that he could eat and drink the scent and downright roll around in it, but it was at best when they were in bed and Law was already turned on. He wanted to eat Law. He licked his throat, pressing a light kiss onto his maddening Adam's apple.

Law hummed appreciatively, burying his fingers into Luffy's hair. "It seems that we aren't talking much during these kind of moments."

"Is that something we should do then?" Luffy could always come up with something to say, whether he needed to or not, he liked talking, but he didn't feel like there was a need to do so now. Just being close and touching was quite enough, but if Law wanted... "You know, when I went back to buy this bracelet –"

"We don't need to," Law interrupted. "It was just a pretty neutral observation."

"Hmm?"

"There are some people who want to endlessly discuss the act after having sex, explaining how good it felt and things like that. It just suddenly crossed my mind that we don't obviously have such a tendency."

"You're thinking too much."

"Oh really? Such a thing has never occurred to me before."

Luffy hummed, finding himself thinking of Law's words. "Wouldn't it be kinda waste of time?"

"What is?"

"Chewing it over afterwards?"

"Perhaps such a thing can feel necessary, if you're not very much on the same wavelength with your partner?" Law guessed. "I don't know. It's something I've never understood, actually."

"Maybe." That would explain why Luffy didn't need to say anything about it, and apparently Law felt the same. "I know even without saying that both of us had fun a moment ago and that you're feeling like jelly now and that you know my cock's aching." He didn't understand why anyone wanted to have sex with someone with whom you needed to talk in order to know such things. It didn't feel right at all.
Law gave a warm laugh. "You're adorable. And yeah, I'm aware of the fact you mentioned last. The way you're poking at me with it makes deducing it pretty easy."

Luffy rocked his hips a couple of times, rubbing the mentioned body part against Law, it felt good. He started to very much like that lube thing, the skin felt so different when coated by it. It would have been so easy to come all over Law after only a few pleasurable movements – and damn, wasn't that some good mental imagery –

"I'm starting to feel like I could actually consider moving, so perhaps we should do something about it?" Law said.

Law didn't need to suggest it twice; Luffy nodded very enthusiastically.

"All right, in that case you could get off me and lie on your back."

Luffy blinked and freezed, confused. Why was it he who needed to lie on his back, if he was expected to top? Weren't they in a pretty good position already, all he needed to do was inch a bit lower –

"Riding would be easier for me, so, please?"

"... All right," Luffy conceded. He wasn't sure what riding had to do with sex, but Law seemed to know and it sounded cool. Plus, he didn't want to start arguing at the wrong moment again.

The concept become clear to him very quickly as he had settled on his back, and Law climbed astride him. Law was still moving somewhat lazily after his previous orgasm, but was smirking very promisingly while looking down at him. It looked and felt so hot that Luffy was about to explode as Law lubricated his cock.

Law sat down onto Luffy's thighs for a moment, squeezing his rock hard shaft in his hand and giving him a look that demanded full attention; that look that silently managed to say 'Now you listen to me, otherwise I'll be very displeased with you'. It was remarkably more silencing and convincing than those threats to kill that so frequently were dropping from Law's lips.

Luffy looked Law in the eye, waiting. Slick fingers wrapped around his cock were making concentrating on words very challenging, and he really wanted to thrust into that hand harder, but there was something he wanted even more than that. Thus he needed to listen.

"Don't move before I give you a permission, can you do that?" Law asked.

If Law said it like that, like it was a challenge, Luffy would do it even if it was the most difficult feat in his life – he simply didn't accept failure in any kind of challenge. Law had probably noticed it already. Besides, how difficult it could be to not move? He nodded.

His determination was tested immediately after Law had placed himself so that his bottom was touching the tip of Luffy's cock, allowing him to feel subtle twitching of Law's muscles. The desire to press himself harder against Law was so powerful it was stunning, and he had to concentrate on squeezing the bed sheets in order to keep still. Law seemed very focused, brows furrowed and forcing himself to breathe evenly, like he was overwrought and just the even flow of air in and out was keeping him together.

And he's so tense, too...

Noticing that made staying still much easier for Luffy, because it clearly was important and he didn't want to make this more difficult for Law. He was watching his shaft disappearing into Law like his
fingers earlier, agonizingly slowly, and it felt even hotter and tighter than he had imagined. Taking
the pace was same kind of sweet torture as having to eat a lollipop 'like it was meant to be eaten', by
licking and sucking it, even though he was inclined to swallow it whole. Possibly with the stick and
all.

Finally he was perfectly sheathed, his balls very lightly pressing against Law's bottom; Law stopped,
taking a couple of deep breaths. The walls around Luffy's cock kept tightening at times, which felt
amazing, but most of his attention was on Law. His muscles were too tense all over, and he was
frowning.

"You're uncomfortable." Luffy didn't see any signs of real pain, but it was obvious that this wasn't
comfortable for Law.

"It's kind of a part of the package. It'll pass. I'm all right." Law sounded out of breath and strained.

"Hmm. Can I touch you?" It felt like that would be a good way to get Law thinking of something
else for a while, but Luffy wasn't sure whether he was allowed to move his arms or not.

"Yeah, please do."

Luffy stayed lying on his back, stretching his arms a bit so as to reach stroking Law's back; pressing
his hand between Law's shoulder blades and then moving it up and down along the spine. He had
found out that doing this tended to have a soothing effect on Law, and after a few strokes Law did
relax a bit, starting to carefully move his hips slightly.

Damn, Luffy wanted to move too so badly, thrust into Law and see whether he managed to hit that
fun spot that Law liked to have fingered. His own muscles started tensing and shaking as he forced
himself to keep still. Not yet. Just not yet.

Instead he inched one of his hands higher, onto Law's nape, while he used the other to fondle Law's
cock into full hardness again. The combination caused Law to let out a delightful low moan, arching
his back; then he started moving more greedily, lifting his hips higher and pressing himself down
more forcefully, so that Luffy felt the hot clench sliding up and down his shaft.

The hottest thing ever, for sure. Soon he was asked to move, too, and he was able to meet Law's
movements with his own, and... It was almost too good, he had to try not to explode right away,
because actually he never wanted to stop.

~*~

Riding had definitely been the right way to go, and Law was glad that it had occurred to him. It was
both an enlightening counter to Luffy's obsessions of being manly, and easy to handle for his own
mind. There was also the fact that it felt really good.

His hands found support on Luffy's shoulders as he kept lifting himself so that the cock penetrating
him was rubbing the most sensitive spot with almost every movement. His own cock was weeping
onto Luffy's abs, desperately wanting to be touched, but Luffy had digged his fingers into Law's
hips, not seeming like he was capable of letting go, just concentrating on gasping for breath and
groaning helplessly with his head tilted backwards, fully drowning in sensations.

So much for being macho.

It didn't seem like Luffy was going to complain. Law briefly pinched his nipples while searching for
a better place to lean on, causing his whole body shudder in a delicious way; Law could feel it in his
own bottom. This was going to be over quickly.
Even though Luffy totally seemed to be at the mercy of the pleasure, Law didn't succeed in hiding the fact that eventually his bad arm started aching so much he couldn't support himself with it anymore. He tried not to draw attention to it, it wasn't worth disturbing the most pleasant sex; thus he just leant more heavily on his left arm, raising his right shoulder a couple of times to alleviate the pain some.

Luffy didn't say anything, but sat up, wrapping his arms tightly around Law, stopping him. And kissed him. Never had he felt like being so extremely close to someone, at the same time in a tight hug and kissing fiercely and feeling the hard shaft twitching deep inside of him. Luffy probably needed to stretch himself at some place in order to make it physically possible despite their height difference, because Law didn't even need to tilt his neck uncomfortably in order to kiss.

He was fully enjoying being unable to do anything else than drowning into a kiss and melting onto Luffy's lap. Then, suddenly, Luffy scrambled onto his knees like Law weighted nothing at all, placing him onto his back on the bed. He was dimly aware that Luffy's legs were twisting in some really sick rubbery way in the process, allowing him to stay sheathed all the time.

"Is this all right?" Luffy asked, after detaching his lips from Law's with a wet smacking sound.

Law blinked, finding himself so suddenly staring at the ceiling. But it was all right, this way there would be no need for him to strain his arm, and at this point he wasn't insecure anymore like he had been in the beginning. Now the only thing he wanted was to be thoroughly fucked.

"Yeah. Keep moving," he said, wrapping his legs properly around Luffy.

Luffy let out a satisfied noise, rocking his hips and feeling the new position. After a couple of thrusts he decided that it was a great idea to inch his hand under Law's pelvis, supporting and lifting him a bit, before starting to eagerly quicken the pace.

Law didn't argue; the position was deeper now, and he couldn't believe the noises he was making, but he also didn't care. Besides, Luffy was still being the louder one of them, and if his groaning was any indication, he wasn't very far from coming.

Neither was Law. Being treated and held like this was intolerably hot, and Luffy looked so very good on top of him, his hair a total mess and face strained with pleasure. The sensation of sliding and being filled was very pleasurable and close in itself, and every nudge to his most sensitive spot had his balls tightening a bit more, like there was some glowing spring somewhere deep inside him that was being twisted more and more.

Luffy managed to open his eyes for a while, looking at Law with such a warm amazement that he felt like blushing and hiding his face behind a pillow.

"You... you look so... awesome like this, Traffy," Luffy said.

Like being looked at wasn't embarrassing enough, no, on top of that Luffy just had to say whatever crossed his mind, not censoring at all. Law decided to prevent further embarrassing compliments by wrapping his hands around Luffy's neck and pulling him into a kiss.

When they got too out of breath to kiss anymore, Luffy decided to attack Law's neck, nibbling at it while setting a harder pace. Law was clinging to Luffy as every movement was driving him closer to orgasming. Before he had time to reach it, though, Luffy started losing his rhythm, just trying to dig himself as deep as possible; finally his noises turned into a constant wail as he tensed, cumming in Law.
Law tried to ignore his own raging erection, hugging Luffy, who had collapsed on top of him, gasping for breath as a seemingly boneless lump. He couldn't even reach his member, because it was trapped under Luffy. It seemed like it just had to wait for a while.

Sooner than he expected, Luffy propped himself up. For a while Law waited for him to say something, but the only thing that came out of his mouth was an understanding 'Oh'. Soon Luffy slipped out of him, settling between his legs. He waited for a hand around his cock, or lips perhaps, but instead Luffy chose to push a couple of fingers into his ass, hardly stopping to massage the rim as some kind of a warning.

He was so open, and slick with semen, that Luffy was able to twist his fingers any way he pleased, starting immediately rubbing and pressing the most sensitive spot gently.

If Luffy enjoyed doing this to him, he definitely wasn't going to complain. As the other one of Luffy's hands was wrapped securely around his shaft, pumping a couple of times, he couldn't help tensing to an all-consuming orgasm, sweeping all of his energy away like a dive into a sea, but in an extremely more pleasurable way.

The noise Luffy let out didn't sound perfectly satisfied as he let go of Law. This made Law force himself to recover so that he could glance at Luffy curiously.

"I wanted to take that into my mouth and taste you," Luffy said, swirling his fingers in the semen that had splattered on Law's abs. "Didn't have time to do it."

"At this rate you're going to spoil me rotten." Law reached to pet Luffy's hair.

"Not possible," Luffy mused before sucking his fingers clean.

Law appreciated the sight a lot, it caused an exhausted and a bit painful jerk of interest in his groin. There was no way he had energy for another round for a while, though.

"It's not possible to do every fun thing during one round," he said. "But there's always the next one."

"Nope," Luffy said.

Law's mouth dropped to hang open. Did this mean that there was not going to be the next time? He couldn't even say anything to it, but yeah, of course he should have known that nothing nice ever lasted in his –

"Next time we do it the other way round, right?" Luffy continued.

Law dared to breathe again. "I'd like that. I want to spoil you too." He really wanted to find out whether Luffy became even louder once he got a few fingers into a certain place.

Luffy crawled higher, burying his face into Law's neck, giving a content sigh. In that pleasant and close silence Law didn't have enough energy to care about little things, like the semen slowly trickling out of him, and the fact that they really needed fresh bed sheets after this.

"I –" Luffy started, interrupting himself immediately.

"What?"

"Nothing, don't mind it..."

It didn't sound like nothing. Besides, Luffy didn't usually hesitate in telling what was in his mind, so
Law started to get a sneaking suspicion of what it was about. And it was really unfair of him to not listen, just because he happened to have a thousand different complexes about everything.

"You can say whatever you want to say," he said. "As long as you don't expect me to answer everything."

Luffy laughed at it, pretty tiredly but warmly. "You say whatever you wanna say. And I say whatever I wanna say."

"Sounds good." Law didn't believe it would be so easy in practise, but it also sounded right.

Having snuggled even closer, Luffy finally said the thing he had meant to. "I just love you. So much."

Law had already been ready for this. Hearing it still made him restless, but apparently he had had time to get used to the idea, and Luffy had quite effectively softened him, because the feeling was actually tolerable. It also made him feel warm, and perhaps even a bit happy, as much as he dared to admit it to himself.

"I know," he said, hugging Luffy tighter. He didn't have any other answer to give.

"I know it, too."

*This sounds bad. Really bad.*

"What is it you know?" Law asked, even though he didn't know whether he actually wanted to hear this.

"That you too. Even though you don't wanna say it aloud."

Shit. Law took a couple of deep breaths, trying to calm down. He wasn't a good liar, and he didn't want to be one – he preferred leaving some things untold, and he was pretty good at preventing the conversation from taking an unwanted turn, but if someone happened to nail the bullseye nonetheless... he wasn't able to act like it hadn't hit the target.

"Yeah," he admitted, quietly. "Provided that I understand feelings at all... I guess I do."
Awakenings

Chapter Notes

Despite my note before the previous chapter, I wasn't actually hiding under my bed. Well, not all of this time, anyway. I guess I could say that I had some Real Life. It sucked. I'm glad to be back to continuing this fic.

Thank you all of my wonderful readers. <3

Luffy woke up, half conscious, turning onto his other side in order to press himself more snugly against Law, but he was about to fall from the bed because there was no one between him and the edge. That had him waking up fully. He had felt like Law was somewhere very near, and his instinct didn't usually betray him like this.

Perhaps Law had somehow fallen onto the floor in his sleep? Even though it was weird that it hadn't woken Law up. Luffy himself was capable of falling from his upper bunk without waking up, but when it came to things like that, Law was much lighter sleeper than he was.

He turned around again, trying to swing his legs onto the floor so as to get up and go to search for Law. Instead he just happened to kick a bundle on the foot end of the bed, and it let out a whine.

There.

Law was fully nestled under the blanket, curled tightly into a fetal position, which didn't look like a very comfortable way to sleep. There was a bit annoying noise coming from the bundle, and it took a moment before Luffy realized Law was grinding his teeth. It continued. And continued. And continued.

He was hesitant to touch the bundle, because Law probably wouldn't be happy if he woke up and couldn't fall asleep again; but on the other hand there was no way that he was comfortable as he was. Besides, there was no way Luffy was going to be able to relax while knowing that Law wasn't comfortable. When had the situation turned out like this?

Luffy touched Law's shoulder, very carefully; it was tight with tension. There definitely was no way that was comfortable. Slow petting of Law's shoulder and back made him uncurl a bit, luckily not waking him up, and finally Luffy dared to grab him and drag him into a more comfortable position on the bed.

He had almost succeeded in placing Law to lie down, starting to feel victorious, when Law suddenly jerked himself out of his hold, sitting up. He prepared himself to explain why he had been disturbing Law's sleep.

Law was staring towards Chopper's swivel chair. "Never give an IV for an elephant," he snapped at the chair.

Luffy blinked, at a loss of anything to say.

"Never, you get that?" Law pointed at the chair with his finger like it was about to do the mentioned deed.
He can't be fully conscious...

"Yeah, I get it," Luffy answered, using as soothing tone of voice as he was capable.

Law didn't say anything, just lied down and continued sleeping like he hadn't been awake at all. Having listened to his even breathing for a moment, Luffy dared to press himself against Law's back, wrapping his arm around his hips.

Restless sleeping was nothing new to Luffy, you saw all kinds of things while sleeping in the same room with six other people. Talking in their sleep, nightmares, you name it. And he had his own peculiarities, too, like eating in his sleep, if someone happened to bring anything edible near him. He didn't like it, because he wanted to remember all the food he had eaten, enjoying it properly.

Usually he slept through almost any kind of noise and disturbance. At most they made him open one of his eyes a bit so as to glance at what was happening, then he turned onto his other side and fell asleep again. But this had still been a bit... disturbing. He didn't know whether it was because they were sleeping in the same bed and that was why it disturbed him more, or was it because he was more worried of Law being restless than the others. Maybe it was because he knew how difficult it was for Law to catch enough restful sleep.

Now they were comfortable again, anyways. Luffy pressed his cheek against Law's shoulder. He inhaled deeply, enjoying the scent of Law's skin, and was about to indulge himself in just being comfortable beside him, thinking everything they had been doing in the evening. He fell asleep before he could even start recollecting.

~*~

Law woke up, gasping for breath and jumping to sit up, but the clinging strings of his dreams were still capturing him, preventing him from moving freely. He panicked – hadn't it been just a dream, after all? – and jerked himself out of the grip, throwing himself sideways.

After a painful fall onto the floor he finally came to fully realize where he was. The Straw Hat ship. The infirmary. The floor of the infirmary.

There was a fumbling hand, grabbing his shoulder and causing his heart to leap with fright before the pieces finally fell together. "Luffy?"

"What are you doing there?" Luffy asked, stroking Law's shoulder and nape with his unnaturally stretched hand. "I hope I didn't kick you in my sleep?"

"No, you didn't..." Law gave a deep sigh, taking a more comfortable position. His thigh had been bruised by the edge of the bed while he had tipped over it, and he groaned, rubbing it. The bruise was going be a handsome sight to see, again, and just when the previous one had started to fade.

"You hurting?" Luffy peeked over the edge of the bed, eyes huge in the dim light, trying to inch his arm around Law's chest.

Yeah. Mentally more than physically, and I don't even know why's that. Don't touch me right now.

Law tried to get a better grip of reality, convincing himself that he was perfectly all right. It had been just a stupid dream, he didn't even remember it anymore, but the after effect was like he had been struggling, panicked, in a sticky web of some kind of a giant spider.

Of course it had been nothing more than just a dream, and there was nothing holding him in his place against his will. Nothing at all. Feeling that very same panicky anxiousness now was very stupid; he
knew he was awake right now, his new bruise was a firm reminder of that, as well as the feel of cold and uncomfortable boards under his bare ass.

There was absolutely nothing to worry about, and nothing was holding him.

*Just believe it already, Law. There's NOTHING to worry about. Breathe, you fucking idiot, breathe. No, not so rapidly.*

These reassurances weren't helpful at all. Neither was Luffy instinctually trying to hold him tighter while he was slipping towards hyperventilating.

He grabbed Luffy's wrist, pushing the hand circling his chest away from his skin. He realized he had used more force and more impetuous movements than what was necessary, but he couldn't bring himself to care right now. Right now he just wanted to go to the deck, to some spacious place; that might very well clear his mind before this state developed into a full-blown panic attack.

"... Law?" Luffy asked.

Fucking hell, of all possible moments Luffy could have chosen for using his given name, why did he decide to do it right now? He didn't want to hear it right now. 'Traffy' would have been way better, it wouldn't have reminded him of that mockingly caressing way Doflamingo had always used while pronouncing his name. Law...

The walls were leaning much closer to themselves than a moment ago; they were caving in so that the infirmary became smaller and smaller. Soon the walls were going to touch him and start squeezing him, too, crushing him until his bones cracked and his lungs collapsed like two burst balloons. In the end the whole infirmary was going to be like a tiny infirmary-shaped box, a miniature that someone could hold on their palm; and he and Luffy and all the furniture were somewhere inside that tiny box, squeezed into some extremely dense mass, not capable of breathing ever again –

*Stop. Stop. You know it's nothing more than claustrophobia.*

*Claustrophobia: the fear of closed, tight places. Best description of it is found in 'The Great Book of Phobias' by doctor Ivoiz, starting from page eighty-nine.*

Law repeated the most important points of the text in his mind. By this silent, monotonic quoting he succeeded in calming down so much that he had enough presence of mind to throw a coat on and cover his nakedness before dashing out.

Soon he found himself on the main deck, grasping the railing, watching at the open sea, and gasping the cold night air into his aching lungs so greedily that he might very well faint. The lawn of the deck was cold and moist under his bare feet. Apparently he had brought Kikoku with him; it was leaning against the railing next to him. Of course he had. He probably would have brought it even if he had been too out of it to even put on any clothes. It was a reflex.

For a while he counted the black waves lapping the side of the ship. About twenty waves later he felt like his head was almost clear again, and he was ready to think what the hell had happened a moment ago.

Summary: he had had a nightmare, and fallen from the bed. His boyfriend had been considerate and tried comforting him, which he had rejected in a way that made him a prick, and then he had run out without a word.

... Wow. The way he was able to incessantly come up with new ways to earn the title of The Shittiest
Boyfriend in the World was quite baffling. At least it seemed like he had some involuntary creativity when it came to it, if nothing else.

Luffy was surely nestling comfortably under the blanket now, having gone back to sleep after noticing that Law was, once again, in an absolutely impossible mood. That was a logical assumption if you considered the time of the day, Luffy's talent in sleeping, and the fact that Law had probably made it pretty clear that he wanted to be left alone. Luffy had probably thought that there was nothing to be done, shrugging and deciding that it was nighttime now, plus a wonderful opportunity to steal the whole blanket to himself. And then drifted back to sleep without having any problems with the situation.

Law was aware that he didn't have any right to expect anything else, but the idea still made him feel lonely and depressed.

He tried convincing himself that the situation wasn't as bad as it felt right now. In fact, he was doing fine right now, and he even wasn't as broken as he had been expecting.

All right, so he did have nightmares. But that was no news. He had had them since the destruction of Flevance, and they never stopped, really. Having a distressing dream now wasn't an abnormal thing at all, not some alarming rock bottom that he had hit. He wasn't naive enough to think that the nightmares would suddenly stop just because he and Luffy happened to be lovey-dovey. Nightmares just happened, it was normal for him, and thinking of it any more was no use.

It was nothing new that he had sudden bouts of anxiety and wanted to have some space around him, either. It didn't usually slap him across his face quite like this, because usually he wasn't close to someone like he had been this time. But there had been some times when he had nodded off, leaning against Bepo, and suddenly he had woken up, gasping for breath; and never had his first reaction been to listen whether Bepo had something soothing to say. No, he hurried into his cabin and locked the door. Or he might go to the deck, if the submarine happened to be on the surface and that option was available.

Realizing that this was just him being himself was comforting and disheartening at the same time. This wasn't some surprising negative reaction to closeness or Luffy, this was just what Law could expect of himself at any moment.

There was nothing wrong in his situation or in his relationship; that was the good thing.

Apparently he wasn't going to change; that was the bad thing.

Anyways, he wasn't as badly broken as he could have expected. Most of the time he was pretty capable of functioning, he didn't want to die very often, sometimes he even slept a bit, he had appetite for delicious food, and there were things he looked forward to and considered pleasant. That was fucking much better than he had been expecting before Dressrosa.

Not even in his wildest and most absurd dreams had he imagined falling in love. He had known that he would suck in dating – it was getting proved over and over again in new inventive ways – and that meant there was nothing new and alarming in that fact, either. It was just him being himself.

But that falling in love. That was unexpected, a total shock, even though more of a positive kind. He supposed he liked it, at least when it didn't scare him shitless.

So, he should try being as good a boyfriend as he could, trying to pay attention to Luffy. Luffy seemed to be remarkably good at doing that. Sure, his impulsive idiotism drove Law out of his mind, but Luffy also accepted him, his billion flaws and all, and 'liked doing things he liked most', going all
out in order to make him enjoy himself as much as possible.

Law needed to try, too. He clearly couldn't help the nightmares or panic attacks, but at least he could tell Luffy what they were about, and then crawl back to bed beside him. Now he had calmed down enough to do it.

Luffy surely was asleep, but would hardly mind Law getting back to bed, even if it meant waking him up. Yeah, Law should go back to bed. He took a couple of deep breaths more, watching the black sea and the very dark blue sky, dotted by stars. Reminded himself about the world being a very big place, and that there was nothing holding him against his will, not anymore.

He turned around, startling when he spotted Luffy, who was sitting on top of the slide, watching him. At least Luffy's face was turned towards Law, but darkness and the brim of his hat made seeing his eyes impossible. In addition to his hat Luffy was only wearing shorts.

"How long have you been there?" Law asked. If Luffy had arrived just a moment ago, he would have heard it.

"Almost all the time."

That made sense. Law hadn't heard him, because he had been too busy trying to get a grip of himself. "You could have announced yourself."

"Thought you're gonna see me when you're ready," Luffy said.

Law couldn't argue with that, because actually that was just what had happened. He was aware that four minutes ago he wouldn't have appreciated being disturbed. "Yeah," he admitted.

"Are you mad?" Luffy's tone was more quiet now, sounding a bit uncertain.

"No." Not at you. At myself, of course, but that's no news. "I just supposed you were sleeping, so I was surprised."

"And you don't like surprises."

"Not much, no."

They were silent for a long time. Law was wondering how to suggest going back to bed and convince Luffy that he was quite all right – he was quite all right, what else he was supposed to be, it was just that he had woken up by a nightmare and then he had been his own brand of awkward. Luffy was watching him silently, apparently hesitant to speak, and that was always alarming.

Law cursed in his mind how ironic it was that Luffy developed some kind of discretion at the same moment when Law was downright wishing for some silly comment about Sea King meatballs or something like that.

He wasn't pleased to realize how easily he left taking any kind of initiative to Luffy, even if it happened to be something he wanted badly. He never said that he wanted a hug, instead he waited for Luffy to just glue himself to his back, and on top of that he tried to look like tolerating it was an inconvenience. It was ridiculous and he needed to stop it right now.

"When it comes to surprises, this wasn't half bad," he said, breaking the silence that had already continued so long it was uncomfortable.

Even in dim light Law could see Luffy's mouth stretching into a wide grin in the shadow of his hat.
Luffy pushed himself down the slide, soon landing onto the main deck, almost next to Law.

Law moved his hand in order to take Luffy's hand, but Luffy yanked him into a tight hug before he had time to do it. Apparently the gesture had been a sufficient sign about touching being welcome now.

And that it was. Law wrapped his own arms around Luffy, wishing fervently that his coat wouldn't somehow come undone. Even though someone seeing it was very unlikely.

For a while they were just standing there. Law concentrated on breathing; it didn't try to quicken unnecessarily or feel constricted anymore, like Luffy's hug had squeezed him back into his right shape so that he wasn't feeling anxious anymore.

He definitely had nothing against being hugged like this. In other words he needed to explain why he had given the opposite impression after waking up. "I'm sor--"

"No need to explain," Luffy interrupted. "I guess I'm starting to get you."

"Oh?" That was quite an accomplishment, considering that despite his numerous attempts at analyzing himself Law still didn't really get himself.

"Or well, no, that's not right. I don't get you. But I'm starting to get what to do with you."

Law hummed. That sounded like a working level of understanding, and it might be more difficult than analyzing his thought process in detail, which he himself tried to do, like some other people who were close to him or otherwise intelligent. It was pretty refreshing to deal with someone who wasn't over-analyzing the reasons behind his tendency to distance himself and trying to get him to break the habit, for instance. Instead Luffy realized that he needed some space and allowed him to have it.

"So it seems," he agreed. "Unfortunately I don't think I can say the same for my part. There are many times when I don't have a clue of what to do with you."

"You can always give me food?" Luffy suggested. His tone was light, and there was no way for Law to deduce whether it was a totally serious suggestion for a strategy or an attempt at amusing him.

"That should do the trick," Law admitted, trying not to think too much.

Because Law apparently wasn't required to explain himself, he found it easy to enjoy the following silence. He embraced Luffy tighter, leaning his cheek on Luffy's head; the texture of the straw hat was pleasantly rough against his skin.

"Why can't you give an IV for an elephant?" Luffy asked suddenly.

"What?" Law was sure he had heard wrong.

Luffy repeated his question, and Law hadn't heard it wrong.

"I'm pretty sure it can be done, as long as you make sure that the elephant stays still and doesn't yank the tube", Law said. "Why on earth you're asking that?"

"Cause you told never to do that."

"I've never said anything like that." Surely Law would have remembered it if he had sometimes commented on a topic as weird as this?
"You did too. Earlier this night."

This sounded bad, and after asking Luffy some questions Law's sneaking suspicions were confirmed. He gave a heavy sigh – sleeping with him had to be intolerable. "I have no recollection of that, because I was asleep. That's one of my charming parasomnias. Waking up just partially, so I might do or say something insane."

"Ah," Luffy said. "Do you sleepwalk, too?"

"Very rarely. The most recent episode with that happened about two years ago." Law still wanted to sink to the bottom of the ocean every time he remembered how extremely embarrassing it had been. He had been found sleeping on the floor of the kitchen by his cook who had come to make breakfast. He supposed he had tried making some coffee while asleep, because he had stuffed the coffee pot with wheat flour.

He forced the topic to the back of his mind, moving to another one which had really taken him by surprise. "You used my given name."

Luffy made a noncommittal noise, and was silent for a while until remembering. "Aaa, yeah! You used mine first so I –"

Did I?

Law tried remembering whether he had done that. He was pretty sure that it hadn't happened, until suddenly remembering falling from the bed, the hand touching him in the dark, and a confused question if it was Luffy. He had done it, really.

He didn't even have strength to be displeased because it seemed like he had lost one game in the marital war again by giving in first. Had he been properly awake, he wouldn't have said it, but this was such a stupid thing to argue about that being over it was actually a good thing.

Luffy was still talking, and Law realized he had surely missed several whole sentences. "– but I still like Traffy better, so from now on I'm gonna use both!"

Law snorted. He should have guessed that Luffy wouldn't let the awful nickname go just like that. Which was... all right, because he would have missed it in some weird way if he had never heard it again. "Fair enough. Straw Hat."

"Yup." It didn't seem like Luffy was displeased with the nickname at all. He loosened his hold of Law, starting to stroke his back and inch one of his hands to Law's nape and under the collar of his coat. "And are you all right now?"

"I suppose." Law tried not to shiver as Luffy's fingers were sliding lower along his spine. He was acutely aware that under his coat there was only his skin, and it wanted to be touched badly.

He caressed Luffy's neck, raising his chin so that they could kiss. Luffy's immediate response gave him a sneaking suspicion that they were going back to bed very soon, but not in order to catch any sleep.

~*~

"Robin? What are you doing?"

Robin turned away from the window to look at Nami, who peeked from under her blanket, sleepy. Nami was used to Robin often being awake in the middle of the night, but usually her nose was
buried into a book, and exceptions were a sure way to make Nami curious.

"Just watching the most intriguing scene." Robin had grown an extra hand out of the wall, and it was keeping the curtain aside, allowing her to see to the deck.

Nami yawned, rubbing her eyes. "Spying again?"

"Well, that would be quite an inappropriate thing to do, wouldn't it? But you can hardly count the main deck as a private space, and I'm just looking out of the window."

Nami slid out of the bed, throwing the blanket onto her shoulders, too curious to continue sleeping before seeing herself what was happening.

"They're actually pretty cute," Nami said, having seen the pair hugging on the deck.

"Yes, very much so."

There was a longish silence. Nami was shifting her weight from one leg to another, and it didn't seem to be only because her bare toes were chilly.

"What is it?" Robin asked.

"Is it all right to you?"

"Sure. Why on earth it wouldn't be? Haven't we all reached the conclusion that they're good for each other?"

"I didn't mean..." Nami sighed. "I know you like him."

Robin held in a laughter and a desire to tease Nami by pretending to not understand. It would have been so easy, she only needed to say that of course she liked both of them, wondering what that had to do with anything. But Nami actually was worried of her, and it seemed like she had wanted to say this for a while already, so Robin took it seriously.

"Liking someone is very different to loving them," she said. "I'm allowed to appreciate an intelligent and sexy man without wanting to have him myself, am I not?"

Nami thought about it for a moment, then nodded. "I find your taste in men disturbing, though."

"You don't think he's hot, then?"

"I wouldn't know. He's too creepy for me to appreciate."

Robin didn't start debating that, even though it was difficult for her to see why Law was considered so scary. But, on the other hand, she had always tended to think that 'morbid' and 'fascinating' were synonyms.

"At least he's hotter than Jinbei, who you considered handsome," Nami admitted.

"I did, and it was well deserved too."

"I don't get you." Nami sighed.

Robin was just smiling, until returning to the earlier topic. "There's no need for you to worry. Trafalgar is very charming company, but I don't wish to be closer to him than this. I'm pretty sure it would be terrible for both of us. You can't put two sea urchins too close to each other."
"Luffy has never been scared of stings," Nami said.

"True. I'm honestly glad for both of them."

"All right. Are you going to stop spying already? Because the curtain is aside, the light of the lantern comes in and it's annoying."

Robin almost let the curtain fall back into its place, but not before she had taken in the scene. Luffy's arms were wrapped around Law a few times already, their mouths had been pressed together for several minutes nonstop, and at times they managed to take a small step towards the infirmary. At this rate it was going to take hours before they got to bed, so maybe they would end up doing something interesting on the deck, after all.

"Robin?" Nami asked, having settled back to her bed.

"I'm just wondering whether Trafalgar's wearing anything under that coat." His bare shins, and being without shoes and the hat were indicating that the piece of clothing had been pulled on rather hastily.

"Robin! Geez, the whole ship is full of mere perverts."

Robin hummed, finally getting up from her chair in front of the window. Nami was looking pitiful, rubbing her nape and trying to squish her pillow to be more comfortable.

"Are you feeling unwell?" Robin asked.

"Yeah, a bit. I don't know why. The air... it's changing. Kind of like before a storm, but in a different way. But I can't put my finger on what it is."

"We'll know when it happens. Try to get some sleep." Robin tried taking her own advice, too, but couldn't help worrying. When a navigator as good as Nami said that the air was changing, then it really was. And usually it didn't bode well.
Of Collecting Cola, and Professionalism

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry it has been such a long time since I updated last time. It seems like the real life isn't going to stop messing with me anytime soon. Fighting burocracy is a total hell.

All I can do is to thank you for all of your lovely comments and kudos. <3

Operation Super-Secret-Operation-of-Collecting-Cola started right after the breakfast, and Franky proclaimed himself its leader. The Cola stock of the ship was his responsibility; he knew where the shop selling Cola was located, plus he and the owner of the shop had already agreed to the details of fetching the order, so the title went without saying. At least he himself thought so, and there were no objections.

Luffy and Zoro were serving as beasts of burden, pulling a cart on which they had loaded the cola barrels at the shop. Both of them were holding one of the poles of the cart, and they didn't seem the least bit tired even though they were dragging it up a roadless ridge through a forest.

Law had joined the group as some kind of a supervisor, because he apparently didn't trust their ability to execute the Operation without getting into some mess. He was silently walking behind the cart, the sword leaning against his shoulder, his eyes observing even the smallest movement around them.

Everyone else in the crew had been instructed to stay aboard, ready to set sail immediately after they returned with their cargo, and to watch out for possible moves of the Marines.

"Traffy?" Luffy glanced over his shoulder at Law, who hadn't said anything for a very long time. "You should've stayed with the others if you're feeling bad."

"Everything's going super smoothly!" Franky added. There hadn't been even the smallest obstacle during the Operation, even though the inhabitants of the town had been giving their group some quite curious looks.

Anyway, he had to wonder why Luffy was assuming that Law was feeling bad. To him the guy didn't seem to be feeling better or worse than usually at all, but maybe a significant other noticed things that went unnoticed by everyone else. It might be best if he didn't give it too much thought during the Operation, because fluffy love might be too touching, and there was no way he was going to cry.

"Stop using it on me." Law glared at Luffy. "And the reason I'm having a bad feeling about this is because it's going too smoothly."

"You should stop doing that," Luffy answered. "And wait for those good things. Not always bad ones."

This seemed to be a continuation for something the couple had been discussing earlier. Franky would have liked to hear more, but Law fell silent, giving Luffy a warning glare. The atmosphere turned oddly tense after that.
"What do you mean, it's going too smoothly?" Franky asked, after the quiet thumping of their steps on soft moss and squeaking of the cart had been the only sounds to be heard for a too long time.

"The island is bustling with Marines," Law started. "Plus, our disguises are not very good. There are two fucking marine watch towers. And still no one has had even the slightest trouble –"

"We're just really great at hiding," Luffy interrupted.

"There's no way in hell that's true, Straw Hat."

"Traffy." Luffy stuck his tongue out.

"All right, enough of that," Zoro said, looking at Law. "What are you trying to say?"

"That I don't believe even for a second that they haven't noticed us. They haven't done anything to catch us because –"

"I know!" Luffy interrupted. "They're being nice and they're gonna let us go!"

It looked like Law was trying to suffocate himself by his palm. "No, it's because they are plotting some move that allows them to catch the whole group in one go for sure."

Come to think again, what Law said made sense. It was weird that an infamous pirate ship was allowed to stay anchored for several days just like that. The back side of the island wasn't that desolate, there had been some ships passing by and seeing them. Franky had thought they had lucked out because no one had paid more attention to them, but there might be another reason for letting them be, too.

"I get what you mean," Franky said. "But so what? They're super stupid if they try attacking us."

"We can kick anyone's ass," Luffy said.

"A fight might hit the spot", Zoro said.

Law gave a heavy sigh, raising his shoulders a couple of times, like feeling something. "Well, for my part I'd prefer skipping it, for now."

Luffy stopped abruptly, letting go of the pole; Zoro grunted as he suddenly needed to hold the whole weight of the cart by himself and prevent it from rolling down the ridge.

"I knew it!" Luffy turned around to point at Law with his finger, while his other hand was already stretching towards Law to grab him. "It's still hurting, right? Why're you not –"

"I am a doctor, I'm well aware of what I'm –"

Luffy got a hold of Law's waist, launching himself at him. The collision caused both of them losing their balance. Luffy yelped. Law cursed. Law's sword, which was so unpractically overlong, got stuck under Luffy's legs, and all in all they seemed to be just a big tangle of limbs; and Luffy didn't seem to be in any hurry to disengage until Law attacked him by tickling.

They weren't very good at hiding, indeed; Luffy's hysterical laughter was probably heard several kilometers away.

"That's so super cute," Franky said, pondering whether he should change his hairdo for something a bit more fluffy.
"Grab the pole and we continue," Zoro said.

Franky did so. The cart was remarkably slowing them down on the roadless ridge, so the couple could catch them easily after they had solved their... business. Whatever it was. It didn't quite look like an argument nor a spontaneous tender moment, it was more like some undefined weirdness.

It was a tranquil and beautiful morning, though a little bit cloudy. And a moment later there was a bunch of lightnings striking at the sea, behind the ridge; the thunder was about to burst their eardrums.

Franky glanced at Zoro, who was looking at him in turn.

"Nami," they said in unison. Starting to run. Franky tried not to imagine how the barrels of Cola were going to react as they were shaking on the cart, hoping they wouldn't explode because of the pressure at least.

Luffy and Law were already on top of the ridge as Franky and Zoro arrived pulling the cart. It felt unfair that some people were able to move so fast that you couldn't even see them go. In the chilly morning air there was steam rising from Luffy after he had been using Gear Second, and he didn't seem delighted by Law holding his waist in order to prevent him from senselessly rushing to the shore. Law probably hadn't taken a single step in order to get on top of the ridge, instead utilizing his Power.

Thousand Sunny seemed small compared to the dozen Marine warships that were circling around it, multiple times bigger than the pirate ship. The sails of two warships were already on fire because of the lightnings, but the Sunny was still in trouble. Franky should have been there, he was the one who knew the ship best!

"Traffy!" Luffy's feet were scrabbling at moss as he was struggling in Law's hold, running in place. "Let go! I gotta go and help –"

"Yes, in a minute." Law spoke calmly, turning to Franky. "Can you get the load to the ship if we go first?"

Franky studied the cart. It was made of wood, so it was going to float. He would be just fine with it, so Luffy and Law could by all means take the shopping boat they had used to disembark and go first to help defending the ship. That was a sensible idea in every way. Sanji and Robin were strong, and the others aboard were not weaklings either, but the Marines had gone overboard while gathering their troops. There was no way there was so many warships of that calibre in the whole base; those bastards had spent their time by calling for loads of reinforcements.

This really was a planned thing, and those could turn ugly, as the opponents had had time to equip themselves suitably and adjust their strategy according to the situation.

"Leave it to us, we're going to super take care of it! Get going already!" Franky said.

Law nodded, letting go of Luffy, who darted away as barely visible flash of red shirt. Law disappeared as well, and in his place there was only a rock that had been located somewhere else a moment ago.

Franky turned the cart facing backwards to prevent the poles from getting stuck in the ground. There was a steep downhill in front of them, but there wasn't an unobstruck straight path to the shore because of so many trees growing there. It occurred to him that some kind of a portable, Cola-fueled power-axe-contraption would be a multi-purpose and manly thing to invent. Perhaps he would build
such a thing next, but right now he didn't have necessary materials for it.

But you didn't need to care about things like that if you were with Zoro, because he was quite a handy slicer for any purpose in himself. Soon Zoro was sitting on the foremost barrels, holding an unsheathed sword and preparing himself to cut a path through the forest, while Franky pushed the cart to give it some speed and jumped on it, too.

Racing downhill on a cart through a forest and ending up right in the middle of a swarm of enemies having superior numbers – that was the special brand of super crazy the Straw Hat pirates were infamous of. That kind of thing made any man's heart swell with such a pride that it made them feel emotional.

The trees were snapping neatly in two, falling aside by Zoro's flying attacks. Franky had thrown himself onto the Cola barrels, using his weight to hold them in their place as well as he could in order to prevent them from bouncing off the cart. It felt like the shaking of the cart might very well tear his kidneys off; and as they were halfway down, it occurred to him they didn't have anything even resembling brakes.

But he didn't care; they wouldn't have used the brakes anyway.

After they had raced down, their speed had already accelerated so wildly it forced Franky's eyes to water. He wasn't crying, it was just because of the air stream. The cart splashed into the sea, becoming a pretty decent raft, unfortunately sans a motor or oars. He jumped into the water so as to push the raft to the ship.

Some of the sharpest Marines noticed them, starting to aim their cannons at the raft. Franky left slicing the cannonballs to Zoro, concentrating on being a super motor.

If he didn't hurry, the fight might be over when they got there; that wouldn't be super at all.

The shopping boat was floating beside the Sunny, empty, meaning Luffy and Law had already made it. There was a total chaos on the main deck, as everyone was doing their best at defending the ship. Nami was summoning a typhoon that was forming nearby, and that was going one hell of a problem for the Sunny, too, unless they had time to get out of its way. It should prevent the Marines from following them pretty effectively.

Franky was swimming with all of his might. Now there were rifles aimed at them, but that wasn't a problem, either. At least he didn't think it was – until one of the bullets hit the edge of the raft, making a lot neater hole than bullets used to make. He tried to get why it was bothering him.

After about ten vigorous kicks the edge of the raft exploded, exactly where the bullet had embedded itself. Zoro managed to prevent the outermost barrel from rolling into the sea, and reflect the following bullets harmlessly aside using the blade of his katana.

"They seem to have brought pretty dangerous toys this time," Zoro said, not seeming like those toys had impressed him much. He flashed a dangerous grin, and the scar going over his missing eye made it look even more impressive.

Franky was sharing the feeling, but couldn't help worrying a bit, still. He could only hope Luffy wasn't going to try his usual trick and bounce the bullets fired at him back towards the shooters. If those bullets happened to be of sharp and explosive kind, it wasn't going to be pretty. The thought made Franky kick the water even faster, and soon they were beside the shopping boat.

"Go and tell Luffy!" he shouted, as Zoro was already jumping off the barrels onto the railing of the
Sunny, leaving him floundering in the sea. Was he really the last one to arrive? That was so lame.

Well, at least someone had understood to open the hatch on the side of the ship, so that he could take the boat and the Cola into the hall. He was pushing the raft inside, when one of the barrels exploded because some Marine had shot at it.

The Cola had become over pressured because of shaking. Franky watched how it exploded all over the place; it was running along the side of the ship, it was dripping from his hair, and floating on billows as brownish foam. And then he himself exploded even more violently. He glared at the closest warship and rows of Marines on its deck, wearing their white-and-blue uniforms and aiming their rifles at him.

"OI OI OI GUYS, IT'S NOT THE LEAST BIT SUPER TO WASTE SOMEONE'S COLA!"

Getting it had been an effort!

Some of the Marine chickens started trembling so that you could see it from afar. And come to think again, actually the whole warship was an eyesore, it needed to go. Franky decided it was about time he took a part in the fight, too, joining his hands and aiming a laser beam neatly at the waterline of the warship.

The whole side of the warship was ripped open in the most satisfactory way, taking in water and starting to keel over. One taken out.

Franky rushed inside, shutting the hatch after him. He grabbed two barrels of Cola onto his arms, darting towards the energy room. The typhoon Nami was raising meant they were going to need the engine, preferably sooner than later, so it was best to load the fuel right away. The shouts and cracks from the deck made him hurry; at times the whole ship jolted as it was hit by something.

Having loaded the Cola, he rushed onto the deck. The fight was very hectic. More than a half of the warships were already disabled, and the sea was full of floundering Marines trying to prevent their comrades who had Devil's Fruit powers from drowning. There were a few dorsal fins of sharks cleaving the restless waves, too. They had smelled out their prey, one more concern for the Marines.

Where the four still intact warships got all of their cannonballs didn't make any sense, especially as Usopp was doing fine job taking their shooters out by frighteningly precise hits. It was still raining cannonballs, so that Sanji didn't have time to do anything else than kick them aside, while Zoro kept slicing them. Well, of course they also had time to bicker while they were at it, and change the whole thing into a contest about which one of them rejected more. Zoro was moping, because the contest wasn't fair as Sanji had jumped the gun.

As the troublemakers were concentrating on their verbal fight, Luffy took the cake by bouncing a bunch of cannonballs back at the Marines. They ripped the side of one of the warships open, too bad that the hole was so high the ship didn't sink.

Robin had gotten tangled into some kind of a net, feebly trying to get out of it without success. It was strengthened by the Sea Stone, in other words. Franky hurried to her, but Chopper was faster. He wasn't thinking at all, soon he was lying on the deck as a same kind of a powerless bundle as Robin, having touched the net.

"Oi, what if you think before acting?" Franky said, pulling Chopper further from the net. "I get that you want to help, but try to remember you have a Power, too!"

At this rate he was never going to make it to the bow and the helm through all of these obstacles. He peeled the net off Robin, anyways, and got a tired smile for his efforts. He also got an accidental
glimpse of black panties as Robin was trying to get onto her feet.

SUPER!

Suddenly Franky noticed both Robin and Chopper staring into the same direction by him, eyes wide, and hurried to follow suit.

One of the intact warships was flying.

Or, it was more like rising out of the water, as well as a hefty amount of sea water surrounding it. It was rising like it was hanging off some cable, slowly turning around as it went, sideways, then upside down. Everything that had been on its deck was falling into the sea, and the Marines were clinging to anything they had managed to grasp. Their expressions of incredulous horror were comical.

Until now Franky hadn't noticed the enormous dome confining almost all of the area, arching above them, transparent and light-blue. Law was heavily leaning against the railing, looking intently at the flying ship, and the fingers of his stretched out hand were moving slowly. Controlling.

Oi oi oi oi oi, when it comes to stealing the show, isn't that a bit of an overkill!?

It seemed like the Marines weren't appreciating Law's performance much, instead they turned all the rifles they still had in their possession at him. Luffy jumped in front of him, ready to bounce the bullets back.

"Idiot! Those are sharp," Law hissed, tackling Luffy onto the deck with him in order to dodge. At the same time he happened to drop the warship he had been lifting on top of another warship, and a lot of noise and wreckage ensued. The masts were crushed, tearing holes to the hulls; there were shreds of torn sails floating here and there, like some molted skin of a giant sea monster.

The bullets meant for Law went over the couple.

One of them hit Nami, who was standing in the middle of the deck, calling for more wind into her hurricane and presuming that the others were defending the sides of the ship. It felt like the time itself came to a halt as Franky was watching, powerless, how the bullet was hitting her chest, making some blood gush out. She screamed, starting to curl up and bring her hand up to her chest so as to press it on the wound.

"Don't move!" Law shouted, and the tone of his voice was so effective that in addition to Nami, it made everyone else freeze in their place and stop breathing, too.

Then Law hastily unsheathed his sword, cutting Nami in two. There was nothing you could do except just helplessly stare at that kind of surrealism. The incision cut her torso diagonally, so that her head and one arm were with the first half, while legs and the other arm were with the other. There was just blackness to be seen where the incision was, like there was some other dimension in there; no blood or bones or internal organs or anything else that would have made any sense.

Law had cut her precisely at the point where the bullet had went in. He snatched it from the black surface of one of Nami's halves, throwing it overboard. It exploded on its way.

The bang of the explosion felt like a sign to come back to the present from their previous stupefied states, and many of them inhaled loudly. Law gave a heavy sigh, going down onto his knees and telling them to put Nami back together. Luffy and Chopper dashed to do just that, grabbing the halves and setting them in their place as carefully as they could.
The wound in her chest hadn't stopped bleeding despite her being whole again. She managed to remain standing after Luffy and Chopper had let go of her, though, taking some shaky steps to Law.

She slapped his cheek so that Franky winced because of sympathy. The girl knew how to deliver a feisty blow.

"No man has ever pushed their hand into my chest in such a crass way!" She screamed. Slapping his other cheek, too. "And that was so scary!"

"I apologize," Law said. "Next time I'm going to let it explode inside your ribcage."

"... Thank you." Nami had used all the energy the shock had lent her, and sunk to sit on the deck.

"I recommend you to take it very easy now. I didn't have time to do anything to the wound itself – you still need a doctor."

"And we need to get out of here!" Franky said, having properly become aware of their situation. The typhoon wasn't controlled by Nami anymore, getting closer to them as a gust of swirling wind. It had started sucking some debris from the warships into itself already, lifting scraps into its crazy carousel.

"Yeah, that's right!" Luffy said. "Franky, are we ready to go?"

"Super ready!"

"Go and take the helm then, and get us out of here! Chopper, take Nami to the infirmary!"

Franky was running. He was dimly aware of Chopper asking Law to come to help him, and together they started walking a wobbly Nami towards the infirmary. The others were busy, preventing the Marines splashing in the sea from climbing up the sides of the Sunny. The typhoon getting closer had motivated them to try getting into any ship that was still floating and responding to steering.

Brook seemed relieved as he got to pass the helm to Franky. Soon he was ready to shoot the ship a good distance away using Cola power.

The typhoon, Carata and the shipwrecks floating in the sea were left behind them in a second, as the ship jerked into motion violently. Luffy was rolling on the deck, holding his sides and laughing unrestrainedly; sometimes it was hard to tell whether he was having fun or if it was just the adrenaline rush evening out after some excitement.

Franky tried not to worry about Nami or the others who had gotten some small bruises and scratches during the fight. Saving lifes and treating injuries was a job for a doctor, and there were two super good ones aboard.

His job was steering the Sunny towards more peaceful waters and losing the rest of the Marines, and that was exactly what he was going to do.

~*~

"... am I?"

"In the infirmary. How are you feeling?"

Law opened his eyes, having heard Nami and Chopper's voices. He was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall; since they had managed to make Nami stable, he had been drifting back and forth between being awake and being unconscious. It felt like he had been drenched in sea water and then
mangled by a warship falling on him.

Once again he had used his Power too much. Not as badly as on Dressrosa, but it had happened way too soon after that incident. Some teleporting on the island wasn't a problem, but a fight was another matter altogether. Maintaining a Room that big was always exhausting, but he had needed to do it. After lifting a warship, and doing a hasty precision cut in an emergency, needing to operate a bullet wound with Chopper and use his Power some more wasn't exactly good for him.

The rough waves caused by the typhoon Nami had unleashed definitely weren't good for him, either. The attempt at keeping his seasickness in bay with mere willpower made him even more exhausted. He imagined that an almost empty barrel was feeling like this – like his internal organs were sloshing from one side to another, following the swaying of the floor. Every time when there was a certain kind of quick bobbing motion, his stomach was trying to climb out of his mouth.

The going had gotten a bit more even now, but his nauseous feeling was going to linger for some time. If he succeeded in eating something, the increase of his blood sugar might help.

After the operation he had left bandaging the wound and choosing the medication to Chopper, but had stayed in the infirmary despite the open air feeling like a tempting idea. Chopper had said he might need consulting, and so Law had just collapsed onto the floor, slipping between being 'awake', 'barely conscious', and 'totally out'.

"It hurts, but not too bad," Nami said. "What's happening?"

"You've been sleeping for three hours," Chopper said.

Law would have estimated it had been about half an hour. Apparently he had been sleeping too, but he didn't feel the least bit refreshed.

"The others?"

"They're fine." Chopper was wiggling in his chair somewhat uncomfortably, maybe because he actually hadn't gotten to check the wounds of the others at all. "No one else got badly injured, at least. They have all been here to ask how you're doing."

Apparently Law had missed at least half of those inquiries, because he had only been aware of Luffy, Sanji and Robin. Luffy had been the first one to burst in after Chopper had told the operation had been successful. Nami had been sleeping, and he had held her hand in his own for a moment, uncharacteristically silent, then talking with Chopper a bit. Law hadn't had energy to listen to those words, let alone comprehend them; he had only concentrated on Luffy's quiet tone that had had a surprisingly sedative effect on him. Then, there had been a hand petting his hair, and the fingertips lightly massaging his scalp had been soothing enough to make him nod off for the first time.

"Where are we?" Nami asked.

Chopper didn't answer.

"No idea," Law said. "A good distance away from Carata, but to which direction..." He shrugged, then pointed at the Log Pose lying on a shelf. They had taken it off her wrist to put her on a drip.

Nami turned her head to look at him. "Woah, you look so terrible!"

"As much as I appreciate compliments, there's no need for you to bother with it." Law forced himself to smile a bit in order to look a little less like a corpse, but it might come out as creepy. "At this point I believe it's clear to both of us that we're not each other's type."
Nami snickered, quickly pressing her hand to her chest. "Ow. Ow, ow, don't make me laugh now."

"I'm sorry. I didn't actually expect you to get my humour."

"I'm used to hearing Robin's humour. Yours is not much weirder than that. Did that mean you think I'm slow?"

Law shook his head. "Not at all. But we put you to sleep using a substance which should still cause noticeable grogginess."

Nami shut her eyes, feeling her chest which was bandaged. As she raised her hand, she also noticed the IV. "I was... operated on?"

"Yeah," Law confirmed. "It went so close to your heart that we decided to open you just in case. And good thing that we did – one of your ribs was fragmented in a pretty nasty way. It could have punctured your lung."

"Don't worry about it, just get some rest," Chopper said. "Law fixed it really beautifully, it's going to be as good as new."

"Only if you rest," Law said. "No getting up for at least two days, and even after that you need to take it very easy for some time."

"It seems like I'm occupying your bed," Nami said.

"No, now it's used in the way it's intended. It's meant for a patient." Law wasn't crazy about needing to find some other place to sleep, but he was going to live with it. The couch in the aquarium bar might be a good option, he had already found out how comfortable it was. He just needed to find out whether he could lock the door of the room if he wanted to have some quality time with Luffy.

When he wanted it...

"Your bed..." Nami repeated, thoughtful. "And Luffy's..."

"Of course we changed the bed sheets."

After this assurance Nami's expression relaxed visibly, which irritated Law. Fuck, what kind of surgeon worth anything supposedly didn't take care of hygiene? All in all, making someone sleep in a semen-stained bed was a proof of bad taste.

Or maybe it was just him being a hygiene freak, who thought it was disgusting unless he himself had participated in staining the mentioned sheets.

"Anyways, you must rest for a while," he said, trying to get his own brain to change the topic. "Is there anyone else capable of navigating here? Someone who could take care of it meanwhile?"

"Robin," Nami said right away. Law wasn't surprised. "Franky... Usopp's not bad, either... And Brook... did you know he used to be the captain of his previous crew for a while?"

Law hadn't heard of it, but didn't find it particularly surprising. Brook could have been just about anything, it had been such a long time since he had been alive. "Being a captain doesn't guarantee you can navigate," he said. "Sure, I'm not too hopeless myself, but..."

"True enough, Luffy is."

"Well, I guess there are enough decent substitutes to keep the ship on course while you're bedridden."
Am I going to give the Log Pose to Robin, then?"

Nami nodded.

Law took it from the shelf. "All right. I take my leave, I guess Chopper's going to stay –"

"Of course!" Chopper said.

Law staggered, needing to use the wall as a support as he scrambled onto his feet. Come to think
again, it might be that the combination of cyclizine, food and some sleep might benefit him
drastically. And caffeine.

"You are not all right!" Chopper squealed.

"Nope," Law admitted. "I used my Power too much, but there's no helping it. I just need to take it
easy."

Chopper seemed somewhat unhappy, but didn't try to prevent him from going, or force him to submit
to some examinations. "Tell the others that if someone's injured, they come in now?"

"What?" Nami seemed upset. "You mean you haven't checked them already?"

"You were in obvious danger!" Chopper said. "So of course I needed to monitor you until you woke
up, and Law –" There was a long pause, during which Chopper seemed to realize something. "... he... kind of just collapsed..."

"Chopper..." Nami sighed.

"I'm sorry!"

_That reminds me of Bepo._

Law didn't need anyone to worry about him. He was a doctor and well aware of what he was doing.
They needed to steer the ship to the right direction, so he walked to the door, not detaching his hand
from the wall even once.

"Are you well enough to deal with Luffy?" Nami asked.

"Why wouldn't I be? Last time I saw him, he was perfectly fine."

"Isn't that the problem?" Nami sighed. "Haven't you seen what fighting actually _does_ to him by
now? I'm sure there's some medical term for it, too."

Law didn't ask, because this felt like something he needed to figure out by himself.

Luffy loved fighting. Was there something more to it?"

Maybe you could say that Luffy was kind of a... hm, adrenaline junkie... but was it an actual
problem? If you asked Luffy about it, he would definitely flash a grin, saying they were pirates.

He was digging through his memory, thinking of fights in which he knew Luffy had participated.
They tended to end in two alternative ways. Either Luffy used all of his energy, getting injured so
badly that the next days were spent with him recovering and sleeping like a log. Or he threw a wild
banquet to celebrate their victory, using the rest of his energy in this rampage, and _then_ slept like a
log.
Marineford. Punk Hazard. Dressrosa. There was a distinct pattern.

All right. It was a problem, because this time there hadn't been a chance for either of those options. The fight had been over before Luffy had needed to do much, and a banquet wasn't an option now because of Nami's injury.

Luffy had loads of unused, restless energy, plus he was bound to be worried of Nami.

Law was so screwed. He hardly managed to keep standing.

"Perhaps I could just knock him out using the same substance we used to put Nami to sleep?" he suggested to Chopper. "Where do you keep those syringes?"

"Not telling you! That's not professional!" Chopper was almost trembling with sudden rage, the fur on his nape was standing and fluffy.

"I think it was meant to be a joke," Nami said.

"One point to Nami." Law sighed, taking his luggage in addition to the Log Pose with him. He needed to find some place to sleep anyways.

He hoped that Luffy was going to share that place with him.

He also hoped that Luffy would let him catch some sleep, even a little bit. Assuming he would be able to fall asleep in the first place.

Law peeked into the kitchen first, because he needed to get energy. Maybe he had missed a meal when he had been napping, or perhaps the lunch was going to be served late today because of their hardships earlier.

Sanji was there, seeming ever busier than he usually was; keeping an eye on four kettles at the same time and limping to get some ingredient from the cupboard at times. His expression was tense.

"You'd better let Chopper examine that leg of yours," Law said.

"It's nothing. But it's good that you showed up – is there something I need to take into account while cooking for Nami-swan?"

Law sighed. Some people just happened to be impossible patients. Luckily it seemed like Nami was going to accept staying in bed, not trying to escape all the time claiming she was perfectly fine. "Not really. She can eat whatever she wants, there's no damage in her digestive system. It's about –"

"Don't talk about Nami-swan in such a clinical and insensitive way!" Sanji snapped.

"I tend to speak about everyone in a similar way if I happen to be in a doctor mode. It's not my problem if it's bothering you."

Sanji didn't say anything to it. Law placed his luggage in front of the couch until he figured out where he was going to settle for now.

"Anyway, we're talking about a bedridden patient," he continued. "So making her diet light and easy for her stomach would be a good idea. She's on a drip for now, so she gets some energy that way, too."

"I'm cooking some cream soup," Sanji said.
"That should do. And when you go and take it to her, you let Chopper examine that leg of yours at the same time."

"I already said that it's not –"

"Don't even try. Even though you're behind the kitchen island, I can clearly see you limping. If you think your doctor doesn't notice it, you don't know him very well."

"I just kicked one cannonball a bit carelessly and the ankle cracked."

Law made a face, imagining it; even the idea was painful. Who on earth even considered kicking some cannonballs as a good idea? They weren't like some fucking footballs. And maybe such a thing wasn't a big deal for Sanji generally, but when you took into account the fractures he had gotten during his fight with Vergo on Punk Hazard, he really needed to take it easier for a while.

"You just take care of yourself," Sanji blurted. "You look like you just escaped from some morgue."

"Lovely, I am suitably flattered. But I give – I am tired and hungry."

"Food's ready in less than an hour."

"Okay, I can get by until then." He had time to check all of the Straw Hats by then, and send the ones with scratches to Chopper. If he didn't count Nami and Chopper in, he had now dealt with the first one; six to go.

The sky was clear again, and the effects of the typhoon didn't reach them anymore. The waves had calmed down, and it was about time, too. Brisk tailwind was pushing the Thousand Sunny to some so-far-unknown direction.

Brook and Usopp were lying on the deck, perhaps right where they had collapsed after the chaos. Zoro was napping, leaning his back against the railing; and Robin was sitting in a deck chair holding a book on her lap, but it didn't seem like she was reading it, just fiddling with a corner of a page. On the fore deck Franky's wide back was covering the helm from Law's sight, and Luffy was nowhere to be seen.

Law stifled a pang of uneasiness because of the latest fact, telling himself that Luffy was very likely on the figurehead in these circumstances.

"How's Nami?" Robin asked.

"When are we going to get some food?" Usopp asked.

"She's awake," Law said. "I guess she's well enough for you to go and see her by all means, but only if Chopper gets to patch every injury you might have gotten during that fight."

"And the food?" Brook asked. "My stomach feels so empty – even though I have no –"

All of them were relieved as Usopp interrupted the bad joke by kicking Brook's tibia.

"It should be ready in less than an hour," Law said. "So, is there anyone injured here?"

No one announced themselves. How very unsurprising. Law went to Brook and Usopp, who happened to be nearest him, looking at them carefully from top to toe as well as he could while they were still clothed; not that he could have done much for Brook even if he had found some fractures.

"What happened to that?" he asked, having noticed some fiery red rash in one of Usopp's palms.
Usopp tried moving his hand and hiding it, but couldn't help scratching it briefly.

"Don't bother with it, I already saw it," Law said.

"It's not a big deal at all, it's just that one of my powder stars was leaking a bit before I managed to shoot it. But you should have seen what kind of reaction it caused when it hit the target—"

Whatever the poison in the projectile had been, it seemed to cause some fucking disturbing reactions when it came to contact with bare skin. It might be some exotic plant, Usopp seemed to know much about them. "Go to Chopper. He has some ointments to reduce the irritation."

"I don't have any strength to move. I have I'm-going-to-die-because-of-overstraining-if-I-need-to-get-up syndrome..."

"Such a thing really requires an examination, so get going already."

Law won a staring contest with Usopp, watching him start dragging himself towards the infirmary. Geez, the whole ship was full of difficult patients, and each one of them was worse than the previous. Law glanced at Zoro, settling to the fact that there was no blood to be seen in his clothes. He wasn't feeling great enough to start arguing with the most obstinate macho idiot ever, not when he himself needed to lean on Kikoku in order to stay on his feet. He would be happy to leave dealing with Zoro to Chopper, if need be.

"And what are the doctors' orders for me?" Robin asked, smiling.

"Resting, some food, some coffee, and a Log Pose." Law handed the last-mentioned to Robin, who didn't have any visible injuries. He also thought that Robin would have gone to the infirmary herself, if there had been some reason to do it. That was what intelligent people did. "For now you're the substitute navigator chosen by Nami."

Robin attached the band around her wrist. "That didn't sound like a very medical prescription."

"It was well thought out to offer refreshment for a tired body, and some mental stimulus."

"I suppose the latter part is successful..." Robin was watching the object, frowning. "Which one of these are we trying to follow?"

Law froze, the realization hitting him. "That's one hell of a good question. I have no idea."

He leaned closer to look at three little bulbs containing the oscillating needles. After leaving Dressrosa they had been following the middle one, but the magnetic field of Carata had probably caused them to adapt again. He just didn't have any idea, and in the middle of everything Nami hadn't had a chance to set them on their course.

"I suppose we need to ask her," Robin said. "Thirty-three percent probability for getting it right feels quite insufficient to me."

"No, wait a minute." Law suddenly remembered something he hadn't been thinking for days, taking his hat off. There was a tiny pocket hidden in its lining, barely big enough to hold a piece of paper that was smaller than his palm. First his fingers couldn't find the piece of paper, and he had time to start panicking that he might have lost it – or maybe it had burnt to ashes without him noticing, he didn't even want to think of it – but finally he got a hold of the piece. It had been very unnoticeable, smooth along the lining.

"Is that...?"
"Yeah." Law placed the Vivre card onto his palm, where it started sliding towards his pinky right away. "Bepo's somewhere in that direction. And because he's on Zou, it means Zou's there, too."

And I miss him...

Robin brought the Log Pose next to Law's hand, soon finding the needle pointing at the same direction as the Vivre card. "It's that one. Oh my. It seems like we're on a course that's about 180 degrees wrong."

"So it seems."

Robin put her book onto her deck chair, starting towards the bow. Law followed. "Why are you coming along, by the way?" she asked.

"I'm looking for Luffy. I was about to check his favourite spot, but a bunch of half-dead Straw Hat pirates was holding me on my way."

"Such a thing might be a serious hinder indeed," Robin laughed.

Law had to lean on the railing as he climbed the stairs to the fore deck. Robin started telling Franky about their new course immediately; Law, for his part, was eyeing Franky from top to toe to check possible injuries. It seemed like he could have used some band-aids after the fight, but superficial scratches had already stopped bleeding, and blood had dried. Law briefly informed him of the state of Nami and the next meal, urging him to visit the infirmary so that Chopper could disinfect the scratches.

Robin and Franky started to prepare for a turn-around. Law glanced at the sails, and couldn't help sighing – they had been speeding into a wrong direction for hours, and it felt like they weren't getting closer to Zou at all. Sure, if you wanted to put some distance between you and, say, some Marines, it made sense to use tailwind to escape as quickly as possible... but still. A submarine would have been so much more convenient. Following it would have been more difficult, and its speed wasn't affected by wind.

He stepped to the figure head, a bit uneasy, leaning against its mane for support and peeking over it. If he didn't find Luffy here, he wouldn't know where he should search next. The idea of Luffy doing something like shutting himself alone into men's quarters was totally absurd.

Worrying of that proved to be useless, though, because Luffy was exactly where Law had expected him to be. Sitting on the lion's forehead, knees dragged close to his chest and leaning his chin on them. Luffy had wrapped his arms around himself a couple of times, like he needed a hug. Or like he was trying to keep his restlessness inside by using physical means.

"Luffy?" Law called.

Luffy startled visibly, almost losing his balance and falling into the sea, but he managed to secure himself. Seeing Law made a little smile rise to his lips, at least.

"Didn't you notice me?" This was the first time Law had ever seen Luffy startled because of someone approaching him; it seemed like his Haki was always keyed, at least subconsciously.

"Thinking of stuff."

It didn't feel like the right moment for jabs concerning whether Luffy ever thought of anything besides food. Law hummed, encouraging him to continue, and then concentrating on grasping the mane as the deck was suddenly tilting sharply.
"Why're we turning around?" Luffy asked.

"Because we were sailing to a wrong direction a moment ago. Nami woke up and –" Law paused, as Luffy was patting a place beside him on the figurehead. "Could we talk somewhere else?"

"I like it here."

"Yeah, I get it. It's fine almost anytime, but right now... I'm already feeling sick to begin with, plus I know it's going to be a rocky ride because we need to beat up against the wind." Fuck, he really hated sailships.

They ended up going to Law's favourite spot for a change, on the bench circling the mast, but they weren't talking. After Law had sat down, Luffy just wiggled onto his lap, just lying there and watching at sea. He was caressing Luffy's shoulder, equally silent. Trying to have any kind of discussion felt useless right now. The day was still young, and in addition to them, there was nothing to be seen but the sea; in other words the rest of the day might be peaceful. Even though you couldn't predict such a thing in the New World.

For now they didn't need to do anything but wait for a meal to be served. Perhaps eating would dissolve Luffy's strange mood in itself, cheering him up. If not, at least it would give Law enough energy to try and solve the problem when he felt better himself.

Just leaning against the mast and lazing with Luffy as a warm weight on his thighs wasn't half bad, actually.
I'm happy to tell that my life sucks a little bit less at the moment, and I also pretty much liked writing this chapter. Thank you for comments and kudos, dear readers. <3

Luffy wasn't as hungry as he had expected. As a rule, fighting made him have an even more ravenous appetite than usually, making everything taste even more delicious than usually; but not this time. He pushed a little bit of this and that into his mouth, rocking restlessly on his chair, until Franky eventually threatened to nail him to the floor in order to keep him still.

He tried his best to be a little bit less annoying, because the atmosphere by the table was exhausted and down. There were too many unoccupied seats; in addition to Nami and Chopper, Robin was also away, steering. Sanji had taken a lunch box to her to the helm, probably one decorated with some vegetables shaped as hearts.

This wasn't one of those moods Luffy could turn into a joyful chaos by doing something like urging Usopp to act silly with him. Now Usopp was prodding his food, holding a fork clumsily in his weaker hand – the other was carefully bandaged – and it seemed like he might forget to open his mouth because of sheer tiredness.

This was one of those moods where no one had any desire or energy to even try cheering up. They would be more annoyed than amused, if Luffy started pushing some carrots into his nose, pretending to be a mutant monster rabbit.

It was so boring. And it left him with way too much time to think, until he suddenly felt like running a thousand times around the ship, just to spend some energy.

Law covertly pressed his shin against Luffy's, letting it just rest there. The contact was a bit soothing, it was like Law knew what he was thinking.

Sanji started looking downright insulted by Luffy's lack of appetite, glaring at him. Or perhaps Sanji was in a bad mood because he had gotten a light cast around his ankle, or maybe he was annoyed because there wasn't a single beautiful lady by the table for him to pamper.

Anyway, Luffy thought it was best to hurry a bit, snatching the most delicious looking piece of food from the table. It happened to be a deep-fried fillet of tuna fish on Law's plate.

"That's mine," Law said, having quickly grabbed his wrist before he had time to pull the catch onto his own plate.

"Was," Luffy corrected.

"You have one very similar to that already. There are some left, too. So why the fuck –"

"It has to be better 'cause it's yours!"

Sanji exploded immediately, demanding Luffy to tell what was wrong with his cooking. A surprised chuckle escaped Brook, and Usopp was muttering something about the marital war before
accidentally poking his nose by his fork.

Law facepalmed, sighing deeply. "Right. Take it. I can't deal with this right now." He let go of Luffy's wrist, just taking another fillet from the dish.

This wasn't the outcome Luffy had hoped for, but he stuffed the fillet into his mouth anyway, convincing himself that it really was tasting better. He also tried to not worry.

Law wasn't looking even a bit more refreshed than he had been after the fight, even though he had been nodding off before the meal, his head constantly drooping. Luffy had succeeded in staying in his place despite his restlessness only because he hadn't wanted to disturb Law.

Was Law going to be tired the rest of the day? That felt like an intolerable idea, but whining about it didn't feel fair, after Law had saved Nami's life. After Luffy himself had –

_I don't wanna think of it._

Instead he started thinking about Law lifting that warship out of the water by one move of his finger. That had been so cool! Almost... no, not almost, it had been _just_ as cool as a laser beam. Law's gloomy, intent expression had been the cherry on top.

"Luffy," Sanji started. "Why on earth you're glowing like that?"

"He's thinking of something good, isn't he?" Usopp took a guess.

"Yup!" Luffy flashed a wide grin. "I just realized that I have the coolest boyfriend in the world and I love him so much."

Law still hadn't stopped facepalming, but his hand wasn't enough to cover all of his face.

"He's blushing," Brook said.

"Super cute," Franky said.

Luffy felt his appetite slowly coming back, along with the lighter atmosphere, and snatched the next fillet from Law's plate.

"Could you please stop doing that?" Law snapped, turning to fully face him. There was more life and fire in Law's eyes than he had seen in them during the whole morning, and that was a good thing even though Law's tone was frustrated.

"Naaa, why? I do it all the time and you don't care."

"That's true, but I'm actually quite hungry this time, and also too tired to fight for every bite."

A pang of guilt made Luffy grab something from his own plate, and push it into Law's mouth in turn. That was a fair thing to do. "Oh, take this –"

The offering of peace might have worked, if it hadn't happened to be a slice of bread, and if Law hadn't happened to be in a mood not tolerating any stupidities to begin with.

But during the chaos that ensued, no one had time to wallow in heavy thoughts.

~*~

As Law finally slumped to sit onto the couch in the Aquarium bar, he felt like he was never going to
have enough strength to get up ever again. Getting there had been quite an ordeal.

The lunch had been a chaos he didn't even want to remember anymore. Bread. He had successfully avoided getting that accursed baked product anywhere near his mouth for the last eleven years – at that time he had accidentally taken a bite because he had been reading a book while eating – and now his laudable streak had been broken because of Luffy. The taste hadn't been quite as awful as he had been remembering, but he still couldn't stand the way that loaf felt in his mouth. It felt like swallowing it was an impossible feat.

He really had to be head over heels in love, because he hadn't cut Luffy into pieces for his efforts. Well, maybe him being so merciful had only been because he had been too busy trying to flush the mass out of his mouth, so that he couldn't grab his sword fast enough. Claiming that Luffy was trying to poison him had also been quite a bad idea. Sanji hadn't been in his best mood, either; of course there had been a fight because of insulting food like that.

Chopper had been surprisingly scary, dashing out of the infirmary and demanding them to give Nami some peace to recover.

Law had finally managed to eat enough, despite a pilfering Luffy, and after the meal he had went to see the patient once again. He had dragged Luffy with him, hoping that he would calm down some after seeing that Nami was all right, but it seemed like it had been counter-productive. Nami had just been sleeping, and Luffy was almost jumping onto the walls like some spring that was forced into its extreme position and then suddenly released.

Too much unused energy and adrenaline, indeed. It had made Law to consider finding those anesthetic syringes of Chopper's, anyway, by scanning the whole infirmary. But he would have needed to bring up a Room for that. And he simply couldn't.

He had hauled Luffy to take a shower with him, both of them had sorely needed one after the eventful beginning of the day. In the middle of washing up it had just kind of happened that Luffy ended up fucking his fist and coming all over the tiles, but it hadn't done much to soothe the restless energy still radiating from him.

Law gave a heavy sigh, leaning more comfortably against the backrest of the couch, so that he was looking at the ceiling. At least he finally was in a room with a lock, and from the beginning he had considered the bar homey. Behind the windows there was only the fishtank – almost like being under the surface of the sea. The second best option, right after the infirmary.

Luffy flopped down, half beside Law and half on top of him; pressing his head against Law's chest and wiggling restlessly until finally finding a comfortable position, his ear pressed near Law's heart. Law wrapped his arm around Luffy's back, just relaxing, until he almost worried that he might dribble onto the floor as some kind of goo.

The light coming into the room was filtered through water in the tank, it was not as bright as light from a normal window. Ripples on the surface were reflecting some wavelike patterns onto the walls and the ceiling, they were considerably mesmerizing.

It was so quiet and warm. Suddenly Law startled, realizing he didn't have any idea what he had been thinking a moment ago. He had been about to fall asleep.

"What is it?" Luffy asked.

"If you want to talk about something, or do something, I recommend doing it now. Otherwise I'm going to fall asleep."
"Is that a bad thing? You're tired, right?"

Law thought of it for a moment, getting stuck to staring at those wavelike reflections on the ceiling. "Partly. It is true that a nap right now might be refreshing, but on the other hand, then I probably couldn't catch any sleep next night; plus it would be boring to you."

"Hmm," Luffy said, being silent for a long time, fiddling restlessly with the fabric of Law's shirt. "You all right?"

"Yeah, just tired." Having something to eat, and taking a shower had done miraculous job at making him feel better, the only problem was over using his Ope Ope power. To recover from that, nothing could be done except taking it easy. "How about you?"

"Yup, of course," Luffy answered, his face buried into Law's shirt.

Law forced himself to sit up, it made him perk up a bit, forcing him to be more alert in order to maintain his posture. Luffy ended up sitting astride on his lap, but didn't look at him but his own hands, still wringing the hem of his hoodie.

"You don't need to tell me what's bothering you, if you don't want to," Law said. "But do not pretend it's nothing at all. You're just as terrible liar than Bepo and Chopper, so don't even try doing it."

"Maybe I need to practise," Luffy mumbled, still not looking up.

"Don't." Law touched Luffy's shoulder, letting his hand rest on it soothingly while he was gathering himself. Making certain kind of confessions was always difficult to him, he felt so awkward, like he was trying to handle some fragile eggshells while wearing three pairs of thick mittens. Sometimes you still needed to try no matter what, and so he was sliding his hand onto Luffy's neck and under his chin, raising it until they were looking at each other.

Luffy was blinking, confused, like he couldn't understand how on earth the eye contact had happened despite him trying to avoid it.

"I... like you just as you are," Law said. "Straightforward." As often as he felt like he wanted to dig a hole into the ground and bury himself there because of some tactless blurt of Luffy's, he still wouldn't have changed the feature to anything else. It was one of those numerous things that caused Luffy to be Luffy.

"Really?"

"You should know it. I'm a pretty terrible liar, too."

"Yeah." Luffy nodded. "You are. There's so much stuff you don't like to tell, but if you choose to say something, you really mean it too."

Law didn't know what to think of Luffy understanding his tendencies so well. That kind of thing was always surprising, still. He hurried to go back to the previous topic. "Anyway. I can see there's something bothering you. If you don't want to share, just say it, and I leave it alone." He himself was constantly taking some distance, not telling things. He would have been a hypocritical prick if he demanded something more from Luffy. "But seeing you trying to look like there's nothing bothering you – for some reason it... is bothering me, in turn." Any kind of pretending just didn't suit Luffy, not at all.

Luffy was thinking, at the same time pulling and wringing Law's hoodie so that he suspected it to
tear soon, or at least get stretched and baggy. Finally Luffy yanked his chin out of Law's hold, starting to stare at his chest.

"I'm the captain," Luffy said, quietly.

Law blinked, surprised, waiting for a continuation which didn't come. "Yes, I'm aware of this fact." But why to mention it right now? Perhaps... "I do know there are things a captain never tells his crew." To save them. To save his own face. To seem strong, not to make the others worried. There were numerous possible reasons. "But I'm not in your crew, Stra-" Not now. "Luffy. Perhaps you could –"

He was interrupted by a hand, slammed onto his mouth in a remarkably furious way. Luffy got up onto his knees, eyes smoldering and his mouth pressed as a tight line, and Law thought it was best to sink against the backrest, as relaxed and unintimidating as possible. He wasn't too sure whether he had enough energy to even teleport a safe distance away, if Luffy really decided to explode.

Sometimes Law almost forgot that Luffy actually was capable of getting mad. You didn't think about it, what with Luffy usually being so excessively good-natured, smiling at everything, acknowledging so many irritating things by saying it wasn't a big deal and laughing on top of it; all in all being more easy-going than anyone else. The facts almost dropped out of your head.

There was a bounty of five-hundred million berries set on Luffy's head, and every single berry of that amount was well-earned. He was dangerous as hell. And short-tempered, too, if someone made the mistake of crossing the wrong line.

Law suddenly remembered their first meeting on Sabaody Archipelago; the way Luffy had been looking like, a moment before striking that Celestial Dragon into the wall of the Auction Hall. That glare.

There was no way Law had ever wanted to be the target of that glare. And now they were here.

"YOU DON'T GET IT!" Luffy started, his voice was easily heard through the walls and all the way outside, for sure. Law would have wanted to cover his ears, he would have heard Luffy well even like that, but he was frozen. "I AM THE CAPTAIN, AND WHEN WE GET INTO A FIGHT I NEED TO TAKE CARE NO ONE GETS INTO TOO MUCH TROUBLE! BUT BEFORE I EVEN KNEW WHAT I WAS DOING I JUST HAD JUMPED IN FRONT OF YOU, AND –"

Luffy stopped to take a breath, shoulders rising and falling wildly. "Nami got shot because of that. It was my fault. I should have just let you do whatever it was you were about to do, and it would've been fine, right? But I was just – I just moved without thinking at all. That is what's bothering me!"

For a moment Law was just staring at Luffy. In the end of his burst he started to seem more discouraged and less fierce, panting like he had been running for hours.

He got it. Loud and clear. And because the probability of explosion didn't seem very high anymore, he put his hand onto Luffy's, pulling it away from his mouth in order to speak. Luffy wasn't resisting, as Law interlocked their fingers.

"I'm just as guilty as you are," Law said. "And yeah, it's bothering me, too." He had had plenty of time for thinking after setting the fractured piece of rib back to its place – an operation which would have been fully avoidable, if two people had been a bit more sensible.

"You saved her."

Law shook his head. "There wouldn't have been need to do that, if..." He sighed. "I was about to
replace those bullets with some air, it would have been an easy trick to pull off. And I could have
done it even after your jumping in the way. That was exactly what I should have done, but suddenly
all I could think of was getting you out of the way." An insane reflex. His brain had totally stopped
functioning at the moment he had realized that the idiot hadn't noticed those bullets were explosive.

Luffy didn't say anything.

"I think... neither of us is used to having these feelings. Or had any time to prepare for what kind of
effect it might have while being in danger." Some very deep-rooted primitive need to keep their mate
safe no matter what.

Luffy still wasn't saying anything, not seeming the least bit calmer, either.

"Luffy?"

"I remembered, then..." Luffy's hand squeezed into a fist under Law's palm, so tightly he almost
heard bones cracking. "That time at Colosseum. I was just talking to Zoro through a window. And
then you suddenly fell from some really high place. And Mingo landed there, too. And he –"

Law swallowed. Luffy's hand had started trembling, and suddenly it was yanked out of Law's hold.
Right away Luffy had grabbed his hoodie again, clinging to the fabric desperately, so that it was
tightening uncomfortably on Law.

"He SHOT at you there right in front of me and there was nothing I could do, 'cause I was IN and
you were OUT."

Shit, he happened to see it?

At that time Law hadn't had time to take in where he had fallen, or who had happened to be there.
All of his attention had been focused on Doflamingo, but the lead bullets fired into his side, those he
remembered very vividly. His wounds had almost healed, but now his shirt that was pulled so taut
was abrading them, plus the memory made the pain feel fresh again.

"I just couldn't do anything..." Luffy's voice got quieter. "And it just suddenly came back today, as I
saw someone shooting at you..."

"It's no wonder you tried to interfere." Law didn't want to imagine how ugly that little episode had
seemed on Dressrosa. He could remember Doflamingo grinning and laughing while emptying his
pistol into his flesh, and actually him being still alive was nothing short of a miracle. If he thought he
was the only one with traumas, he was an idiot.

"But Nami –"

"– will make a perfect recovery," Law hurried to interrupt. "If you want to torture yourself because
of it, all right, I totally get it. But you have to give half of it to me."

Luffy heaved a heavy sigh, sinking to sit properly on Law's lap. "You're not fair at all, Traffy. I am
the cap-"

"And what am I?"

"... A captain," Luffy admitted. "But in a different –"

"We have an alliance. And as long as it lasts –"
"Huh?" Luffy interrupted. "You don't mean that we ever stop it, right? We're gonna get married."

Law smiled at it, he couldn't help it. Apparently the claim had stopped irritating him at all. "That remains to be seen. But even more of a reason – what kind of a man supposedly isn't protecting his husband's crew like his own?"

"... Yeah. All right. You can have that half."

They sat there in a thoughtful silence for a while, until Law broke it. "Are you feeling any better?"

"Naah, I don't know."

"By the way, I'd appreciate it if you stopped strangling me with my own hoodie..."

Luffy blinked owlishly, loosening his grip. "Oh. Sorry."

They really could use something to lighten the atmosphere. Law tormented his brain in order to come up with something uplifting, to make them stop thinking of things that had taken place earlier. He realized he had started caressing Luffy's thighs while thinking, just because they happened to be at hand so nicely; he was practically between them. He inched his hands into Luffy's shorts through his pant legs, sliding his fingers up along that warm skin.

Luffy moaned, pressing himself harder against the touch.

"It seems like you could use some doctor's attention," Law said, smirking.

"No way! I'm all right. Besides, Chopper already has stuff to do!"

Law wanted to smack himself, making a mental note to never try flirting again. He was insecure in it anyway, so his boyfriend not even recognizing his attempt was pretty discouraging.

"Why do you suddenly say – mmff!"

Law decided to cut Luffy's objections short in a best possible way, pulling him closer. He pressed their lips against each other, and having let out a little surprised noise Luffy parted his lips, kissing back with remarkable enthusiasm.

Luffy's hands soon found their way onto Law's shoulders, pressing him firmly into the couch; fingertips were digging into his muscles in a very rousing way while Luffy was wriggling on his lap, rocking his bottom on a strategic place. It felt like his blood was set on fire by the drowning, greedy kiss, and there was demanding tightening in his groin. As Luffy leaned on his shoulders even harder while moving, he started leaking pre-cum, feeling his underpants getting glued to the tip of his cock.

He hadn't expected that he had enough energy to get this hard and this quickly, but on the other hand, he also hadn't expected Luffy acting like this. He had to admit he really might have some fantasies about submitting.

He placed his hands onto Luffy's hips, pushing his fingers under the sash to stroke the smooth skin. Luffy detached himself from Law's lips, and he made use of the opportunity to speak. "Want to have some sex?"

Luffy nodded sharply. "Yup. Sometimes you're so stupid, Traffy."

Law snorted, but not because of irritation. It seemed like he developed tolerance to Luffy's blurts just as fast as to some regularly used sleeping pills, because he didn't soften even a bit even though being
called stupid should have been anything but a turn-on. "Admittedly the answer seemed pretty obvious, but I'm aware that body and mind don't always agree with each other."

"Oh? Do you want it, then?"

"Yeah." Law thrust his hips upwards, grinding his groin against Luffy.

Luffy's brows furrowed as he was looking at Law carefully. "You're not tired after all?"

"Not that tired." How the fuck he was supposed to rest with this hard-on? "But I wouldn't mind if you did most of the moving." He hated sounding so lazy and demanding, but Luffy seemed to have loads of extra energy, so he might not be offended.

Luffy didn't stop frowning.

"You don't need to," Law hurried to say.

"No, it's not that... You mean I don't need a doctor like you said earlier, after all?"

Law slammed his hand onto his face, sighing. Why on earth Luffy could remember some things for such a long time, while really essential things went over his ears right away? "When I said you need some doctor's attention, it was an innuendo. I might not be very smooth when it comes to them, but I assumed that you realized I happen to be a doctor."

"Ah!" Luffy's expression brightened as the realization hit him, then he started laughing so hard he needed to hold his sides. "That was a – go-good one... yeah, of course I wanna haha-have some attention from you," Luffy panted through his bout of laughter, shaking on Law's cock.

The movement in question might have been the only thing saving Law's erection. He sighed. "Indeed, I'm feeling so witty right now." Apparently his tolerance to Luffy-isms wasn't perfect yet, because even in this state he was capable of getting annoyed.

Luffy noticed the change of mood, finally stopping laughing. And commented on Law's grumpy face looking so awesomely bad, before pushing his hands under the hem of Law's hoodie without further ado.

"You're weird," Law said, opening Luffy's sash.

"So are you." Luffy pulled the hoodie off Law.

Perhaps both of them were weird, then, but they also were half-naked and horny, and nothing else mattered right now. Their bare upper bodies pressed together, their lips searching each other; Luffy was fingering Law's earrings as they were kissing, while Law was inching his hands into Luffy's shorts from the backside. Their pants really started getting in their way.

"Should I do that thing you did last time?" Luffy asked, grinding his hips forcefully against Law's. "That riding thing? That was so great."

Oh yes, yes, yes.

The mental image of Luffy riding his cock right here and now made Law's groin throb almost painfully. "There's no way I'm going to resist if you want to give it a try."

Luffy laughed briefly at it, moving a bit in order to get his hands to Law's pants.

"Could you please yank my luggage here?" Law pointed at the bundle on the other end of the couch,
holding his stuff. He didn't have strength to use his Power to move it, and he didn't want to move physically, either.

Having gotten Law's zipper opened, Luffy did like he was told; and soon Law was digging through his luggage, searching for lube. He happened to find a towel and decided to spread it onto the couch, because there were no sheets here, and Franky was going to kill them if they made a mess.

Thinking of Franky was not a good idea if you were about to have sex. Law quickly shook it out of his mind, squirming out of his jeans and sitting on the towel.

Luffy jumped onto his feet in order to get rid of his shorts, and Law got an opportunity to watch his stiff cock springing free from under the fabric. It seemed very delicious and he still hadn't gotten a chance to try tasting it, maybe now, he placed his hand onto Luffy's hipbone to keep him still –

To no avail, because Luffy pushed him against the backrest, just sitting astride him so that his shaft was snugly nestled between Luffy's buttocks. The sensation was so sudden, he couldn't help throwing his head backwards and grinding even harder against Luffy's ass. Luffy didn't help him to get a grip at all, attacking his neck and rocking his hips from side to side, clearly trying to drive him crazy.

The attempt almost succeeded, especially when Luffy rose a bit so that the tip of Law's cock was brushing against the entrance at times. It was so hot and so close, and – this really wasn't the way this worked.

"Wait, waitwait." Law grabbed Luffy's hips with both hands, stopping him. "You can't just sit on it just like that."

"Why? I'm sure I'm elastic enough, and I wanna know how it feels."

Well, at least Luffy wasn't even a bit nervous, that much was clear. Law liked it, he couldn't help smiling as he was waving the tube of lube in front of Luffy's nose. "And you would keep me from having fun with this? That's pretty mean of you."

"Oh, that! That was fun – you had really interesting looks." Luffy's smile seemed way too innocent in relation to their topic.

"Up onto your knees." Law couldn't help licking his lips as Luffy did like he was told, because Luffy looked really good like this; eager and excited, hard and waiting. He squeezed some gel onto his hand, tossing the tube aside and wrapping a steadying arm around Luffy's waist before bringing the other hand between his legs. "Is this all right?"

"It's cold..."

Law's answer was just a hum. Yes, it felt somewhat cool, and it was going to pass soon. He concentrated on feeling the warm, slick skin with his fingertips, enjoying the way Luffy inhaled sharply as he pressed the tip of his fore finger against the entrance, light and teasing, just massaging the outer rim, twitching under his touch.

"Try not to tense, and tell me if it's too weird," Law said before pressing the finger in.

Hot. Tight. Slick. He swallowed, trying to ignore his own cock getting even harder and leaking a bit more. Like he supposedly hadn't gotten laid in an eternity, it felt like he was going to die because of the fatal over-arousal-syndrome again.
Luffy let out a surprised noise, sounding like a squeaky toy when someone stepped on it, but didn't tense. It shouldn't have been a sexy sound, but Law's cock had apparently developed its own preferences.

"It's weird, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yup. Weirder than I expected." Luffy sounded out of breath. "But pretty nice."

Law was pretty sure that he could make it better very soon. He started using his other hand to fondle Luffy's cock while moving his finger in and out, and the noises escaping Luffy were more appreciative indeed. As Luffy tried pressing his ass against his hand in order to impale himself deeper, he added another finger.

Immediately he found out that Luffy had been right – the channel really was elastic like the whole of his body, effortlessly giving in under Law's fingertips, and reverting back right away like there hadn't been anything in there in the first place; and this was going to feel so good hugging his cock...

But that could wait for a moment still. Getting Luffy's muscles relaxed might be an unnecessary thing to do, but it didn't mean you couldn't drive him crazy by fingering him.

~*~

One of the first things that Luffy had found fascinating about Law had been his hands. He didn't usually pay much attention to that part of a body, but when it came to Law, he just couldn't help it. In the beginning he had thought it was just because of those tattoos, but that wasn't it, even though they were cool indeed.

When they had been on Sabaody, and Law had cut apart a whole bunch of Marines, mixing their body parts with each other, controlling the whole mess by his fingers... It had just seemed like those hands had a life of their own, like they were capable of anything, that was what it was. Luffy had gotten stuck staring at them, thinking, 'Wow', and then he had accidentally dropped several cannonballs, almost hitting Kid in the process; that had been amusing in itself.

Later, after Marineford, he had always started feeling sort of strange whenever it occurred to him that those hands had been touching him as Law had saved his life. Strange and hot.

He had been about to fall in love, despite not realizing it yet. And later he had found out that Law really knew how to use his hands, but he had never imagined they could drive him into this kind of state.

At first having something pushed into him had been weird. Weird in a kind of interesting way. The sensation had been more intense than he had been expecting, and soon he had come to the conclusion that this might turn out to be very fun.

Then Law had touched something in there, sending an almost paralyzing jolt of pleasure searing through him. He had never felt anything like that, he had almost cummed, shouting, and just as he had been about to recover from the surprise, Law did it again.

And again. Smirking in that wicked way of his.

That was how Luffy had ended up in this situation, where he was able to stay on his knees only because he was clinging to Law's shoulders. His thighs were trembling, his mouth was hanging open, and his groin was throbbing, and practically he was just a moaning, drooling mess trying to press himself harder against Law's fingers so that he could finally come all over his inked chest.
Law moved his hand further away according to Luffy's movements, so he never quite succeeded in his attempt.

New brush of fingers inside him made him jerk with pleasure that was rising and mounting in an intolerable way. It was terrible and awesome at the same time – it felt like he might die if something made him feel even a little bit better than this, but he didn't want it to stop, either.

"T-traffy –" He fell silent, not knowing what he was trying to say.

"Hmm?" Law grabbed Luffy's cock, fondling it a bit; at the same time his fingers stopped moving in him so that he once again couldn't climax. It felt good in a different way, but just as much. Somehow it was even worse, that variation was keeping his nerve endings in fire.

Luffy shook his head, frustrated as he couldn't find the words, and that was when he happened to see that tube. He stretched his hand to grab it – missing twice, it was hard to concentrate – and finally managed to open it, too.

Law's expression changed very drastically, when Luffy grabbed his shaft by his slick hand, starting to caress it. It was very clear that Law had managed to ignore himself by concentrating on Luffy so hard, but that self-control was shattered at the moment Luffy properly got his hands on him.

"Ah! Do you – want to try doing it now?" Law asked, trying to thrust better into Luffy's fist.

"Yeah." And it felt like Luffy had been wanting it for an eternity already, but he didn't want to waste time by saying anything else.

He moved a bit forward, Law's fingers slid out of him, and he missed them immediately; he felt so empty. But he settled in a right place, ignoring a warning to not hurry too much, and lowered himself, burying all of Law's cock into himself in one go.

It felt thicker than he had expected, and it felt more than he had expected. The surprising sensation dropped him into an orgasm right away, making even his soul tremble.

~*~

Law was biting his lip in order to prevent himself from cumming, when Luffy's walls were so suddenly tightly hugging his shaft. He had a sneaking suspicion that he was going to collapse pathetically after orgasming, and wouldn't have enough strength to gather himself again; not after a day like this, so holding back was a wise thing to do.

It was so very hard to not move, if you had just gotten in after a long time of waiting and teasing. Luffy was just as tight and pliant at the same time as he had been imagining, so fucking perfect, and he really wanted to move, to thrust, grind, lose himself, but he couldn't, not just yet.

Luffy had slumped to lean his forehead against his shoulder, gasping for breath like he was about to suffocate.

"Are you alive?" Law asked.

"Ju-just barely..."

Law was stroking Luffy's back, a bit slick with sweat. He tried to ignore the way he was feeling Luffy's breathing in his dick; he was softly tightening with each inhale, and relaxing as he let the air out again.
"I almost thought I'm gonna die, though," Luffy said, laughing tiredly.

That was easy to believe. Law didn't think that Luffy had ever had much patience while playing with himself; to try out what it felt like to make it last as long as possible, letting the pleasure mount so that you were constantly on the edge. He imagined that Luffy tended to jerk off quickly, and if it felt like it was over too soon, well, you could always do it again.

It was a very different thing. Law liked it both ways, but the prolonged version might be a bit surprising if you didn't see it coming.

"But did you like it?" he asked.

"Yup. So much." Luffy took a deep breath, pushing himself to sit up. "You're throbbing..."

Law made an affirmative noise, pressing their lips together in a long, slow kiss to give Luffy a bit more time to recover. He fully intended to make him come one more time.

Thus, in the middle of sensual dancing of their tongues, he started caressing and teasing every sensitive spot he had found in Luffy; he was stroking his neck and sides, pinching his nipples, following the ridge of the scar on Luffy's chest with his fingertips. When he got to the groin, he found Luffy's cock to be half-hard already, starting to encourage it into full hardness by rubbing and fondling it. He cupped his balls, kneading them gently, and Luffy twitched, forcing him to hiss.

Like they had some sort of unspoken agreement, Luffy started lifting his hips, feeling the movement. Law's muscles were twitching as he forced himself to stay still, despite that sweet pressure on his cock demanding him to thrust and let go.

He dared to move, as Luffy's hips started rocking more intently, starting to moan every time he lowered himself. He was holding Luffy's hips steadily, pressing his lips onto his neck, tasting the wild saltiness on his tongue, and feeling the racing pulse under his lips; and he started sucking on it just as hard as he pleased.

Nothing made much sense after that, there was only the need to get more, and then finally release. Luffy was pulling his hair, one hand on his nape, and he realized he needed to grab Luffy's cock and start pumping it, because he couldn't hold back more than a moment anymore.

Their panting and groaning was almost loud enough to cover the sound of damp skin slapping against damp skin at a quickening pace. Suddenly Luffy gripped Law's nape harder; he squealed, jerking violently in Luffy's hold, and coming deep into his ass as heady spurts.

His mind was spinning, as he slumped against the backrest, but he still tightened his hold of Luffy's shaft. Luffy soon tensed into his own orgasm, too, spurring his sticky load onto him; and suddenly he was grateful for having spread that towel onto the couch.

Luffy gave a deep sigh, collapsing onto Law.

There was a long silence. Law almost fell asleep, but reminded himself about cleaning themselves first. He couldn't sleep like this, sitting, naked, and covered in semen. No matter how tired he might be.

"Now you've tried it both ways," he said, in order to keep himself awake. "Topping and bottoming. Can you say you prefer one over the other?"

"Maybe." Luffy sounded absent-minded, drawing some ticklish patterns into the splatters of semen with his finger. "No, not really."
Law hummed questionably.

"I was about to say topping first, but this was really, really nice, too. You're great at this!"

Law gave a laugh. "It's more knowing anatomy and having read some dirty literature than actual experience, but it's all good if it works."

"Yup, works for me."

"That's good. And I'm glad – I enjoy both, too. By the way, are you still feeling restless?"

"Huh? No, sleepy now." Luffy pressed his head against Law's chest, going so limp that it was like he didn't have a single bone in his body.

At least the mission to spend some energy had been successful. Law sighed, bracing himself to force them move so that they could get some clothes on. It felt like a hopelessly exhausting task.

Perhaps he could use that nap after all.
On Call Duty

Chapter Notes

Last time I updated I said that I'm feeling better. I should never say stuff like that, it backfires - of course soon after that, I fell sick. It was bad. Like, Really Bad. Not to go into details, but it took months to regain even some semblance of health, and I'm still pretty weak.

Finally continuing the story, anyway! :) Thank you for all your comments and kudos. <3 I find it pretty embarrassing that it took me so long to answer them, but I just couldn't get to it before getting the update ready.

It was very dim, when Nami woke up, and she wasn't hurting much. It felt like her head was stuffed with some soft wool, so it took her a moment to remember why she found that fact so surprising, and why the bed was so uncomfortable. It clearly wasn't her own; it was harder, and the upper end of it was slightly elevated.

She was in the infirmary, and it was night. The curtain of the little window on the door was left open, letting in some light from the moon and the stars, but all of the lamps were off.

She closed her eyes, concentrating on her surroundings and how she was feeling. There was someone softly snoring nearby – she could tell it was Luffy.

Nami turned onto her side slowly, trying to see Luffy in dark. He had to be either lying on the floor or sprawling in Chopper's chair, but it took some time before the shades of grey she was seeing started making sense.

A long and narrow shape sticking from the chair wasn't Luffy's or anyone else's leg or arm, but Law's sword. And there was Law himself, too, sitting on the floor and leaning his back against the wall, holding something square and pale-colored on his lap – a pillow? Luffy's head was resting on it as he was lying on the floor.

She should have known that there was a doctor monitoring her round-the-clock for now, but she had been expecting Chopper, not Law.

And Law wasn't sleeping. Nami couldn't make out his eyes in dark, but she saw him raising his head slightly, reacting to her moving around.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, his tone quiet.

She had been bedridden for more than half a day already, and the most pressing sensation was her bladder being full. She had been told to stay in bed and not to get up, though, and she didn't know how strictly Law was taking that. Him helping her to use a bed-pan was something she really didn't wish for. The more she kept thinking about it, the more she really needed to go, though, so finally she didn't have a choice.

"I need to go to the toilet," she said.

Law nodded. "If you're capable of getting onto your feet on your own, you're well enough to do
Nami gave a sigh of relief, pushing herself to sit up. She had thought she was moving carefully, even using her hand as a support, but the room was still getting blurry in her eyes, feeling like it was spinning slowly. She had to lie down again, for there wasn't any strength left in her limbs.

"Raise your legs, if that's feasible," Law told her, sounding infuriatingly calm. "Nauseous?"

"Nope. I – I can get up, just wasn't expecting that..." The bed-pan was still haunting her thoughts as a very un-appealing alternative.

"It's the intravenous painkiller you're on. Many people experience dizziness as a side effect. Try again after a moment, slower."

She couldn't come up with anything witty to say, so she was just watching the ceiling and feeling how the room slowly stopped spinning. There was sounds of rustling fabric and some joints popping, telling that Law was moving on the other side of the room. Perhaps trying to get up without waking up Luffy, whose even breathing had continued peacefully all the time.

"I'm going to switch the reading light on," Law said.

Nami shut her eyes tightly, so that the sudden light wouldn't be too much of a shock. The switch clicked. Having taken a few breaths she slowly opened her eyes slightly.

Law was stretching his limbs – there were more cracking sounds from his joints – before coming to adjust the flow of the drip. The liquid was clear, obviously not blood. Realizing it was dripping into her vein was making her a bit queasy.

"Is that really necessary any more? I'm well enough to eat and drink."

"Until tomorrow, at least... Besides, now all the medicine you need can be administered intravenously, too, which makes it very effective."

_Doctors._ It felt like she was in professional care, any way, so she kept her mouth shut. For now.

Law rolled the IV pole within her reach. "Hold onto this, and get up very slowly. Keep your head lowered until the very end."

By following his advice Nami succeeded in sitting up. She was gathering her strenght on the edge of the bed, feeling the floor under her toes, preparing herself for standing up soon. The floor was cold and sanded very smooth by Franky; there was no way he would have left any splinters sticking out from any surface of his ship.

Law was standing near, not rushing or jeering at her, like... a good doctor, she had to give it to him. He also had considerably covered Luffy's face with his hat before switching the light on, and Luffy was still snoring away on the floor, all limbs spread.

The pole turned out to be a very necessary support, as Nami finally dared to trust her legs enough to lift her bottom from the edge of the bed. The room was spinning for a moment again, but stopped when she stayed still. Then she started shuffling towards the nearest toilet. Law following her in case of sudden bout of dizziness was both embarrassing and soothing, even though he chose to stay on the deck.

Relieving herself, and cleaning herself up a bit, improved Nami's mood considerably, even though she had to be very careful while bending over in order to wash her face. Straightening herself made
her dizzy again, but she started to get how she needed to move in order to avoid nasty surprises.

Robin had brought her a loose nightgown with buttons in front of it; it was a cozy thing to wear while being bedridden. Nami opened it so as to see her bandages, finding out there was less of them than she had been imagining. There wasn't any gauze wrapped around her chest or anything like that, only a big square bandage taped onto her skin, partly hiding under her left breast.

The bullet had really been close to her heart...

There was some blood oozing through the bandage, and she was itching under it. Maybe the thing should be changed? She didn't know, but she wanted to rub the material against her skin to get rid of the itch. That was probably a bad idea.

She buttoned the nightgown up again, and braided her hair, in order to make it a bit easier to control while being bedridden. Having done that, she was already feeling like she couldn't stand any longer. Getting back to bed was a relief.

Law asked some annoyingly specific questions, like whether she was out of breath because of exertion, or was she possibly experiencing pain in some specific part of her body while breathing. Her answers seemed to be satisfactory, because Law was nodding a bit while listening.

"You're recovering as expected, you should just get more rest," he said. "If that was all you needed, try to catch some sleep."

"Water." Nami had forgotten to sip some water, as she had been concentrating on other things. She wasn't thirsty, not exactly, so apparently the drip was keeping her hydrated, but her throat was a bit dry. Besides, she didn't want to go back to sleep yet.

Law silently brought her a small glass of water, leaving her to deal with the task of drinking on her own.

"Shouldn't you catch some sleep, too?" she asked, taking some careful sips. When she had woken up earlier, he had almost been too weak to stand, and monitoring some patient in the wee hours couldn't be good for him.

"That's something I should always do. It just happened that I took a pretty long nap earlier, so there's no way I'm going to fall asleep now. I might be on call as well, and let Chopper sleep."

"Do I really need to be constantly monitored? I'm not feeling that bad."

Law shrugged. "It's an order from your crew's own very professional doctor. I just happen to be substituting him right now."

"And what would have been your order?" She was curious, and her glass was still half full, so she apparently wasn't going to sleep too soon.

"Regarding that, the very same thing." He almost smiled as he admitted it. "I would have chosen a different brand of painkiller, though, but because Chopper knows you better, he's probably aware of what works for you."

"This is working, all right. I don't have a clue of what drug it is, though." She took a couple of deep breaths, only concentrating on how she was feeling. The wound was painful, but not any worse than a common stab wound. She really wasn't feeling like someone had done something to her ribs, not to mention opened her ribcage. "Was I really operated on? Doesn't feel like it."
"That's because I was using my Power." Law's smirk couldn't be described as nice, it was bitter and emphatic. "Creepy, isn't it?"

Nami suddenly remembered all of those times she had been calling Law creepy. It was pretty embarrassing, having her life saved namely in a creepy way – and it was creepy, no matter what. What other word could have been used to describe someone capable of cutting people open just like that, not even leaving a scar as an evidence that something had happened?

Luffy would probably say it's 'awesome'. Or 'cool'.

"Creepy things are creepy," she said. "I don't mean it's necessarily a bad thing, though."

"Hmm?"

"I mean, let's talk about Luffy, for example – he's an idiot, but that's not a bad thing necessarily, either. He just happens to be like that." She had to smile as she was looking at Luffy. At times he exhaled so strongly that a puff of air lifted the brim of his hat. He was lying spread eagle, succeeding in filling almost all of the available space on the floor of the smallish room. "There's no way that's comfortable. He's capable of sleeping through so unbelievable things that it blows my mind."

"You can say that again." Law sighed, but there still was a slight smile on his face. "I could probably step on him without waking him up. Sometimes I'm so envious, it almost makes me sick physically."

A confession like that was demanding Nami to glance at his face; dark shadows under his eyes were like bruises. Apparently Law was just as bad in sleeping as he seemed to be, and she was wondering whether she should say something, but couldn't come up with anything that wouldn't be lame and forced.

He interrupted her pondering very soon. "And I just happen to be creepy, is that it?" It seemed like he found the subject amusing in some twisted way.

"Yeah? Well, at least your Power is. I don't know how you would be without it."

"I would be dead," he said curtly.

Ouch. "Creepy is better than... that," she admitted. Deciding that they sorely needed a new topic. She sipped her water while thinking. "It's a good thing that you got him to calm down." She glanced at Luffy again. "He seemed to be a bit restless earlier..." That was putting it mildly. More like he was about to break a wall, just because he felt like breaking something. As if doing so had made any difference. Luffy was a bit simple when it came to lot of things.

"That's true. His condition was downright demanding doctor's attention." The corner of Law's mouth was curling upwards in a way that made Robin's tastes a bit more understandable to Nami. And Luffy's tastes, too.

"Sounds lewd," she said.

"That is exactly what it was."

Nami realized that during the last few days she really had gotten used to Luffy being in a relationship; but when she tried to picture him having sex, she found it difficult. It wasn't like Luffy wasn't good-looking in his boyish way, plus very passionate about many things; it was just the fact that before Law had happened Luffy's interest toward the subject had been so non-existent, Nami hadn't even cared if he happened to see her naked. What did it matter, because Luffy really didn't care.
Perhaps it really was some kind of a weird and deep instinct thing. And the right one.

Law was leaning his bottom against the desk, arms crossed, one of his foots twitching restlessly. He had rolled his sleeves up, making it kind of hard to not stare at the tattoos on his fore arms. She was still starting to feel like he wasn't the least bit as bad as he seemed to be. It didn't look like he was very fed up with their conversation at the moment, either.

She swallowed. It was now or never. "Who was topping?"

There was a heavy sigh, and it wasn't a surprise to see Law facepalming. "If I answer that question now, I don't want to return to the subject ever again; topic closed, period."

"Deal!"

"This time I was."

Nami opened her mouth in order to ask –

"I also want to say," he continued quickly, "that switching is not a rare thing to do in a homosexual relationship. Plus, penetration isn't the only way to have sex, for real. I'm not going into more details. Period."

Must be the first time I hear someone talking about sex in such a flat tone.

Anyway, she had heard what she had wanted to hear. It seemed like Luffy and Law were having... a good relationship, and it was soothing to find out that at least one of them was sensible, because she was well aware of Luffy being a total jerk at times, in addition to being inexperienced in this whole relationship thing.

"I don't need details," she said. But damn, she wouldn't have minded if Law had told more. "I find it most surprising that you answered at all."

"I appreciate a straightforward question over someone going behind my back, trying to pry into my life."

Nami pressed her lips tightly together in order to not make a face – Law had an impeccable ability to make others feel terrible if he wanted to, and she had gotten a taste of that talent a couple of times too many. Not without a reason, perhaps... but she still didn't like it.

"You probably like that about Luffy?" she asked. "Him being straightforward?"

"Isn't that true for all of us?" His gaze got much softer, as he looked down, where Luffy was, unbelievably enough, still sleeping like a log near his feet.

"Yes, you're right."

There was a short, surprisingly companionable silence. It was finally broken by Law. "And now you really should rest and try to catch some sleep. Before I'm forced to look for some sedative and knock you out. I do know that Chopper has quite a lovely stock."

"It's probably because some of us are hopelessly terrible patients," she said.

"Like Zoro?"

"He's the worst. You should see him arguing with Chopper every time he's wounded and takes the bandages off way too early, starting training."
"I may have heard some of Chopper's horror stories." The corner of Law's mouth was twitching. "Compared to that a navigator refusing to go back to sleep sounds like a minor thing, I admit that."

"Ah! Navigating! Where are we? Are we on the course? Who's taking care –"

"Calm down. We are steadily sailing towards Zou, Robin's taking care of the Log pose, and you can just concentrate on getting better as fast as possible."

Nami let out such a deep sigh that she could downright feel her shoulders relaxing and getting softer. It had been bothering her, even though she hadn't consciously remembered it before. Making sure that the ship was on the right course was her responsibility.

Perhaps she could get some sleep now. She placed the empty glass onto the shelf near the upper end of the bed, trying to get more comfortable without yanking the IV tube. As she was turning around, she happened to rub the itchy bandage; it was unexpectedly painful, like there was a nail stuck to her chest which was suddenly being twisted. She hissed.

"Where does it hurt?" Law asked.

"Just my wound. That's normal, right?"

"It really is. The painkiller is effective, but it's not like it's making you totally numb."

"Is blood seeping through the bandage a bad thing?" Nami remembered she had been meaning to ask.

"Not really, unless it's gushing like crazy. We used a lightweight gauze to let it air, and if the wound is still bleeding, it is going to seep through. It's meant to be changed pretty often."

"It's itching."

"Must be some dried blood. It can be changed if it's bothering you."

"That would be good. I don't think I can sleep otherwise."

Law gave a deep sigh, pushing himself off the desk and striding towards the door of the infirmary. For a moment Nami thought he was going to wash his hands, but startled as Law grabbed the handle of the door instead.

"Where exactly do you think you're going?" she asked.

"To fetch a doctor?" Law was looking at her like she was an idiot.

"Is this kind of a task too complicated for the renowned 'Surgeon of Death'?"

"Of course not. I just assumed you would be much more comfortable with Chopper doing it."

He had nailed it very accurately, and Nami wasn't exactly looking forward to the experience, but on the other hand he had been perfectly professional. "I really would prefer him, no offense, but I feel like there's no point in waking him up because of such a minor thing when you're already here. You're all right."

Having looked at her for a while Law turned his back to the door, crossing his arms. "Well then, I'm not going to pay for being forced to see your breasts."

She nodded. That rule was mostly for the perverts trying to catch an eyeful every time she was taking
a shower. Sanji and Brook, especially. She had collected nice pocket money that way, also making sure that those worshippers of feminine beauty always owed her something.

"And you still want me to change it?" he confirmed.

She nodded again.

"Fine." Law rolled his sleeves even higher above his elbows, starting meticulously scrubbing his hands. "Open your nightgown."

She reluctantly did like she was told, wondering what she had gotten herself into. But it would have been stupid to take her words back anymore. Besides – "Besides, you've probably seen them already, haven't you?"

"Your breasts? Yes, I have. Not seeing them would have been quite an impossible feat, considering the fact that I needed to push a considerable amount of fat tissue and mammary glands aside in order to properly treat the wound." Law had started searching for bandages and stuff for cleaning the wound, not even glancing at her while talking.

"You make it sound terrible."

"And you make it sound like you think it's an overwhelmingly arousing experience for me." He snorted. "Let me tell you, yours is not the first pair of breasts I've seen in my life, and it's not making me feel anything special."

She felt like she was some prepared specimen under a microscope, but pulled her fat tissue and mammary glands towards her shoulder like he told her to do, exposing the underside. Tearing the tape off felt nasty enough to make her forget her awkward situation. Law was muttering something about pus and leukocytes, and swiping the area with some substance, smarting like hell. Then he strode to wash his hands again and placed a new sterile bandage on top of the wound. His fingertips were cold.

"That's it," he declared, putting the equipment back to their place.

"Thanks." She buttoned the nightgown up. At least the itching had stopped.

Law sat down onto the floor again. Luffy finally became a bit more aware, enough to squirm onto Law's lap and wrap his arm around one of Law's thighs like it was a cuddly toy, before falling back to sleep.

"Geez," Law sighed. But he took off Luffy's hat, anyway, so as to bury his fingers into his hair.

"What are you going to do?" Nami asked. "With him, I mean?"

"That is about the most pressing question in my mind right now. As for you – sleep."

It sounded like a valid piece of advice. She closed her eyes, and soon there was a clicking sound telling that Law had turned the light off.

~*~

'What are you going to do? With him, I mean?'

Law was watching somewhere in the general direction of the bed in dark. Nami had gone quiet and still, probably sleeping already. Her question was restlessly turning around in his mind while his
fingers were grasping Luffy's hair.

What was he going to do? It would be for the best if he could make some decision before they were at Zou. He had time even after that, at least in theory; their alliance was meant to last until Kaidou was taken down, and he couldn't even start guessing how much time that was going to take. Now it seemed like they were going to stay together even after that, their relationship had started feeling pretty stable.

He was in love, really. But it still left some questions un-answered, the biggest one.

Yes? No? Did Luffy even want it anymore, having found out what a tightly wound tangle of problems Law actually was? Every sensible person would have thrown in the towel already, giving up and running away.

On the other hand, Luffy was never sensible...

Law still felt like he was balancing on his toes on an unsteady chair, a loose noose wrapped around his neck. And the thing he was the most scared of wasn't losing his balance, no, it was Luffy deciding to remove the noose after all.

Jumping felt like an insane option, too, but at least it would be a permanent solution.

What was he going to do?

The darkness was slowly waning, but Law wasn't becoming any wiser. Finally he couldn't find a tolerable position on the hard floor anymore, deciding that enough was enough. He wanted to shut his eyes for a moment before breakfast, meaning it was time to go and wake up Chopper.

He detached Luffy's hold of his thigh, inching away from under him. All of his limbs were aching after sitting in an uncomfortable position. Luffy still wasn't waking up, of course not; just smacking his lips like he was dreaming of eating, and pawing the floor in front of him, trying to find something to cuddle.

Law was about to step out, when Luffy suddenly startled and sat up. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"To sleep," Law said. "Let Chopper monitor her the rest of the night."

"Why didn't you wake me up?" Luffy sounded hurt.

"Because you seemed to be tired. Don't speak so loudly, we don't want to disturb the patient."

Luffy slammed his hand onto his mouth, looking at the bed. "How's she doing?"

"All right. She woke up once, we talked a bit, nothing un-expected."

Luffy gave a relieved laugh. "Good."

"Are you coming or not?" Law asked by the door. Luffy scrambled onto his feet, following him.

The sky was partly cloudy and slowly getting lighter, but some stars were still visible. It wasn't very
windy and they were sailing pretty slowly, something Law was happy about, because it meant more time for him to think.

They didn't talk on their way to the boys' quarters, where Law woke up Chopper by shaking him and giving him a summary of Nami's situation. Having sleepily blinked a few times Chopper nodded, hurrying to the infirmary.

"Let's sleep here," Luffy proposed.

This was the second time Law climbed to Luffy's bunk, and he couldn't help remembering what kind of thoughts and decisions had been tormenting him when he had done this for the first time. He had been trying to get a grip of himself in order to tell Luffy he was willing to try being together, and then second-guessed every single thing.

This time was so similar, it was almost like he had been thrown back in time.
I don't even know what to say about slow updates any more, but well, first life wasn't very kind to me, and after that the break had already been so long that it was really hard to break the block. But I have a new chapter now! Thank you for all of your lovely comments and kudos. :)

It was a cloudy and cool early evening; a perfect moment for fishing. Usopp was able to hold a fishing pole with both hands again, even though the right one was still bandaged and itching intolerably at times despite the soothing balm. Luffy was sitting next to him on the railing, radiating good mood, and Franky had joined them, too, testing his new Cola-powered fishing-pole-holder.

Everything was so peaceful and ordinary, it was difficult to understand their escape from Carata had happened just the day before yesterday. Now everything was right.

Nami wasn't bedridden anymore, she was lazing on a deck chair, the Log Pose firmly in her possession once again. Chopper and Sanji were dutifully hovering nearby, making sure she wasn't overexerting herself, and getting her everything she possibly needed. She didn't hesitate in taking an advantage of the situation fully and unscrupulously. She was in a pretty feisty mood, because of being wounded and 'being forced to wear ugly clothes', like that was supposed to be a big problem. The bullet wound apparently prevented her from wearing her favourite bikini top. Usopp tried to not think about it – when it came to Nami, you probably needed to pay for even imagining things.

Law was sitting on the bench circling the mast, reading, and at times exchanging some opinions with Robin, who was sitting by a folding table, also immersed in her book. They kept recommending books to each other, and even the names of the tomes were enough to make the brains of most bystanders explode because of overstraining. Like The Things We Know about the Void Century because of Traditional Acts of Healing, or From Amputations to Antibiotics: the Whole History of Medicine. For some reason Law seemed to find the latter particularly hilarious – the guy had one of the weirdest senses of humour ever.

Zoro was sleeping, and Brook was by the helm.

So blissfully ordinary. Usopp hoped there would be no more incidents before they reached Zou. There definitely had been enough of those already.

Right now the most exciting thing was waiting to see the bobber being pulled below the surface as a fish took the bait. And that was exciting enough for him. This was the New World after all; in other words, you never knew what kind of creature you might catch.

Usopp was imagining Sea Kings lurking below the surface so vividly he almost screamed in fright when something was finally tugging the line. But soon they found out that it was just a fish, about the length of his forearm, its shape very flat and high.

"Super looks like a pizza base," Franky said.

"Looks so tasty," Luffy said, almost drooling already.
"It is," said Sanji, who had hurried to them to see the catch. "That's a full moon fish. That's a
gourmet delicacy if it's fried in butter. Keep fishing! If there's one of them, there ought to be a whole
school."

"Are we gonna eat them today?" Luffy asked. Now he was drooling for real, like he could already
smell a crispy battered fillet as it was sizzling on a frying pan.

"Why not, if you can catch enough of them." Sanji shrugged, going back to Nami to ask whether she
wanted something to drink. Fawning and looking like a fool, as usual.

Right away Luffy decided to catch all of them. Usopp found himself claiming that he was going to
catch more than Luffy, for sure. This inspired Franky to declare how super magnificent his new
fishing-pole-holder was. There was no other way to solve the matter than the good old fishing
competition.

When it came to fishing competitions among this crew, not following any kind of rules was a
standard. It might be that Usopp indulged in exaggerating the number of fish he had caught a little
bit, and the others were quick to follow suit, so that no one's calculations could not be trusted any
more. At times there was a quarrel about who had caught the biggest fish so far, and hooks getting
stuck to their clothes plus Franky's ever-changing hairstyles – one of which made Luffy clap his
hands so wildly he almost fell into the sea – added to the general chaos.

Anyway, they had so much fun and they caught a lot of fish, so it was time well spent.

Franky's fishing-pole-holder was doing its job admirably well. In lieu of hands it had two clamps
holding the pole tightly, and pressing a button made it turn vertical, pulling the fish out of water.
Usopp and Luffy were both watching it, fascinated. Luffy declared it was one of the coolest things
ever, and you could almost see stars in his eyes as another fish resembling a pizza base was being
hauled over the railing, wiggling weakly.

And all of a sudden Luffy turned to look behind him, and there had to be a good reason for that,
because there was no way he would have taken his eyes off of such a fascinating sight otherwise.

"What is it?" Usopp asked. He hadn't heard anything demanding their attention, but noticing that
Luffy was looking towards the base of the mast was no surprise to him.

Law hadn't tried to get Luffy's attention in any way – not saying anything, waving his hand, nothing
at all. He was just sitting still, an opened book on his lap, watching the horizon and wearing an
expression you could call downright dreamy.

"Luffy?" Usopp tried again, as Luffy had been watching his boyfriend watching the horizon for
almost a minute, just as still and not even blinking.

No reaction at all.

"All right, let's say I'm the winner, then," Usopp said.

"Huh? No way, it's gonna be me!" Luffy finally took notice that there had been something tugging at
his fishing pole for a while, and dragged one pizza base more onto the deck.

Usopp and Franky glanced at each other, as Luffy was detaching his catch from the hook, but they
didn't say anything. It was just that seeing Luffy reacting to someone with the same ardent
fascination as he reacted to meat cooking in the oven was just a little bit weird.

They went on with the fishing. Full moon fish seemed to swim in really massive schools, because
they had already caught dozens of them, and there seemed to be no end for them. Perhaps they should put some into the fish tank to wait for their turn, despite Luffy's appetite.

"How about we start putting them into the tank?" Usopp asked, turning to look at Franky. At the same time he noticed that Luffy had gotten absorbed in watching Law, again, this time frowning in a very un-Luffy-like way. Usopp waved his hand in front of his eyes.

Luffy blinked. "Oh. It's just, like, he's thinking really hard."

"Isn't that always the case?" There wasn't anything new in Luffy's claim, some people just seemed to be thinking of something all the time. Usopp was putting a new bait to his hook, as his brain suddenly did a double take and realized how matter-of-fact Luffy's tone had been. "How do you know that?"

Luffy shrugged. "I just do. Feel it."

Their fishing went on, in a somewhat uneasy silence; all of them were thinking something else than competing and joking around. Only a few minutes had passed, when Luffy suddenly turned around again, huffing as he put his pole aside. "You can win, I don't care anymore," he said, before marching to Law.

"Eh," Usopp said. Luffy giving up wasn't something you see every day. In fact, it wasn't something you see at all, ever.

"Was that a Haki thing?" Franky asked.

"Might be? I don't know."

"You're learning it too, aren't you?"

Usopp nodded. He had brought it up with Luffy yesterday, as some semblance of normalcy had finally been back aboard the ship. In the same way as always, Luffy had been overjoyed and proud, as one of his crewmates had learnt a new skill and gotten stronger, and he had no doubts about Usopp managing to master the skill over time. Usopp had to manage, because Luffy believed in him. Just like that Luffy was driving all of them to improve their skills over and over again, without even realizing he was doing it. He just believed in them, and there was no way any of them could stand even a thought of letting him down.

I wonder whether Law feels like that, too?

He didn't have time to think about it more, because a sudden whistle by Franky had him turning towards the mast, too, even though he was a little scared of what he might see there.

Luffy was doing his best so kiss Law into the mast, and he seemed to be quite successful. He was bending down towards Law, who was leaning against the mast, his hands on Law's shoulders, and one of his legs was lifted –

Usopp was staring. Luffy's leg was not between Law's legs so that his knee was pressing against Law's privates, right? He really didn't need to see this!

"Super passionate," Franky commented.

"Is that person over there really our captain?" It was a bit difficult to associate this kind of Luffy to that Luffy, who after spotting some scantily clad carnival girls was just wondering if they were cold, and then wanted to know what kind of food was being served at the carnival.
Franky considered the question carefully, keeping his eyes on the couple all the time. Law had wrapped his arms around Luffy's nape like trying to prevent him from pulling away.

"Yup, I'd say I'm super sure that's our captain," Franky said. "At least, I'm seeing someone who does whatever he feels like doing without thinking what other people might think of it, going all out while doing it; someone with a weird taste and not a tad of discretion –"

"You're right. Definitely Luffy." It hadn't occurred to Usopp before, but when he gave it some thought, he realized that Luffy was still Luffy despite the unfamiliar situation. There was something very soothing in that thought.

~*~

Law hadn't made much progress with his reading, because he lost himself in pondering what to do all the time. There were things he should make clear, and he didn't know how to bring them up. He was watching at the sea without actually seeing it at all, until his scenery was suddenly covered by something, making him blink.

"You're thinking too much," Luffy said.

"That shouldn't be news for anyone, Straw Hat." And the most frustrating thing was that he apparently just wasn't able to reach a conclusion, despite all the thinking he had been doing. Perhaps it was time to do something else for a while. He closed his book, putting it onto the bench next to him before leaning his back more comfortably against the mast and looking at Luffy, smirking. "What are you going to do about it?"

Luffy answered by placing his hands onto Law's shoulders and, using them as support, bending closer, until the brim of his straw hat completely covered the scenery Law had been watching; until there was nothing else to be seen than Luffy's eyes... until Law had to close his own eyes, concentrating on the kiss.

Law's thoughts were rushing downwards into his groin, as his back was delightfully pressed against the mast. The position wasn't the most comfortable for Luffy, and he did move like he was about to settle onto Law's lap. Law was quick to spread his legs, because Luffy accidentally flattening something important by crashing onto his lap while his legs were crossed wasn't something he particularly wished for.

But Luffy didn't crash, instead placing one of his legs between Law's, like that had been his intention all the time. And used his knee to nudge Law's crotch gently.

A pleasurable shiver run through Law like an electric shock, and he couldn't help moving so as to seek more of that contact. His arms wrapped around Luffy's nape to keep him from pulling away. Their dry humping session which had started with so much promise was cut regrettably short, though, by a wet and quite repulsive smacking sound.

Luffy disengaged quickly, turning around and leaving Law to wonder what was going on. The pieces soon fell together, as Luffy was brandishing a fish he was holding by its tail, and shouting at Sanji, "Oi, if you wanna throw some fish at us, you could grill them first!"

"I kicked it, that's not throwing!" Sanji answered. True enough, the cook's hands were in the pockets of his pinstripe vest, like proving that he hadn't used them for a while.

"Well kick grilled fish, then! I can't even eat this one yet – or I could, but I guess Traffy doesn't let me to –"
"Feel free." Law rolled his eyes, trying to not look at the fish, still twitching weakly in Luffy's hold. "But there will be no kissing for a long time if you go and eat it raw."

"Naaaaa... but Traffy, you like fish, too –"

"Very much, if it's cooked."

"Sanjiii! Why are you kicking fish if they're not snacks for us?" Luffy asked.

"I wouldn't have needed to, if some shitty bastards hadn't been groping each other on the deck!" Sanji shouted.

"Groping is not the right word for what it was," Law said.

"I don't care! There are delicate flowers nearby, they don't need to see such obscen-"

Sanji was interrupted by Nami, surly accusing Sanji of spoiling her entertainment.

Law didn't feel like being anyone's entertainment, so he dragged Luffy to the infirmary, which was his to use again as Nami had recovered so well. He closed the door after them.

Luffy blinked in that way that always made Law think of owls, until noticing that the two of them were alone. "Ah." A huge smile split Luffy's face.

Law dodged, as Luffy tried to touch him with his fishy hands. He ushered Luffy to wash his hands while he himself made sure the doors were securely locked, and closed the curtains, too.

Luffy was so concentrated on scrubbing his hands he didn't even twitch as Law snatched his hat, putting it onto the table. Then Law was able to dig his fingers into Luffy's hair and lean down, pressing kisses onto his nape. Luffy was just leaning towards Law, until deciding that his hands probably were clean enough already, drying them with the closest cloth within reach, which happened to be Law's hoodie – and Law didn't even find this annoying, because he was about to strip off as quickly as possible, anyway.

They were stumbling towards the bed, lips glued together, until Law's legs made contact with the edge of the bed, and he sat down with Luffy on his lap.

Having finally pulled away in order to take some proper breaths, Luffy looked curiously at Law for a long time. "What is it?"

"What?" Law frowned, staring at Luffy; his hands had been inching into Luffy's open shirt in order to slide it off Luffy's shoulders, but they paused now, momentarily forgotten.

"Something's bothering you."

"Is it a sign of something bothering me, if I want to take my boyfriend to bed? You started this."

"No! You're so stupid sometimes."

Law shut his eyes, giving a deep sigh. Sometimes he really had to wonder what he was seeing in Luffy, and this blurt was about as arousing as barrelful of icecubes being poured on him. Or raw fish.

And still, he couldn't help thinking –

"That's what I mean!" Luffy said, pressing the tip of his nose against Law's. "There's something bothering you."
"Besides, he's right."

"You were thinking something really hard earlier," Luffy went on. "And then I came to ask what it was, but somehow we ended up kissing."

Law wanted to say there was nothing bothering him. But that would have been lying, and he wasn't very good in it. Furthermore, Luffy already was aware of something bothering him. He just didn't feel like telling what it was, not yet, at least. He wanted to finish thinking first.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said.

"All right. What do you wanna do, then?"

It took a moment for Law to recover from realizing that Luffy wasn't trying to pressure him by asking more. Sometimes understanding what it was that he was seeing in Luffy was really easy. And well, if he was asked about it, there really was something in his mind; something he had wanted to try for a while already. "Do you want to see?"

Luffy nodded eagerly. So, they stopped talking nonsense, concentrating on taking their clothes off and touching and kissing each other everywhere they could get their hands and lips to instead.

Law guided Luffy on his back onto the bed, and couldn't help grinding their cocks together as his tongue was slithering between Luffy's parted lips. The contact was so light it was frustrating, but it was enough to feel how hard the other one already was, anyway. Luffy's hands were sliding in Law's hair and nape, and just wrapping his fingers around their stiff lengths and thrusting together would have been a bliss, but he reminded himself about that other thing he had been thinking.

He went on to give some attention to Luffy's neck, pressing small kisses on it, tickling it with the tip of his tongue, and surprised Luffy by sucking hard the side of it. Luffy's hips jerked violently against Law's, both of them groaning.

"Traffy –"

All right, Law shouldn't lose himself in lingering for a too long time, especially as teasing wasn't even his intention this time. Luffy didn't even know what was about to come, and hadn't asked, either; just throwing himself in it eagerly, trusting it was going to be good. That realization was making Law dizzy.

He slithered lower, swirling his tongue around one of Luffy's nipples. It felt fun as it pebbled under his ministrations, so he gave similar treatment to the other one, too, before finding himself studying the scar on Luffy's chest.

That scar meant so many things. He had saved Luffy's life, even though he hadn't known why – he just couldn't have not done it. And he still wasn't quite sure of what to do with Luffy, but apparently he just couldn't not do it anyway. He did remember how it had felt, pushing his hands into Luffy's gaping chest cavity and holding his stubbornly beating heart on his hands, hoping with all of his being that it wouldn't stop.

"What is it?" Luffy asked, petting his head.

Law startled, noticing that in his deep thoughts he had pressed his cheek against the scar, stopping there for who knows how long a time. Just listening to the excited beating under Luffy's skin and sternum. He didn't feel like even trying to find the right words to describe his feelings, so he hurried to continue with his mission, moving downwards along Luffy's wiry body, pressing some kisses onto his stomach in the process.
He prodded Luffy's legs in order to fit nicely between them, and Luffy readily parted them for him, propping himself up onto by elbows so that he could watch Law.

Small kisses onto Luffy's inner thighs had him breathing harsher, thrusting his groin towards Law in a hopeful way. Law took his time with the thighs, slowly moving towards the groin, but also wrapping his fingers around the erect shaft, fingerling its hot, velvety skin.

It was a lovely cock indeed, and the more Law got familiar with it, the more he found himself liking it. It looked good, felt good in his hands, felt good pressed against his own cock, felt good inside of him. Desire was clawing the pit of his stomach, as he imagined how fun climbing astride Luffy and impaling himself with it would be.

Maybe later. But right now it was about time to find out how it tasted.

Law gave the shaft a careful lick. It wasn't disgusting, it felt pretty much the same under his tongue as any skin. The lick also made Luffy utter a little surprised gasp, so Law did it again, slowly moving towards the tip.

The glans, no longer hiding under the foreskin, was different. Slick, tasting like salt and musk. It had his own groin tightening as effectively as the noises escaping Luffy, and he tried to take the whole tip properly into his mouth.

Luffy's hips twitched. Not much. Enough to make Law picture the cock thrusting deep into his throat, at the same time unnerving and arousing. He really wasn't about to test that at the first time he was doing this, perhaps not at the second, either. Maybe never. He wasn't coping well with situations that made him feel like he was suffocating.

Like drowning, or a Devil's Fruit being pushed into his mouth by force.

*Don't think of it now.*

Luffy was stroking his head. "Traffy? You don't need –"

"I want to." Law remembered them having a similar exchange of words once in the shower, right before Luffy had sucked his brain out through his cock for the first time. There was symmetry appealing to him there. "I just... Just try to be still, okay?"

"Yeah."

Law wrapped one of his hands around the base of Luffy's cock, fondling it as he let the glans slide between his lips again. Better. He was able to really concentrate on what he was doing, caressing with his tongue, sucking on the tip, taking as much of the cock into his mouth as he easily could and not a millimeter more.

Staying still certainly couldn't be easy for Luffy, but he dug his fingers into the blanket and did like he was told to. He didn't seem inclined to complain about his situation, either. "Tra-af! That's – huh – really –"

Breathless, broken sentences didn't make any sense to Law, but their basic point was clear to him all the same. He started to get seriously turned on himself, too, listening to that and feeling the muscles of Luffy's thighs flexing against his shoulders as Luffy tried to not move.

Law was nodding his head more boldly, now. The cock in his mouth was twitching with little contractions of muscles, and it was so hard and hot, ready to explode. His own was craving for touch so badly it hurt.
He jumped by surprise, as suddenly there was a hand wrapping around it. A second of confusion was followed by realization – to hell with the laws of anatomy and the reach of a human body; of course Luffy could reach him in this position, too.

"Oh, sorry." Luffy sounded remorseful. "Should've warned you, right?"

"I'd appreciate it next time," Law admitted. "But it feels good. Don't stop."

"Mm."

The fingers wrapped themselves more securely around his length, so that he could thrust into the fist as he went back to sucking Luffy's cock with even more enthusiasm. Luffy's fingers kept moving, and the grip got tighter at the same time as his sucking intensified; just losing himself into Luffy's taste and moans and the quickening jerking of his own hips against warm fingers was so easy. It wasn't long before he had found a good rhythm that had them both coming quickly.

Law's bones felt like jelly, as he crawled towards the head end of the bed, slumping next to Luffy with his head onto Luffy's chest. His mouth was tasting like semen, and the heart under his cheek was beating strong and soothing.

"I had been wanting to try that for a while," he said.

Luffy hummed, blissful, pulling him tighter against himself. They were lying there, silent. And Law was thinking.

~*~

After the dinner Luffy was sitting on the figure head with Law. They were leaning against each other's backs, and Luffy felt the weight of Law's thoughts like air itself had been more dense. His stomach wasn't hurting, so he guessed nothing was actually wrong, but this had been going on for days already.

He was wondering whether he should ask about it, but Law had already told him he didn't want to talk about it. Perhaps Luffy wouldn't ask. Law would talk if he wanted to.

"Nami said we might be there the day after tomorrow," Luffy said.

"Hmm," Law said, and his thoughts did a restless turn, like some small whirls of wind in the air.

Never before had Luffy been so aware of someone. It wasn't disturbing at all, instead it felt very right. As he imagined not feeling Law's presence anywhere near him, he started feeling cold and lonely.

"She showed me a map she's been drawing," he continued. "It's very pretty. All of her maps are pretty." He might not know how to read them, but it wasn't like he didn't see that.

"They are. I've seen them, too." It sounded like Law had other things in his mind.

Luffy tilted his head backwards, so that it rested on Law's shoulder, and he could watch the sky. It was darkening, there were some stars to be seen already. He tried to understand why it felt like Law was sinking even deeper into his thoughts as they got closer to Zou. He should have been happy about seeing his crew after a long separation.

"Are you thinking of what your crew's gonna say?" he asked.
Law took a moment to think. "About what?"

"I don't know." He hadn't expected to think of this so deeply. But why not? The figure head was the best place for deep thinking, if you absolutely had to do such a thing. "Just thinking." It felt like Law was waiting for him to continue. He was watching stars, tormenting his brain as hard as he could. "'Cause you didn't wanna tell them that we're together."

Law shook his head, his hair tickling Luffy's temple. "No. In the beginning... I admit that at that time I was reluctant to tell them, because I didn't actually believe this is going to work."

"You didn't trust me?"

"Myself. I'm not good with relationships, Luffy."

"I don't get how and why you could and should be 'better' at something like that," Luffy said. "You're like that. I like it."

He heard Law taking a slow, shuddering breath. Then there was a silence.

"Traffy?" he asked, as the silence started to get awkward. Maybe he had said something wrong.

"What?"

"Did that come out wrong? You sounded like –"

"No, that wasn't it," Law interrupted, relaxing to lean a bit more heavily against Luffy's back. Luffy felt something nudging at his hip. It was Law's hand, and he took it immediately, interlacing their fingers.

Law sighed, and after a short silence spoke. "Has anyone ever told you something that was so right that hearing it kind of hurts?"

"Yeah, of course. Sometimes."

"Well, you just succeeded a moment ago."

"Oh." Luffy recalled what exactly he had said, so that he could say it again some time. "Was it that thing about me liking you just as you are?"

"Yes, it was."

"Why on earth I wouldn't? You're so weird."

Law gave a laugh. "There's one possible reason already: I am weird. And difficult as hell most of the time."

"Nah, you're just thinking too much."

"That is one way to be difficult."

"Maybe," Luffy admitted. "But aren't you forgetting something?"

"What?"

"I'm the man who's gonna be the Pirate king." Luffy just had to smile so wide that the corners of his
mouth reached his ears, as he said it.

Law laughed. It was short, but it was a genuine laugh, not a single snort of laughter that usually was his way of expressing amusement. That wasn't something you heard every day. Luffy loved the sound.

"I see what you mean," Law said.

"Good."

It was so nice, watching the sea darkening as the night fell, and feeling Law's back evenly rising and falling behind Luffy's. So peaceful. Law seemed to be more relaxed than he had been for a while, slowly stroking his hand with his thumb.

"Because I'm weird, I like some weird things, too," Law said after a while. "Like you."

"I'm weird, then?"

"The weirdest."

"All right."

"That is what I was thinking as early as on Sabaody," Law said. "At least I was thinking that you have one of the weirdest Devil's Fruit Powers I've ever seen."

"Oh?"

"Indeed." Law tugged at one of Luffy's fingers, stretching it. "Do you really not feel even slightest pain when I do this?"

"Nope. It's feels pretty nice." Luffy had never known how to describe the feeling, but it was perfectly natural. "But I don't like it when someone lets go too suddenly. It's like... a rubber band snapping at your fingers."

Law gently let the finger shorten to its usual length. "I fail to understand how your bones and joints are doing that thing."

"They just do. Do you get how your own Fruit works?"

"Hell no." There was a sour snort of laughter by Law. "I do know quite a bit about how to use it and what to do in order for it to work, but whenever I try to think deeper about why it actually works... I don't know. My brain starts cramping."

"Yup. So why try thinking of it?"

Law didn't answer, just giving a deep sigh and sinking into heavier silence for some time. The ship was rocking on smallish waves as they were sailing towards Zou and Law's crew.

"I really wanted to surprise them," Law suddenly said.

"Huh?"

"My crew. Even after I had started to get a feeling this is going to work, I didn't want to tell them, because I really want to see their faces."

"Yeah. I wanna see them too. And we will."
"Soon."

Law seemed more restless again, his hand moving about restlessly in Luffy's. "It's making you feel something other than happiness, too," Luffy said.

Law sighed very heavily. "They are going to be mad as hell at me."

"Why's that? 'Cause we're together?"

"No, of course not because of that."

"Why, then?"

Luffy started to think that Law wasn't going to answer at all. Finally there was one more endlessly deep sigh, after which Law started speaking, reluctant. "They didn't want to stay on Zou, waiting for me, you know. But I ordered them to do it anyway, because I didn't want anyone..." Law swallowed. "I knew where I was going, so I –"

Luffy waited, but there was no continuation. Sitting back by back wasn't enough, so he turned around, attaching himself properly to Law's back and pulling him into a tight hug. "You tried to protect them, right?" Because Law had assumed he was going to end up fighting Doflamingo, and that guy had been really strong. The two of them had had their hands full with him – wanting to keep the weaker out of the way wasn't a wrong thing to do.

"That too, of course. But in addition to that... I didn't want anyone –"

Law went silent again. Luffy's stomach started aching as an echo of his tightly wound self-loathing. "It's all right," Luffy said, rubbing his cheek against Law's shoulder. "All right if you wanna tell. Or if you don't."

~*~

Law was sitting on the figure head in Luffy's embrace, trying to decide what to do. To talk or not to talk. Just leaving would have been a tempting solution too, being so easy, but on the other hand he had plans and such a stunt would ruin the atmosphere pretty thoroughly.

If I really am going to –

He hadn't even finished thinking of it, yet. He had other things to think first.

He appreciated Luffy not demanding any answers, but it was making holding his tongue more difficult. It gave him some space to realize that perhaps he actually wanted to let out those terrible words going around inside his head. There was some odd sort of satisfaction in bursting some festering abscess, too, and it often made you feel better. At least, when it was done, you knew it couldn't burst by itself later, spreading pus all around.

He assumed that his crew might express their displeasure so loudly that Luffy couldn't miss hearing their arguments anyway, so.

"When I left them there and departed, I was ready to die."

Luffy hummed, questioning. "So what? You can't go into any fight if you aren't."

Law didn't know what to say, it was so true and still so misunderstood at the same time. "Well, that's true," he said blandly.
"But that wasn't what you meant," Luffy realized.

"No, it wasn't. Or I did, but it was put pretty mildly."

"You mean you wanted it?"

"I guess. At least I wouldn't have minded." Why was he trying to sugarcoat his words? It wasn't his style at all, he was more inclined to be rudely honest. Get a grip, Law. "Yes, and I didn't want them trying to stop me from going through with my plan. So I didn't even give them a chance."

The silence was painful, but at least Luffy wasn't releasing Law from his hug.

"Yup. They're gonna be really mad for sure," Luffy stated, having thought about it for a bit. "I'd be, at least, if I was in your crew, and you left us waiting for you and just went to die. I was so angry when Ro-" Luffy cut himself short, falling silent for a while. "My crew was really mad when I went to Marineford without them, too."

That was something Law had no trouble imagining, and he nodded.

"Of course they knew I didn't have time to find them. And why I had to go. But when we met again, everyone still screamed at me because of it, and Nami hit me across my face by her Climatact. I didn't even know there can be so much blood coming out of your nose. Then Chopper started shouting at both of us –"

Law shuddered, imagining it.

"You know why?" Luffy asked.

He thought he did know, but he didn't want to speak, interrupting Luffy's fascinating story. So he shook his head.

"'Cause they care. And friends like that don't wanna be left behind, waiting."

"Yeah," Law said, quietly.

"It's gonna be all right. I'm sure they're gonna be so happy to see you, they can't stay mad for a long time."

"I really hope so."

"And then we're gonna throw a party."

Law smiled. Of course Luffy was thinking of the party already. He wasn't so thrilled about it, but there really were reasons to party, and he could handle it if he was prepared for it.

"I'm happy I didn't die," he said.

"Yeah, me too."

He didn't know if Luffy meant he was happy about Law not dying, or if he was speaking about himself. Both alternatives surely were correct, but Luffy could have meant any of them firstly. "Have you ever wanted it? To die?" The idea felt absurd, but on the other hand Law did remember what he had seen.

Luffy was silent.
Law was wriggling in the embrace a bit, until Luffy's hold loosened enough for him to turn around and face Luffy. They were looking each other in the eye. He just had to touch, running his fingers on Luffy's cheek, he seemed so uncharacterically serious. His skin was warm in cooling night.

"Maybe," Luffy said. "I'm not quite sure."

Law's fingers were tracing Luffy's cheekbone towards his ear, then tangling themselves into the hair at his nape.

"But as everything went black, there, I guess I hoped I'm never gonna wake up again."

It was easy to believe, but hearing Luffy confessing something like that, having even a small break in his endless hunger for life after a traumatic experience, still felt so wrong.

"But you did wake up," Law said.

"Yup." Luffy's smile was unfamiliar, hinting something. "I woke up and you had stolen my heart, holding it on your hand."

"Sounds pretty romantic to me."

"Maybe it was? At least it was so cool."

Law gave a laugh. "You really are the weirdest. But I wasn't trying to steal it."

*Not at that time. But I do want it now. Give it to me, please?*

"Yeah, I know. You still did."

This felt like a good moment to say what Law had been intending to say. Suddenly his throat was so dry that speaking felt like an impossible feat.

"I wanted to wake up after that," Luffy said.

This was a comfortable atmosphere, not too heavy anymore, and it was even romantic in some weird way. Law shouldn't waste it. He needed to say –

"I wanted to tell you –" Luffy's sentence was interrupted by him having a sudden realization, and right away he was poking at the tip of Law's nose with his finger tip. "Hey! I'm mad at you! I had forgotten all about it, but it just came back."

*Great.*

"What have I done?" Law asked. There probably was an awful lot of perfectly valid and rational reasons for being mad at him, but he didn't have any idea of what Luffy was talking about now.

"You scrammed! That time on Amazon Lily! I wanted to say thanks for saving my life and... and spend some time with you. I was so curious. But when I came to, and could've done it – you had left already! I don't even remember what your sub looks like, as I was asleep all the time!"

"You're going to see it in a couple of days," Law said.

"I know! Still."

"... Yeah." Law didn't know how to explain why scrambling had felt like the best idea. He didn't think that he was cheery company for anyone who was in such a vulnerable state of mind, plus he
didn't want to deal with his patients' feelings. He was a surgeon, not a psychiatrist. Even more he had been terrified of his own thoughts and of his never-ending pondering of why the hell he had gone and saved Monkey D. Luffy's life; after all there wasn't any sense in such an action.

At that time he hadn't known that scramming wasn't going to make those thoughts disappear from his mind.

"Jinbei and Rayleigh were there, so it felt like it was safe to leave," he said.

"Yeah, they're awesome, but I didn't want you to leave either!"

"... I'm sorry. I had way too many problems at that time, too."

Luffy was looking him in the eye for a moment, then a smile spread onto his lips. "All right then."

"All right?" Law repeated. "Does that mean that you've forgiven me?"

"Yup!"

The moment felt right for a kiss. Before their conversation had a chance to run away in an even more absurd direction, and because Law just wanted to do it. It was an unhurried 'it's-so-good-that-you-happen-to-be-there' kiss, during which their hands were wandering, confirming each other's contours. Law's fingers stayed on Luffy's chest for a long time, both on the scar and on the heart. In his mind he was already searching for right words.

Luffy was smiling softly against his lips, before touching his own chest, too. "Did you leave the scar, at that time?"

"No!" Law was looking at the large expanse of scar tissue, slightly horrified by even the idea of leaving marks like that. Or because someone could even think of that. "That wound was the reason for you ending up onto my operating table. I did utilize my Power for healing it as well as I could... and that didn't leave any scars."

He hadn't expected his answer making Luffy pout. "Bah," Luffy said, lips puckering in an absurdly cute way.

"What?"

"It would've been nice. You leaving a permanent mark on me."

Law's chest was tightening as his heart was swelling because of feelings. Some day he was going to die because of feeling like this, of that he was sure. "And people keep implying that I am the creepy one," he said. "But that's actually pretty romantic."

Luffy snickered, taking one of Law's hands between his own and tracing the tattoo on the back of Law's hand. "Your ink is so cool. I wanna have some marks, too."

"There's plenty of scars on you; no need to start gathering more on purpose."

Luffy hummed as he caressed his way onto the tattoo on Law's forearm.

"Like this one," Law said, inching his hand under Luffy's shirt and following a semi circle shaped scar marking his shoulder; imprints of saw-like teeth like pearls in a necklace. "Were you bitten by a shark?"

"No, that was a fish man. One guy named Hody."
Law had seen what kind of teeth some fish men had, and didn't doubt the story. He traced the recent scar by his finger tips, thoughtful. "I assume you came out victorious?"

"Of course!" Luffy grinned.

Law found himself watching a small crescent scar under Luffy's left eye. It seemed like it was smiling at him, he had been wanting to ask about it for a long time. "Or this one..." He caressed it by his finger tips. "Where did this come from? It's old."

"Oh, that? That I did myself. As a kid."

Law could only stare, his finger tips frozen on the crescent mark.

"I was always trying to get Shanks to take me to the sea, but he never did," Luffy explained. "I thought he's gonna agree when he sees I'm really tough."

"And so you stabbed youself by... a dagger?" Law took a guess after inspecting the scar more.

"Some kinda knife-like thing it was, yeah."

"Well, you're lucky you didn't take your eye out." Someone had closed the wound by two stitches at that time, big and not very neat stitches.

Since their first meeting – hell, since he had read the news about the Enies Lobby incident – Law had known that Luffy was crazy, but he had never thought it went as deep as this. Words kept twirling on the tip of his tongue ready to fall out, words like 'You're a nutcase' and 'Do you even get what could have blah blah blah'.

But, considering what he himself had been up to when he had been about ten years old, he really didn't have any right to say anything. Things like marching into Doflamingo's hiding place, enough explosives on his person to make a couple of islands vanish, demanding to enlist. Stabbing yourself to seem tough in order to be admitted into a crew was still a pretty tame strategy, and Luffy might very well be crazy, but Law still was much worse.

"Traffy?" Luffy asked.

Law took Luffy's hands between his own, holding them tightly. Now. He had suddenly been reminded of what it was like; wanting something so much you were ready to do desperate things in order for it to happen, whether it was sensible of not. Sometimes you just had to act, not plan acting.

He might feel like he didn't have right to say this, but he was going to say it, nevertheless.

Now.

"Luffy... Would you do it for real? If I said 'Yes'?"

His answer was a pair of eyes blinking owlishly, telling him that his change of topic had been way too incomprehensible.

"Would you marry me?" he clarified.

"Yeah, of course," Luffy answered immediately. "How so?"

"Let's," Law said, before he had time to think of it even more.

Luffy was staring at him, speechless. "For real?"
"Yeah. I want to." Why on earth not? Life was crazy anyways, both of them were aware of that. So why not to indulge in being really insane and impulsive, if it felt like the right thing to do? It wouldn't be the first time for either of them. Probably not the last, either.

"All right, let's do it," Luffy answered, a huge smile splitting his face.

Just like that it was decided.

Law leaned towards Luffy in order to seal the decision with a kiss, but Luffy jumped up, balancing on the sharp tips of the mane of the figure head in a way that seemed really dangerous.

"OIII!" Luffy shouted so loudly that not a soul aboard the ship could avoid hearing him, no matter where they were; taking a bath, napping, or tinkering below the deck and banging loudly by a hammer.

Soon the curious Straw Hats started appearing onto the deck. Even without looking Law could imagine their eyes focusing on their captain, making a racket on top of the mane.

"What is it now?" asked Nami's voice, somewhere on the main deck.

Luffy was silent for a little while, and Law didn't need to see him grin in order to know it happened. "Guess what?" Luffy asked. "WE'RE GONNA GET MARRIIIIIEED!"

"That was surely heard as far as on Zou," Law muttered, not wanting to face the mob of Straw Hats yet, making noise and congratulating them.

Shielded by the figure head he could smile like the happiest idiot in the world.

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