

A Warlord and his Princess

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Kapitel 8: Celebration

Today was the beginning of the annual festivities for the 'Liberation Day' on the island close by that always lasted for a week. The inhabitants of the island organised the feast to celebrate the town being purged from the blood-seeking pirates. Whenever Mihawk had the chance, he tried to make an appearance there, as he was basically the reason the villagers were partying. Ever since he has been to the island with Perona the last time, she made it clear that she wanted to go to the festivities too. And of course, she made him promise that they would go there together. He accepted on one condition: they would not tell Zoro that they were going to a festival. He was supposed to focus on his training and for the last weeks during his stay Mihawk forbid him to consume any kind of alcohol until he finally mastered his haki skills. Which is why they agreed on a small lie, that Mihawk was called to an investigation by the marines at an island close by and Perona would join him as usual. It would take them at least one night until they came back. If they needed more time, then so be it.

Mihawk and Perona were already close to the island. The warlord was sitting on his throne as usual, with his and her small bag next to his seat. Perona was in front of him on the small boat. She lay on her stomach, legs angled upwards and wiggling a bit and her head was placed on her also angled arms. From her position she could already see the small harbour as she looked around, enjoying the view. She could not wait to go ashore and explore everything they have organised for the celebration.

The docks were already decorated with large and long rows of pennants, big flower arrangements, torches lit with fire and a lot of ships were already docked there. Many people gathered around the harbour, disembarked their ships and greeted others cheerfully. It seemed like many people came around to visit this town and attend the celebration. "This looks so pretty!", Perona enthused about the view, "I can't wait to see everything!" Between larger ships they let their boat come to a stop. Perona grabbed her bag quickly or floated off without caring if Mihawk was behind her or not. She was too excited. The warlord let out a sigh, took his bag and left the boat too, walking after her casually.

At the end of the wooden bridge Mr. Williams was greeting all the arriving visitors friendly. When he saw Perona, he smiled even wider. "Lady Perona!", he exclaimed, walked towards her and pulled her in a friendly hug, "It is nice to see you again!" Perona smiled and returned the hug. "I was looking forward to the festivities. Everything looks great. I can't wait to see the rest of it." They let go of each other and in the meantime Mihawk also arrived. "Hawkeye!", the mayor welcomed him with a friendly handshake, "It's a pleasure as always." The warlord nodded as a greeting. "We have reserved a room for you in our small inn in hope you would be attending. Please

feel free to make yourself comfortable and enjoy the party." "Thank you", Mihawk answered. "Let's go and bring our stuff to the room", he addressed to Perona and walked in the direction of the inn. Perona quickly said "See you later" to the mayor and followed Mihawk.

The inn was only about 200 meters away and within reach of the harbour. It was only a small building, not more than three floors high. The house was built in a beautiful old framework style and large, colourful flower boxes were decorating the windows. Some of the rooms had small balconies with a view to the sea. "So cute", she mumbled and followed the warlord through the entrance door. Inside the style was similar compared to the outer appearance. A lot of wooden bars graced the light-coloured walls. Big plants decorated the side of each door. In one corner a small table and four chairs were placed. Except for some people the inn was empty. Many visitors were already at the festival.

When Mihawk went to the reception desk the woman behind it was quick to ask him for his reservation. She was beautiful, Perona had to admit. Her long blond hair fell down in waves. Her beautiful blue eyes were rounded with a decent make up and long eye lashes and she had a beautiful smile. The woman stood behind the desk, looking at Mihawk with flirting eyes, blinking with her long eyelashes into his direction and as she went to a shelf to get the keys, she swung her hips a tad too obvious at him. Perona rolled her eyes and needed to avert her gaze or she would have said something inappropriate. She knew that Mihawk was a real looker. Any woman to state, that she was not affected by his face with his well-shaped beard and his openly shown chest muscles would be an idiot. But Perona did not like to be confronted with such a situation. She did not want to be close, when women were flirting with the warlord. It made her feel uncomfortable. Out of the corner of her eyes she saw, that Mihawk was his usual stoic self and not really affected by her avances. He turned to Perona and held up the keys he was given. "It seems like they only got us one room", he started to explain, "But there should be a couch in it. I will take that." Perona blushed lightly at that comment. They were living together for almost two years and she never had a problem with it because they had their separated rooms and bathrooms. Never had they seen each other in sleeping clothes let alone shared a room together. Then she remembered that evening they had shared together and spent cuddling on the couch. She tried to get the pictures out of her head as quickly as possible. She did not want to get a deeper face colour than she already had. Perona nodded as an answer. Not trusting her abilities to form a coherent sentence. "Give me your bag. I will take it upstairs and meet you outside." He took her bag and went straight to the direction of their room. Meanwhile Perona left the building again to get some fresh air but she could not help to give the lady at the reception desk one last sceptical look.

Outside she inhaled and exhaled deeply. Perona needed to get her thoughts straight and get herself together. Ever since that one evening she was struggling whenever it was just the two of them and they were close to each other. She could not risk losing whatever kind of friendship they had at the moment, but there was no point in denying the truth. She was falling for him. And she was falling hard. As soon as she has gotten back her composure, Mihawk exited the inn and stood next to her. "Ready for the big party?" Perona smiled at him and nodded "Yes! Let's go!" Together they went into the direction of the town square, where the festivities were held.

The small streets that lead the way were decorated with long flower bouquets on each side hanging high on some strings between the street lanterns. Additionally,

they were equipped with some fairy lights for illuminating the night. The closer they got to the centre the streets became more crowded with people, gathering around the main attractions, drinking and laughing cheerful. The town square was also decorated with large flower decorations going around the place. Below them some tables are placed to enjoy the atmosphere and the romantic lighting in the evening. On the sides the visitors were able to buy drinks and food from the booths maintained by some of the inhabitants of the village. On the far end of the place was a large stage.

Currently a little show was presented there. On the left side of the stage five people dressed in torn, dark clothes were laughing loudly and mockingly. They raised their swords, shouting some insults at the man in front of them. On the right side of the stage, opposite to the five actors, stood another young actor. He was standing there, unfazed by the other actors with arms crossed and doing nothing. The man wore a large hat, an open coat, some loose trousers and a big sword was tied on his back. "OH MY GOD!", Perona exclaimed. She looked from the stage to Mihawk and back. "This is supposed to be you!" Mihawk muttered something she did not understand. Perona inspected the actor that was mirroring the warlord again. He was so much younger than the man next to her. The beard was not yet that effortful and by far he was not having many muscles compared to the original. "Oh my gosh", she put her hand in front of her mouth, "This is so cute!" She looked over to Mihawk. Obviously, he was not a friend of that play and he was trying to keep his usual unfazed expression but more and more he seemed to fail. "Did you really look like this when you first came here?" Perona asked. The warlord decided not to answer that question. He turned around, muttered something like "I need a drink." And went to the next stand to buy something. Perona laughed about that behaviour and followed him.

The warlord bought a bottle of the local red wine and got two glasses. He filled the glasses and handed one to Perona who accepted it with a "Thanks". Together they stood next to each other on a small high table below a flower bouquet and they watched the actors stage their show. Mihawk hated this part of the festival. Every year they reenacted the same scene from years ago. Each time he came a little bit later to the celebration in hope, that this theatre play was already over when he arrived - without much luck. Mihawk understood, that him interfering with the pestering pirates was a cause to celebrate. But why did they need to make a man, that was not even halfway looking like him, reenact that day all over again? As he sipped his wine casually to get other thoughts into his head, Perona eyed not only the stage but the whole scenery in front of her. The people were celebrating like there was no tomorrow. On her left side she saw some other booths that sold children's toys, flowers and other stuff. She definitely needed to examine this later on her own. She drank a bit wine from her glass as the show ended and the people cheered and applauded. The actors bowed in front of their audience and left the stage. The mayor held a short speech about how he was happy to celebrate the 'Liberation Day' with all of them together and how important peace was and afterwards, musicians entered the stage to make cheerful music.

Mr. Williams came over to Mihawk and Perona, smiling, infected by the good mood around him. "I hope you are enjoying your stay so far?", he asked as soon as he reached his famous guests. "It is great to be part of the celebration", Perona responded, "I cannot imagine the effort you had to prepare all this." The mayor waved his hand, flattered by her praise and chuckled: "Oh dear. The whole town loves to help when it comes to our annual holiday. All the shop owners and their families contribute

their goods to decorate the village or provide food and drinks." Mr. Williams let his gaze wander around, savouring the moment and proceeded. "You know, every decoration has its own meaning here. Our bakery products the stand for harvesting and thanksgiving. The wine you are drinking is a sign of fertility." Hearing that and caught by surprise Perona was on the brink of spitting out the wine she just drank out of her glass. Really? Fertility? A bottle of red wine Mihawk and her were sharing? Oh please – Perona cursed about her own thoughts. She averted her eyes and tried to not let it show how embarrassing this was for her. "And fitting for the occasion we chose white lilies as the representing flower for our feast. They stand for purity and love." Mr. Williams cleared his throat and mentioned to the flower above Mihawks and Peronas head. Both of them looked up and saw a single white lily above them. "You know: When a pair stands underneath a white lily it is a tradition for a pair to share a kiss."

As soon as the mayor mentioned the flower decoration, Mihawk knew what was coming. The last times he attended the party the older man never failed to mention the meaning of the lilies and asked the warlord, when the time would finally come for him to bring along a woman to share this tradition. As Mihawk never was the type to dive into this kind a discussion, he just brushed off the topic. After all: Mihawk was neither the type of man to do something just because of a tradition nor being fond of public affections. So he simply ignored the fact each time he came to visit. Right now - being here with Perona - he reprimanded himself why he did not pay more attention to their drinking place. Only some of the tables were decorated with these flowers and if he had been more cautious, then he could have avoided this awkward situation. He rolled his eyes and started to explain: "You know ..."

Perona on the other hand was blushing. First the declaration of the wine and then she was supposed to kiss Mihawk? Oh boy. She knew that he would not do something just out of tradition. Mihawk had a mind of his own and nobody, much less a tradition, could dictate him in doing something. But this whole conversation took a quick turn into a very wrong direction. It became more embarrassing from sentence to sentence. Perona needed to get out of this situation. And she needed to get out quickly. She exhaled deeply and non-audible and decided to take the given opportunity to flee. As Mihawk started to say something, Perona interrupted him as casually as she could at the moment. "Well. We don't want to cause bad luck, do we?" With that said, she stood on her tiptoes, covered Mihawks left cheek with her left hand and placed a short kiss on the other cheek. As soon as her lips came in contact with his skin and part of his well-groomed beard, she realised the mistake she did. Perona just catapulted herself deeper into her flourishing feelings for him. She let go, reached for her glass and emptied the wine inside of it - it was almost empty anyway. "I will have a look at the booths over there and leave you two to chat a bit." With that she left the men behind and headed over to the attraction she wanted to see.

Mihawk was taken by surprise when Perona kissed him on his cheek. When he tried to ease the situation, he had various outcomes in mind. Whatever he expected, this was not part of it. Unaware of it, he touched his right cheek with his fingers and watched her go. This woman would be the death of him.

After this Perona fully enjoyed the different activities of the celebration. As planned, she went over to the booths she had spotted and saw, that the place where they sold flowers also offered to make a flower crown. She quickly sat down on one of the free chairs, removed her hat and placed it next to her and waited for the florist to come over and explain her the necessary steps. Perona decided to braid a simple and

delicate one consisting of daisies and green leaves. It matched her style best. When she was finished, she placed the crown on her pink hair and watched herself on front of a small mirror. "This is so cute~", she smiled widely. Next to her, she saw some children and woman dancing. Perona quickly paid the florist, took her hat in her hand and floated over to Mihawk and Mr. Williams, who were still talking in the same spot she left them. She shortly looked over to the warlord to see, how he was doing and left her hat on the table next to him with a short "I entrust you with my hat". As soon as she has spoken these words, she hurried over to the dancing women. One of them was Elisabeth, the mayor's wife. Upon recognising her, Perona went to greet her friendly and joined her and the others in their dance. It was a light-hearted tune the musicians were playing. The women and children held each other's hands and danced, hopped and laughed during their round dance.

From a distance Mihawk and Mr. Williams watched the ladies enjoying their time and having fun. "You know, my wife really has much energy. Sometimes it is hard to keep up with her and her wild nature", the mayor stated, "But she is the best thing that happened to me." He turned to the warlord and added. "Sometimes the most opposite characters are the best match." Mihawk looked at the mayor out of the corner of his eyes, raising an eyebrow lightly. Over the years he learned that sometimes the mayor was not one to directly express the things he felt uncomfortable to address. Whenever this was the case, he disguised this within another topic. Was he really implying that Perona and Mihawk were a good match? Old romantic fool. The warlord chose to ignore the approach from the mayor and simply watched the celebration before him.

Time flew by and the first day of the celebration came to an end. As Perona really had fun dancing, Mihawk and Perona stayed until the music stopped playing and everybody went home or to their overnight accommodations. It was almost midnight and both of them retreated to their room at the inn. Since Perona was not really tired yet and the adrenaline from the day was still kicking, they agreed to have one last drink together on their small balcony. The balcony and was only decorated with a bench placed on the side of the house, so one was able to lean with their backs onto the wall, a small table in front of it and some flower arrangements on the railing and above their heads. The two of them comfortably sat on the bench facing the sea and drank some red wine.

It was still warm outside but the sea breeze was a bit chilly. Which is why Perona was cuddled into a warm blanket. She enjoyed the view. The sea was calm, only light waves mirrored the moonlight. Other than ships creaking occasionally and birds chirping while passing the harbour it was quiet. In her hand she had her glass of wine. She drank a bit and put the glass back on the table, afraid to let it fall and spill the content. She turned to Mihawk to her left and smiled. "Today was so much fun! Thank you." The warlord was sitting next to her, glass in his hand and still facing the sea. After they came back from the festivities, he had changed his clothing from his trademark jacket to a white shirt, wearing it halfway buttoned down. The cold breeze did not bother him. He gave her only a side glance, as she started talking. "The people here are so friendly and everything was decorated so beautiful. Do they always celebrate this to this extend?" Mihawk nodded lightly: "They treasure their festivities." "Great! Then we will come back here next year too." Perona closed her eyes, leaned her head against the wall and lifted her face a bit upwards. "It seems like all the problems with pirates or marines or whatever don't exist here. It's so peaceful." She laughed softly. "Seems beneficial to have a warlord living close." Then

she opened her eyes and looked up into the direction of the flower arrangement above them - green leaves and fern, delicate white flowers and in the middle of it: lilies. Perona examined the flower bouquet in thoughts. Wait. Hold on a second. Lilies? Then it dawned her. Oh no. She tried to cover up her discovery and averted her gaze from the flowers above her, looked down and tried to hide her blushing face. Not again. Until now she suppressed the thoughts from this afternoon when the mayor told them everything about the meaning of their whole decoration. How her heart started to race as she gave him the kiss on his cheek. How nice the skin of his face felt on her hand. She needed to get these thoughts out of her head or she would lose her mind next to him. Hopefully he had not noticed her dismay until now.

Mihawk next to her was watching her out of the corner of his eyes. He wondered why she suddenly became so shy and looked to the ground. Her blush did not escape his view. The warlord looked above and saw the reason. He chuckled lowly. Perona was known for two things: talking a lot and being self-confident in what she does. Mihawk found it amusing to see her fussing about a little flower and the words Mr. Williams had planted into her head. This afternoon it seemed to him like she did not have any problem with it, as she gave him a kiss on his cheek. Or maybe this was just her way to cover her insecurity. Mihawk would not deny that he liked the woman next to him. The last actions of him taking her in and caring for her should be proof enough of this. He would not go as far as to say, that he loved her, but he was definitely attracted to her. "Well..." Mihawk put his glass on the table in front of him and turned to Perona, who still examined the floor with great interest. He grinned shortly and lay his left hand on her left cheek to bring her up and face him. The warlord looked her in the eyes, seeing her surprise written all over her face and said the same words, she used on him this afternoon. "We don't want to cause bad luck, do we?" Then he leaned in and kissed her.