

# A Warlord and his Princess

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## Prolog: Prologue

Kuraigana is not the kind of place someone thinks about when going to a holiday trip. The sun barely shines, the resident kingdom was destroyed during a battle years ago and the dark and gloomy aura of the castle could be really frightening for outsiders. The violent humandrills were a further reason to stay away from this island. This was one of the reasons Mihawk took up residence here. He enjoyed the peace and quiet he had on this island. After necessary trips for the marines, it was best place to retreat and the humandrills were good sparring partners to train. He barely got any visitors, except for business and sometimes a certain red-haired pirate and his crew came by to simply annoy him. But other than that, he was alone on this island.

Which is why Mihawk was a little bit irritated when he came back from Marineford to Kuraigana and sensed the presence of two other humans near his castle - a ship was nowhere to be seen from the docks. When he left his small coffin-shaped boat he went directly to where the others were located. Mihawk knew the first presence he felt. How could he forget. It was the only person to ever dare him into a duel about being the world's best swordsman who he left alive. Badly wounded but alive. Mihawk has seen the potential in this young man. Zoro was strong, but also naïve, young and unexperienced compared to him. But why would he be on Kuraigana? Zoro could not be so foolish to believe that he was already able to defeat him. And who was the other person with him?

When Mihawk came closer he saw the two cornered by some angry humandrills, who were cheering about their former triumph. Zoro was wearing a dressing around his upper body which means that he must have been wounded before. Panting, he tried to reach for his swords, which were stuck into the ground close to him, but failed. Next to him was a young, pink-haired woman floating a little bit above the ground with an umbrella in her right hand. Now Mihawk remembered her. She was Perona, one of the fleet commanders of Gecko Moria – another one of the seven warlords. He has seen her sometimes when the warlords got together for some meetings. But as he never really had much respect for the other warlord, he was definitely never in contact with the woman. Not that he regretted it.

"Zoro do something!", Perona shouted, "You cannot simply let them defeat you and they look really pissed." Zoro looked at her grumpily and retorted: "How about you do something to help and stop annoying me?!" Then suddenly the humandrills became rigid in fear. With eyes wide open and shaking from head to toe they slowly turned their head to the side from where Mihawk came walking slowly towards them. As soon as the humandrills saw Mihawk, they ran back into the forest in fear.

Zoro was the first one to notice the new arrival. He felt chills down his spine when he slowly looked into Mihawk's direction and mumbled a low "damnit". This was not how he expected their second meeting to be like. He wanted to kill that man. And worse – he feared that Mihawk would be the one to kill him on sight.

Perona next to him was not doing any better. She looked from Zoro to Mihawk and she felt a bit frightened. "You...you're Hawkeye Mihawk", barely escaped her lips. With any other opponent she would not be so hesitant. But Mihawk was one of the warlords, possibly one of the strongest among them. Perona lived under the roof of Gecko Moria and she always had big respect for the strength of all the warlords. Now even more as she was alone – with a wounded Zoro – and knew that she barely stood

a chance against him if he was really starting to get serious. More so because Gecko Moria was never really fond of Mihawk and she knew the feeling was mutual on Hawkeyes side. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Zoro again struggling to stand up and take his swords as Mihawk was now standing right before them.

"Don't", Mihawk started, as uncompassionate as ever, "You're closer to the dead than to the living. Do you really think you can beat me if you are not even able to defeat some weak baboon?" Zoro ground his teeth and admitted defeat. He fell back on his bottom, let out an annoyed sigh and grumbled: "What are you doing here?" "I live here", Mihawk responded, "The question is: What are you two doing here?"

At this time none of them had thought that this moment was the start of a two-year long residence of Perona and Zoro on Kuraigana, where Zoro would become the student of Mihawk and Perona being the irritating loud woman of the house.

## Kapitel 1: A Princess and her Chores

It took Mihawk, Zoro and Perona almost half a year to warm up around each other. Well – at least as warm as it could get around these three.

Mihawk loved the peace he had when he spent his time alone on the whole island. Now he just enjoys the silence when the others are either sleeping, training or doing whatever they did at daytime to stay away from him. Most of the time he was not training Zoro, preparing meals or working in the garden he spent reading the newspaper and drinking some of his favourite red wine.

Zoro on his side started to wake up early to have most of the day for training to become stronger. The day often started with running some laps around the island to get better stamina. Then he would have some sword fighting and hand to hand combat sessions with Mihawk or the humandrills and after that he always did some work out for his muscular strength. He could feel becoming stronger by each week and he felt proud of what he already achieved.

And then there was Perona. In the beginning she hated everything that required her to physically work in and around the castle. After all – she was basically a princess (even though Mihawk and Zoro did not seem to accept the fact). She was not royal by blood but her former captain and somehow father figure treated her like one. Every day she slept in and only woke up when Mihawk and Zoro were already outside and training. Then she did her morning routine in the bathroom and went downstairs to grab something to eat, decided to explore the castle or watch the two men during their training.

That was until one evening when they sat together for dinner and the owner of the house raised a topic much to her disapproval: "You know, ghost girl, if you want to stay and live here, you also need to contribute to our daily living." Perona on her seat put down her fork and looked straight at him: "WHAT?!" Mihawk stuck his left index finger into his left ear as she shouted at him. "Why do I need to? And do not call me ghost girl. I have a name!" He lowered his hand again. He simply looked at her and continued with a calm voice: "You are living under my roof, eating my food and do nothing all day. Even Roronoa is helping out."

"I am your guest!"

"You are basically an intruder."

"Rude!"

Zoro watched the two with a brow raised sceptically. He could only agree with his mentor in that matter.

"I want you to help me out with the garden and the kitchen."

"Sure. You think because I am the woman here, I should do the typical woman things? Do you also want me to clean your clothes for you?"

"I wouldn't mind."

Perona crossed her arms before her, blew up her cheeks and mumbled some non-audible insults. "I am a princess. I do not need to work."

"Then maybe it is time for you to get down from your high horse and learn how to act like a normal person. Not some silly brat."

That triggered her and she exploded furiously. "WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?!", she started floating above the table and into Mihawk's direction. When she was directly in front of him, she raised her right index finger onto his chest and tipped it with every

word she said as to make her point clear: "I am not a silly brat you arrogant grumpy man!" The swordmaster was not really impressed by that action and continued with a low voice: "The why are you acting like one?" Perona floated a bit higher to not touch the table with her feet and put her hands on her hips. Face filled with anger to be insulted like that: "Am not! Idiot. I won't tolerate you talking to me like that." And with that she stormed out of the dining room. While exiting she could hear Mihawk saying "Tomorrow at 8 in the garden." With a last loud blow she shut the door to the dining room behind her.

When she left the room, it was silent. Mihawk finished his dinner and Zoro emptied his glass of wine. "I guess this means that she is not willing to help out", commented Zoro, "Guess it will be only the two of us doing all the work." "It seems like Moria spoiled her pretty much", Mihawk answered, "But she will come around. Don't underestimate her." Zoro raised his eyebrow again: "Why do you believe that?" But Mihawk decided to end the conversation at this point. It already cost him enough nerves to talk to Perona so he simply reached for his glass of wine and emptied it: "It's your turn to wash the dishes." With that Mihawk stood up and left the room.

On the other side of the castle Perona was sitting on a chair in front of her mirror and combed her hair with fast movements. "He called me brat." Another brush. "That damned idiot" Another brush. "How could he?" Another brush and another and another. Then in her rage she threw her hairbrush with a quick motion onto the next wall and halted for a moment. The worst thing about the whole situation? Mihawk was right and she hated it. Perona really behaved like a small child and she knew it at the moment their conversation took the wrong turn. She was never known to have a good or calm temper. She really could explode within seconds if something happened, that she did not like or was unable to process. Perona tried to calm her breathing and then her anger subsided and made place for something else. Sadness. She had felt it on some evenings when she was all alone in her room without her bear or someone of her crew to talk to her. A silent tear found its way down her cheek and another one followed. Nobody was ever so harsh to her in words. Of course she struggled with violent assaults from her opponents and sometimes she also took some pretty bad physical hits when she was unprepared for battle. But never has anybody hurt her emotionally. Moria always kept her safe and ensured she had everything she needed. Treated her like the princess she soon felt to be like and she never needed to give something in return other than her loyalty. On Thriller Bark she had her pets or the zombies do all the work and never needed to make much effort to have a meal or take a bath. But Moria was no longer there – probably dead. Thriller Bark was destroyed. Kuraigana was her new home. And she really liked it. Yes - the residents could be kinder and definitely a lot cuter but she didn't mind them. Zoro was fun to watch and Mihawk gave her the safety of his home. Perona wanted to stay here for the time, the warlord would allow her to stay. She stood up and slowly went to the wall where her hairbrush was lying. She bent down, picked it up and went back to sit on her chair. She looked at herself in the mirror. Eyes slightly puffy and red from the tears. "So uncute", she mumbled. But then she made a decision: Tomorrow she was going to show them what she was made of. Nobody will call her a brat again. With that she went to bed, cuddling with one of her self-made stuffed toys and fell asleep pretty fast.

The next morning she woke up early. It was not really bright outside and it was hard for Perona to get up before her normal wake up time, but she needed to prove it to herself and mostly to Mihawk and Zoro that she could help if she wanted to. So she quickly went in front of her closet to check, what she should wear. "Ok the garden.

What do I need there." Perona rummaged through her clothes. "Something comfy but also something cute." She decided to wear a simple short black skirt and a black t-shirt showing her bellybutton. Some tights and higher boots to match her outfit. Afterwards she got ready in the bathroom and gave herself one last look in the mirror. "Perfect." She smiled widely. She had a look at the clock and saw, that it was already 8. "Shoot", Perona cursed. She opened her door and flew out of her room, down the stairs and almost bumped into Mihawk who was standing at the bottom of the stairs with his arms crossed and looking in her direction. "Whoops", she was able to come to a stop before crashing into him. She floated shortly before him and then let her feet touch the ground. Standing in front of him. "Good morning", she greeted him and smiled shyly. Perona was wondering, why Mihawk was dressed in his battle clothing including his hat and his sword Yoru on his back. "You decided to show up, ghost girl", he commented emotionless and started to walk into the direction of the garden. Perona was standing still for a moment as he already went away. She tried not to flip out about the rude greeting and inhaled and exhaled deeply. Then she followed him but could not suppress a "I still have a name" addressed to him. "Why are you dressed in your battle outfit when you wanted my help in the garden?", Perona asked when she caught up with him. "You are working in the garden. I will be training with Zoro the whole day." "Oh", she tried to hide a little bit her sadness in her voice but was not sure if she succeeded. Perhaps Mihawk also did not notice it because who knows if he even is aware of such an emotion. Perona thought she was spending her gardening session with him today. Yes – he really was quiet but then at least she had some kind of company. Someone to talk to and who she knew he was forced to listen, even if he did not answer her.

The garden itself was not something she would have called beautiful or well taken care of. Most times they bought their supplies from the neighbouring islands and were not in need to grow something on their own. No wonder that wild plants and flowers were growing in this area. "I want to cultivate the garden again so we have our own vegetables and don't need to go on supply runs so often", Mihawk explained when they arrived in the garden area, "On my last trip I bought some seeds for zucchini, cucumbers and tomatoes. We start with these." He went with her to the small gardening house and showed her the gardening equipment, seeds and explained how to plant them in the correct way. "The way you arrange the plants is to your liking, as long as the plants are able to grow." Perona let her eyes wander around the wild area where she needed to work. "And I should do this all on my own? This will take ages to finish", she exclaimed. "It's not like you have something better to do in the house", Mihawk simply stated and looked at her. "Why are you so rude?", she asked angered. "Why are you only seeing the bad side of this? You are able to contribute to our daily life and you get to chose freely how to design the garden." Ok he got a point. She could imagine this place being in a good shape with all kinds of useful and maybe also other cute plants. Back at Thriller Bark she had her wonder garden. It was not close to useful but it was cute. All of her pets were there and it was a nice place to spend. But this here? This required a lot of physical work - something she was not used to. "I will check on you in the afternoon", Mihawk turned around and started to walk away, "I will be training with Zoro on the mountains on the other side of island." Perona shortly looked after him and then redirected her view onto the garden in her responsibility. She sighed deeply, taking her sweet time to think of how to start with this mess. "Seems like it would be the best to remove all the weed first." With that she grabbed a spade and started digging to remove all the plants with their

roots. The plants were collected in a medium sized basket. When it was halfway filled, she carried it to a place outside of the garden to empty it. Somewhere here she planned to create a small compost. But this needed to be her second priority. When Perona walked back she checked her progress, she sighed again. "I will never finish this alone." Then she felt like someone was watching her. She raised her head and looked around to see who it could be. In the beginning nobody was to be seen. "Oke. No need to get spooked. You are just alone on this part of the island and there is nobody here." She collected herself, took her spade in her hands and proceeded with her work until the next basket was halfway filled. When Perona went to the compost she heard some rustling behind her. Quickly she turned around and saw two humandrills behind her. "Oh shit", she froze in her movements and let the basket fall out of her hands. What were they doing here? The humandrills usually never came close to the castle, because Mihawk was here and they were afraid of him. Then it dawned on her. Mihawk was not even close to her. That stupid swordsman was on the other side of the island tormenting Zoro who knows how. She was by herself. Perona watched the two humandrills who were also standing still and they started staring at each other.

"What do you want?", she dared to ask, "I do not want to fight with you." The two baboons looked at each other questioning until one of them walked straight into her direction. Perona was alarmed and went some steps back. "I really do not want to harm..." Then she stopped as she saw how the first baboon took the spade in front of her and tried to articulate with her. Blabbering something not-understandable for her while pointing on the utensil in his right paw. Perona stared at them, wondering what he tried to tell her. She started smiling when the humandrill stuck the spade into the ground and mirrored her movements from before. "Do you want to help me?" The baboons started cheering and hammered with their paws on their chests. "Ok!", Perona exclaimed excited. "You can start by doing, what I did before", she ordered the first baboon with the spade. Afterwards she looked at the second baboon still standing a bit further away: "You come with me. We will prepare the ranking assistance for the vegetables together." With that said the second humandrill walked eagerly into her direction and together they placed some poles along the already prepared ground and mounted steel wire between them.

In the afternoon around 5 Mihawk decided to end the training session for today. Zoro was already wounded pretty badly from their training while Mihawk himself was not really affected or even so much as panting. "We should head back", Mihawk put his sword on his back and looked into the direction of the castle, "It will get dark soon and we will need about half an hour to go back." Zoro sat on the ground trying to catch his breath: "And check on Perona. Hopefully she did not blow up the garden." The warlord did not comment on this remark. He somehow had the feeling that there was more to that woman than appears on first sight. He could not believe that Moria assigned her as one of her fleet commanders if she was just that annoying brat she used to act like since she set foot on this island. Without any further action Mihawk started walking back and Zoro silently followed him.

When they arrived back at the castle and went to the garden, the warlord did not expect to see what was before them. He expected Perona to maybe have done some progress in removing the weed or maybe planted the first seeds. But not only that. She was responsible for tilling even a bigger surface than he expected to see and almost finished planting all the seeds. In the back of the garden Perona was floating around and not only two but for humandrills were working below her. The baboons

were finishing the wiring around the poles and Perona ordered them around to make the wiring higher or lower, checking the knots and commenting if they are doing a good job. Out of instinct Mihawk put his right hand on the handle of Yoru on his back. As he did, the humandrills froze in their doing and felt the change of the atmosphere around them. The baboons looked in the direction of the warlord and seemed to be in fear again. That was the point where Perona also noticed the new arrivals. Mihawk with his hand on his sword and Zoro staring unbelieving at the garden. She smiled widely and floated to them until she was right before the two men. "Relax, Hawkeye", she scolded him as she was flying a bit around the two men in joy, "They are here to help. Seems like it is good for a change if you do not have to constantly live in fear." With that she lowered down on the ground and stood next to Mihawk - looking expectantly between her achievement and the warlord. Mihawk loosened the grip on his sword and let his gaze wander around the garden again. "It is good, isn't it?", Perona asked full of excitement, "Though I made a deal with them, that we will share the food as a return for their assist." Mihawk slightly nodded and a small smirk came upon his lips. Then he turned around and decided to go back into the castle. While leaving he commented her with a short: "Good job, Perona. Tomorrow evening you will be helping me in the kitchen." Then he left. Perona stood still and looked after him. "He said my name", she whispered. This was the first time the warlord addressed her with her first name. Normally he would only refer to her as "Ghost girl" or "woman" combined with a not so nice character trait of her. After processing it she jumped as high as she could and raised her arms into the air cheering. "YAY!!" It was just a small praise from Mihawk but it felt like a really big step in her stay here.

## Kapitel 2: A Warlords Protection

The morning at the castle was really quiet. Zoro was already outside training on his own while Mihawk and Perona sat at the table and ate their breakfast together in silence. They had bagels for breakfast that they have prepared together in the kitchen before. The warlord had a classic simple bagel with cheese. Peronas bagel was filled with a really tasting strawberry marmalade munching it pleased. She liked cute things and she loved sweet things. Deserts, cakes, marmalade – she could not get enough of this.

-Flashback-

Some weeks ago Perona mentioned that she would love to have some sweets for their meals. Until then their meals only consisted of vegetables, cheese and meat. Mihawk gave her an annoyed side eye, mentioning that it was not healthy for her to eat something like this und brushed off the topic. With that result Perona was not happy but she did not want to anger the warlord too often, as she was just starting to get along with him a little bit better. Which is why she was really surprised the next time Mihawk came back from his supply run. As usual Perona was waiting in the kitchen because of her curious nature to check the bags he always brought with him. When he arrived that day with a lot of bags, he put them on the kitchen table and pulled out a much smaller paper bag. He offered it to her without a word and proceeded to store everything he purchased into the kitchen cupboards. In the beginning Perona was a bit baffled, when he gave her that bag. Mihawk usually never bought something only for her. She opened it and looked inside, smiling widely and giggling in joy about the content. Inside the bag was a big chocolate cookie fresh from the bakery as it seemed. A proof for her, that even though sometimes she was annoying to him, he really did pay attention. She broke off a small piece and tasted it. Closing her eyes shortly, enjoying the cookie. Good lord it tasted so great. "Thank you!", she told him full of delight and smiled the happiest smile she has. Mihawk only looked shortly in her direction while sorting some the supplies into the upper cupboards: "There are more in the larger bag but don't eat them all at once." Perona was not sure if she could become any happier at the moment. She had a look into the other bags that are currently on the table and did not only see cookies, but also different kind of marmalades and other sweets. Perona clapped her hands in joy in front of her chest and giggled. She could not resist and flew as fast as she could to him, more like smashed into him, and hugged him tightly from behind – arms around his stomach. "Thank you so much!" Mihawk, who was not prepared to be assaulted like that, needed to put one hand in front of him on the kitchen counter to assist his stability and not to fall over. He froze in his movements and did not really know what to do. Simply looking in front of him. How could that woman make such a fuss out of a simple chocolate cookie? Perona laughed shortly, feeling his uneasiness and let go of him. Then she stood beside him with her small paper bag in her hand and broke off another piece holding it in front of his nose: "Here. Taste it." Mihawk raised his eyebrow sceptically. "Come on. It won't hurt. It is really great!" He sighed almost non audible and took the piece with his right hand. He inspected that small pastry and ate it. It was way too sweet for his liking. Absolutely nothing he would buy for himself. He stared with his golden eyes into her face and saw her still happy expression. Today he had learned two things about Perona.

First thing: She was pretty easy to please with sweets.

Second thing: She was a hugger when she was happy.

After some seconds she turned and floated out of the room humming a pretty melody. Mihawk looked around in the room and sighed for the second time this day. At least she could have helped in emptying all these bags.

-Flashback-

Since then Perona was a bit more tolerating regarding the distanced character traits of the owner of the house. He has shown her that he pays attention to her even if he does not always approve of her actions or needs. In his special way he cared for the two people living in his home. She was taking another bite of her bagel as she heard a messenger seagull chirping outside on the balcony. She watched Mihawk standing up and going outside to get the newspaper delivered by the bird. He came back with a slightly larger paper stack compared to most other days and Perona was wondering, what it could be about. But she needed to be patient because he was the first one to read the daily newspaper. (Not that she cared most times what was in there.) She would ask him afterwards if he could summarize the latest event in the world – as usual. “Huh”, he scoffed at the newspaper while reading the first page. That caught her attention and she redirected her gaze from her bagel to him. “What’s up?” Mihawk was silent for another minute – obviously finishing the article he was just reading. Then he shortly looked to her and then back to his newspaper. “It mentions the events of Marineford again.” That made Perona listen up: “What? Why now? It was already months ago.” “It states that Gecko Moria is dead. Fallen during the battle of Marineford.” “WHAT?!” Perona shouted. She floated hastily to Mihawk and ripped the newspaper out of his hands. He stared at her and observed her reaction. She floated before him, newspaper in hand and read the whole article not knowing what to think of it. For a long time she considered the possibility of Morias death, but having it written in the newspaper was something entirely else. Tears started to escaped her eyes. Perona raised her left hand to cover her mouth and to suppress some sobs as she continued with the article. “I keep wondering. Last time I saw him there he was still alive”, Mihawk added. Perona read the article a second time. Trying to fully understand every information that was hidden within it. “But why would they lie about it in the newspaper after all this time if he was not dead?” Perona was not able to say anything or answer his more rhetorical question. More and more silent tears were coming out of her eyes and she tried not to simply cry out loud. “Maybe it is just a benefit for the government. Now they are able to spread bounties on his remaining crewmembers and they can pursuit them again.” This led him to the point he was originally planning to make. “Which means that the marine will also place a bounty on your head.” Perona looked at him in disbelief. That was something she totally forgot until now. She never had to worry about the marines because she was protected by Moria and his title as a warlord. But now the newspaper confirmed that Gecko Moria was dead and she was a wanted woman. She handed the newspaper to Mihawk with a quiet “I need some time to think” and floated out of the room. He decided to leave her alone and continued with the second page of the newspaper. There was the big heading he expected. //Marines in pursuit of Gecko Morias former crewmates.// Below the currently assigned bounties on the assumed living members were written. Ghost princess Perona: 200.000.000 Belly.

The next days Perona was pretty quiet. She often spent her day in the garden and the two men decided to leave her until she came to them, ready to talk again. They could understand her struggle, but it was not like they were able to give her the comfort

she needed. Before the newspaper Perona was able to have at least a little bit of hope that maybe Moria was still alive and she would at some point see him again. But now that little bit of hope within her was destroyed and she had nothing to go back to. No crew, no father figure. She was basically alone now. One afternoon she was sitting on a little park bench she had cleaned with the help of the humandrills and sighed deeply. What should she do now? It will be only about one and a half year until Zoro leaves this island to go back to his crew. He always had the plan to leave this island again and rejoin the straw hats. After that it would only be her and the warlord on this island. Perona never thought about what she wanted to do. Did she really want to stay here forever? She really liked the place and grew fond of the owner, whether he liked it or not. But would she be happy here? Would Mihawk still tolerate her when his student left? It was so hard to read him sometimes and she was not sure of the answer to this question. All this thinking the last days was really getting in her head. She desperately needed something sweet from the kitchen. So she stood up from her bench and walked into the direction of the castle. She did not notice the marines waiting at the entrance of the castle until it was too late to escape their gazes. "Ghost Princess Perona!", shouted one of the marines, "By the order of the marines: You are under arrest." Perona cursed about her own stupidity. How could she let her guard down so easily? She took her fighting stance, summoned some of her hollows and was ready to fight these stupid marines off.

At the meantime on the mountains of other part of the island Mihawk and Zoro were training again. They clashed their swords and practiced on Zoros defence. Most of the hits the younger swordsman was able to block but for some of them he was too slow and Mihawk dealt some cuts to his unprotected body. "Keep focussing Roronoa", the warlord shouted at his student and dealt another hit. When Zoro stumbled backwards Mihawk shortly took some steps back to grant the younger man some moments to gather himself and stand up straight again. "Your defence is still in dire need of extended training." Then a silhouette on the horizon caught his eyes and he looked towards the approaching ship. Zoro followed his gaze and saw the ship too. The sails showed the symbol of the marines. "What are they doing here?", Zoro asked his mentor. Mihawk reflected previous and upcoming events affecting his affairs with the marine but he was not aware that the marines required his assistance. If so they would have sent a messenger bird as usual. This could either mean that he was being visited by some higher ranked marine officer or ... Perona. "You stay here until the ship leaves again", Mihawk instructed Zoro, "I don't want to deal with them knowing one of the straw heats is currently residing in my castle." "Don't you need my help with them?", Zoro asked. "You forget that I have certain immunities with the marines as a warlord." With that he left and tried to get as fast to the castle as possible. When he came closer to the main entrance, he already heard the marines shouting "You are under arrest." Mihawk did not recognise one of the marines on his doorstep so in combination with what he saw before him, he was right with his assumption. They are looking for Perona and the other crewmates of Gecko Moria. When he reached the group of people he asked with a low and slightly threatening tone: "To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?" The marines turned around and were quiet for some moments. So far they had not noticed his presence which gave him the advantage of short surprise moment. Mihawk used the time to take his place next to Perona - still ready to fight - who glanced at him and seemed unsure of what to do and what would happen. "I did not receive any information of marines coming to Kuraigana." He stared at the marines with a cold look and crossed his arms in front of his chest. Silence. It

was obvious that the present marines were afraid of the warlord. It took the officer in charge some moments to gather enough courage to take a step forward and to answer Mihawk.

"Dracule Mihawk. We are here by the order of the world government and the marines to arrest the remaining crewmembers of Gecko Moria. We received a hint that her", he pointed to Perona, "is living here and we came to get her." The warlord was still staring at the men in front of him, unfazed by the weak officer. He knew that if he wanted to, he could take them all out at once. But in his head he debated the question, why they knew that they had to look here for Perona. She never accompanied him to any meetings or supply runs. When was he so careless on his trips that he mentioned her stay here? "With Gecko Morias death she has lost her immunity of a warlord and we are allowed to arrest her", the officer in charge took a pair of sea stone handcuffs from his second in command and looked from Perona to Mihawk and made another step forward into their direction, "I would appreciate if you would assist us in doing so." Perona got even tenser with the movement of the officer. She stretched her right arm in front of her and wanted to send the first hollow into the direction of the officer. The marines grabbed the shaft of their swords as they saw Perona getting ready for a fight. Mihawk next to her, calm as ever, put his left arm in front of Perona as to stop her in her doing and calmed the situation: "She still falls into the jurisdiction of a warlord." That made Perona listen up and she looked up to him a bit confused. The marines also eyed the warlord sceptical and before they could ask about it, Mihawk proceeded: "She belongs to me now." With his right hand he grabbed the hilt of Yoru on his back without drawing it out: "Pursuing her means picking up a fight with me." Mihawk could not exactly pinpoint the moment he made the decision to give her the safety of his name and title. In the beginning he thought she was an annoying intruder who came to live in his castle while he was away participating in the battle of Marineford. She was loud, had the habit to intrude his privacy when he wanted it the least. With time he got accustomed to her and the other swordsman living under his roof. Mihawk would also go so far as saying he kind of enjoyed their company – though he would never admit it out loud. Maybe it was also the fact that she had recently lost the only thing she could imagine close to a family and he felt sorry for her. And if keeping her safe for now means officially taking her under his wing then he would do it without hesitation.

They were still standing like before. On one side Perona, held back by a grim looking Mihawk and on the other side the marines who were surprised upon hearing the statement of the warlord. They were looking at each other, lightly mumbling, and then focussed on their commanding officer, who was still evaluating the scene in front of him. The marine officer knew that with this statement he could not do anything against Perona. The warlords were working in favour of the world government and the marines and in return they were given certain immunities concerning their piracy including a crew under their name. The marine officer cleared his throat. "I am sorry for the misunderstanding. We did not know that she is part of your crew now." Technically there was no crew but Mihawk did not want to have a longer discussion than necessary. He relaxed now and crossed his arms again in front of him. "Our job here is done", the officer turned to his men, "We will leave now." With that he was the first to go into the direction of his ship. The others soon followed.

In the beginning Perona could not believe what has happened right before her. She still tried to progress the last minutes and soon felt relief growing inside of her. She let out a deep non-audible breath and closed her eyes shortly – glad that the whole

situation was over now. The marines did not look like a big deal and she was sure that after some time she could have won against them. But it was by far easier with Mihawks diplomatic approach. Which led her thoughts back to the man. Perona looked at him and saw him still staring after the marines, reassuring that they really were leaving. The sword master has just given her the undebatable protection of his warlord title and she was thankful for that from the bottom of her heart. He was known to not mess around with him and to be working alone. Never having a crew on his own. Now at least the last part changed. She smiled lightly, unsure on how to approach him and what this means now. And there was still that nagging question in her head that she needed to address and get a real confirmation. "Hey Mihawk", Perona started, waiting for any reaction on his side. When the warlord tilted his head a bit in her direction, she gathered her courage and continued: "After Zoro left Kuraigana. Can...Can I still live here?" Mihawk raised his eyebrow slightly. He thought that after the encounter with the marines it was clear as day and did not need to be discussed further. The warlord turned around and now stood in front of her, looking into her face. "You can call this place your home as long as you please." Hearing this confirmation, she smiled widely and jumped over to him in joy, hugging him tightly around his torso "Thank you. Thank you so much for everything!" Mihawk could not help himself. A small smirk sneaked its way on his lips and with only his right hand he loosely (more or less) returned the hug, patting her upper back a few times. Perona let go of him and looked him in his golden eyes: "That also means that there is no reason for me to not accompany you on your next shopping trip!" He raised his eyebrow again. Was that really the first thing that came into her mind? Well, he could not deny it now, except if he wanted to have his peace. But it would not hurt having her with him the next time. "You can come with me the next time", he agreed, "But I also want you to start training with us." Perona pouted. "I want you to grow stronger now that you will be associated with me." She sighed: "Fine." Together they went inside the castle. Perona floated into her room while Mihawk went for his study room to do some paper work and drink a glass of wine. After that day he was in dire need of it.

The next morning when Perona appeared for breakfast in the dining room only Zoro was eyeing her sceptical. She was wearing a black long dress with white sections designed in a gothic style. On her head she wore a black hat similar to Mihawks but instead of only one side covered in white feathers and her hat was decorated with white flowers all the way round. "Since when are the two of you wearing matching outfits?"

Some days later the newspaper made it official. The bounty on Perona's head was frozen and it was declared that she was now part of Hawkeye's crew.

## Kapitel 3: Getting Stronger

Since the last incident with the marines Mihawk insisted that Perona was also attending some of their training sessions. Of course he did not want her to become a sword master. That was Zoros and his part, as she never failed to mention. But if it was necessary Perona should be able to defend herself also with a close combat weapon of her choice. Aside of Zoros training Mihawk made a plan that included Haki training and weapon fighting sessions. She was not yet able to keep up with Zoro, that is why in the morning he started with her and her training and the second half of the day was reserved for the training of his potential rival.

Today was another day of weapon fighting training. As Perona was not yet in possession of her own weapon, the two of them were only fighting with thick wood sticks. The beginning was more about fighting stances anyway. In their last sessions they have already had some basic lessons about stances, countering and feet movements. It was pretty hard for Perona in the beginning as she had never really practiced anything in that matter. Good thing for her was that she was in fact a fast learner and a better student than Mihawk has originally expected. The large balcony of the castle served as their training ground. It was flat and smooth – perfect for starters who only needed to focus on the technique without the fear of stumbling upon stones or roots. Perona and Mihawk stood on the balcony. Facing each other, sticks in their lowered right hands and only so much distance, that they could easily cross their toy weapons. The pair was already training for three hours. As the basic stances were now known to her, they were mainly focussing on very slow fighting sessions. He wanted her to counter his movements. “Raise your weapon”, Mihawk ordered her and readied himself already to start the next round. “Again?”, Perona muttered, “We have been on it for hours.” “Your opponent is not waiting for you to be in top form”, he replied. “You are such a meanie when it comes to training”, she grumbled and got into her fighting pose. As soon as she was ready, Mihawk already crossed his wooden stick with hers. Then he changed the angle of his stick, taking two steps to the right and crossed it again with hers. The warlord watched every move she did and continued attacking her slowly. In between he commented with a simple “Good” or corrected her footwork. To try startle her, he aimed directly with the tip of his toy weapon onto her upper body. “What?”, Perona squeaked, jumped to the side and crossed her toy sword as best as she could. Mihawk stopped in his position. “Left foot a little bit more backwards”, he eyed her posture, “turn your upper body a bit more to the left.” Perona did as he said. Or at least tried to as she mixed up left and right. “I said left”, he told her. Then he put a bit more pressure on his weapon, moving it sideways to Peronas stick and left her stumbling. In the result she lost her balance and fell on her butt. “HEY!”, she exclaimed. “Otherwise you will lose your balance.” Mihawk looked down on her, smirked a bit and offered her his free hand to get up. “Yeah, yeah, I know. For you this is funny”, she grumbled and grabbed his hand with her left hand and stood up. When her feet were placed firmly on the ground, she raised her toy sword without a warning and attacked the warlord, trying to go with the advantage of surprise. Mihawk raised his eyebrow questioning and dodged every one of her attacks with ease. “COME ON!”, she shouted frustrated, “How can you not even stumble or make one silly mistake.” “Haste never is a good trait in a fight”, he simply commented. After some strikes he decided to end her little charade by using

her own unbalanced steps to send her backwards on the ground again. There she was lying like a little bug on her back. Frustrated she kicked and beat the air around her as she was lying there, mumbling curses into the direction of the sky. "Did you really think you could land a hit?", he asked standing next to her watching her little tantrum. "Aaargh", Perona lay flat with her back on the ground, spreading her arms and legs away from her and stopping her movements for a short moment. Then she directed her furious gaze at Mihawk and pointed with her outstretched arm and her index finger at him: "YOU! ... Why do you need to be so damn good in everything? It sucks on my end." On that Mihawk could not help to chuckle softly. "Yeah sure. Just laugh, you stupid arrogant sword freak", she muttered grumpily, lowering her arm again to rest it on the ground next to her. "Why am I doing this to myself again?", she asked more rhetorical than serious, "This is your thing. Not mine." Mihawk, who was patiently listening to her little outburst, decided to interfere now or he would be caught up in her self-pitying for much longer: "Because I want you to be safe, even when I am not around." He did not want her to explore and debate the meaning behind that sentence so he directly added: "Let's call it a day. You have done well today." He offered her his free hand to help her stand up again. Perona eyed him with furrowed eyebrows, let out one last annoyed breath and accepted his help in defeat. As she stood on front of him, her hand still in his, she honestly looked at him and gave him her sincere "Thanks". "You're welcome." With a short glance at their still connected hands, she retracted hers, trying to hide the little blush on her cheeks. Mihawk did not seem to notice or at least he did not mention anything. "Well, I will go inside then", she said. The warlord only nodded at that comment. He took both of the toy weapons and put them on the side for their next training session.

In the evening after a small chat with Zoro about the day in the dining room, she decided to go into her room and rest. After the training with Mihawk, even though it was not nearly as intense as his exercise with Zoro, her muscles were a bit sore and she was really tired. She was simply not used to physical exhaustion. Now that she was training almost everyday Perona needed her well-deserved beauty sleep. On her way to her sleeping room she passed the study room. The door was a little bit opened so she could see that the candles were illuminating the room. Seemed like the owner of the castle was still working at that time of the day. Perona did not really think about it further and simply wanted to go to her room, as she heard Mihawk's voice from behind the door: "Come in." For a second she stood still as she did not really expect to be called into his room. Then went to the door and opened it, so she could walk through. "Hey. How can I help you?", she asked as soon as she was inside, closing the door behind her again. So far she has never entered this room. Mihawk always made sure to keep his two guests out of his more private chambers. When she was inside Perona could not help but to examine the room.

It was larger than she had imagined. The walls on her left and on her right were full with book shelves. Behind her on each side of the door a large plant decorated the room. The remaining space was also used for storing books on smaller racks. In front of her Hawkeye was sitting on his desk. A lot of papers in front of him, on the left side was his den den mushi and on the right side was a candleholder. Behind him were two large windows. Mihawk looked up from his papers, that he was studying before and pointed her to the guest chair in front of him and his desk. "Take a seat." Perona did as she was asked to and at the same time Mihawk stood up and went to one of the book shelves to his right. After a short look he found what he was looking for and grabbed a medium sized book. Then he returned to the desk and gave it to Perona.

She watched him questioning and took it from him. "You know. I am more into romance stories. I doubt that this is what I would be reading", she tried make a light joke unsure of what she was supposed to here. Then she eyed the cover of the book and it stated "Devil fruits – known wielders and abilities". Before she could ask a question Mihawk already started to explain: "I remembered I had this in my collection." He went back to his chair on the other side of the desk and took a seat. "I believe that you may not be aware of what power the devil fruits bear. It could help you improve your skills and understand the potential threat of the opponent's powers." "Oh really", she opened the book and browsed through some of the pages until she found the pages addressed to her very own horo horo no mi. She expected it to maybe include one or two pages, as previous wielders are also mentioned, but there was far more included than she would have imagined. "I did not know such a book existed." Perona never thought about widen her abilities. Everything she know about her own devil fruit she figured out by herself. When the moment was right, she felt like an internal push that she could be able to do something specific. And then she knew exactly what she needed to do. Having such a book could really help her in trying to understand much more. "Thanks." Mihawk just watched her as Perona was scanning some of the first pages to get a general overview. "I also wanted to tell you, that tomorrow I need to run some errands", he proceeded and then made a short pause. On that Perona looked up again. Some errands? She tried to not get her hopes up. Since she landed here, she was not allowed to come with him to the surrounding islands and cities. He wanted nobody to know about his two guests. It was always too risky with the close contact to the marines. But now it was official that she was in fact Mihawks partner in crime. The only reason for her to stay behind was gone and the only other reason she could think of was that the warlord did not like her company during his trip. So she dared to ask the only question that was currently occupying her mind: "Can I come with you?" As an answer to that Mihawk simply nodded. Seeing that Perona smiled widely, tapped her feet wildly on the ground, held the book tight to her chest and squealed happily "YES! When do we leave?" "Tomorrow after breakfast", then he returned his gaze to the papers in front of him. "Oke...Oke", she got up from her chair and started floating above it, "I need to prepare. See you tomorrow!" Perona flew to the door of the room, opened it and without looking back she exited the room. She needed to check all her stuff to decide, what she needed to buy tomorrow. Oh this would be great. When she left, the warlord raised his head to watch her go. He smiled a little. "Weird woman."

## Kapitel 4: Shopping

The next morning came faster than expected. Perona was still a bit sleepy when she woke up. Last evening it took a lot of time for her to check, which utensils she needed and she was too hyped to fall asleep. She has not left this island for almost a year now. Everything she needed, she asked Hawkeye to buy for her, which at some points was really embarrassing for her. Who wanted a basically stranger to buy her things for her period? But even in her time with Gecko Moria she did not often visit other cities. Most of her time Perona spent on Thriller Bark and only accompanied him if there were special occasions or missions that required the attendance of the warlords. So every time she went out to another place it was pure excitement for her.

She decided to wear the black dress and the black hat with white roses to match Mihawks outfit. Now that she had her first official trip as his partner, she wanted to dress accordingly and of course she wanted to look splendid. She got dressed and readied herself in the bathroom. Then she took her umbrella and a small bag and flew downstairs to the dining room.

Today it was Zoros turn to prepare the breakfast, so it was no problem that she was a bit late today. Mihawk and Zoro were already seated. The owner of the house sat at usual on the head of the table, eating a piece of his sandwich while studying the latest newspaper. He was already dressed in his usual trademark clothing, except for his hat and his sword. Yoru was leaning on the wall next to him and his hat hung on the headrest of his chair. Zoro sat at the opposite end of the table wearing his classic combat outfit. Seems like he just wanted to proceed with his training today while the other two were leaving. "Good morning", she hummed when she entered. Zoro just side-eyed her, mumbling something like "Somebody is in a good mood." Mihawk looked up for a short moment and nodded simply as a greeting. Then he redirected his attention to the newspaper again. Perona sat on a chair somewhere in the middle of the table, place already prepared and started to eat. Breakfast itself was always quiet. Mihawk was mostly reading his newspaper, Zoro never said a word, only if he wanted to know about today's training or if there were any news on events concerning his crew. Perona would always try to start some light-hearted conversation, asking Zoro if his training went well or how his other crewmates are like. She had met most of them during their time on Thriller Bark and to say that their last encounter was not that friendly would be a big understatement. Over the months they all spent here Zoro became like a friend to her. They talked often and it was nice getting to know him and his crew better. They had experienced a lot of adventures for their young age which was really interesting for her. At some point she was also hoping that she could meet them all again, under different circumstances, and try to get to know them. After all the straw hats seemed like nice people.

When breakfast was over, she looked to Mihawk, who did not say a word this morning, and told him: "I just need to go to the bathroom quickly. Then we can leave." Hawkeye nodded shortly without looking at her and replied: "I will meet you outside." "Ok", Perona decided to not let the indifferent mood of him disturb her and floated outside of the room. When she was gone Mihawk let his gaze wander to Zoro and asked him to destroy the newspaper when they left. This declaration made Zoro suspicious. "What?", he looked at his mentor not really believing what he was ordered to, "Why should I?" Mihawk fold the newspaper two times and put it on the table next to his

plate. He waited for a short moment and checked with his observation haki, if Perona really was out of hearing range. When he got the confirmation, he explained: "The news says that they have spotted someone who might be Gecko Moria." Zoro raised an eyebrow when he processed this information. "And you don't want Perona to see this." Mihawk nodded slowly. "Why?" "This information is very vague. I do not want to get her hopes up and do something reckless." The younger swordsman thought about this statement for a while. "It has been a year", Mihawk grabbed his cup of tea and emptied it, "If he really was interested in getting Perona back, then he knew where he should be headed. The news proclaimed that she is now under my jurisdiction." "But you two never really seemed to be friends", Zoro intervened, "Maybe he does not want to pick a fight with you to get her back." Mihawk considered this statement. It could very well be that he was the reason the other warlord did not reach out for her. But even in that case, the sword master would not give her back to him without knowing that she would be safe there. Given the rumours he received from other informants the world order was about to change. Every wrong move could become a fatal decision. "But I believe you already had that in mind", Zoro continued. He straightened up in his chair and looked at Mihawk with a concerned face: "Anyway I do think that it is better for her to stay here. She told me some things about Morias crew, that even made me wonder what kind of shithole this place was." Mihawk raised an eyebrow on that statement. "Why is that?" "I think it is better if she tells you this by herself", Zoro answered, "She asked me to keep it to myself." Hawkeye nodded and felt Perona's presence coming closer again. He grabbed his hat with his right hand and placed it on top of his head. Then he walked over to Yoru and put it into the holder on his back. "We will be back in the evening." With that he left the room and saw Perona waiting on the entrance to the castle. Together they went to the small coffin shaped boat.

The trip to their destination was quiet. Mihawk sat on his throne as usual when he steered the small boat. He leaned against the backrest, arms crossed in front of him and his hat covering most part of his face. The warlord was still thinking about the small discussion he had with his student before he left. He needed a way to ask Perona about her time with Moria but he did not want to do this without raising her suspicion. The woman occupying his mind was sitting in front of him on the edge of the small boat, staring straight into the ocean. The water has always fascinated her. It looked so beautiful as the smooth waves collided with their boat. But for her the ocean also meant a real-life threat. She was a devil fruit user so she should never come in contact with it. She would lose all her abilities and her strength within seconds, meaning her inevitable death. Perona averted her gaze from the water and looked at Mihawk. He was so quiet this morning which was unusual even for him. "Is something troubling you?", she could not help but ask him. "Nothing that concerns you", he lied plainly. Right now was not the right moment to address his thoughts. Perona pouted and left it at that. She did not want to anger him, because today was a fun day for her. But she was also not really happy with his reply. She directed her view to the front and saw that they were now getting closer to an island. Their trip was not long. It only took them one hour to get to the next island. She watched the silhouette of the island getting sharper and memorized everything that she saw. It was a smaller island. On the docks she saw ships that at most could transport 30 men. The first houses she saw were not that big. But it looked beautiful, clean and at most peaceful. Like all the piracy never has happened there. The pair docked their boat almost in the middle of all the ships and went on the bridges. "Hawkeye!", someone shouted from

the edge of the bridge, "I did not think I would see you again so shortly after your last trip here. Do you need to resupply again?" An old man with grey hair walked towards them. He was shorter than Mihawk and was a little chubby. "It is good to see you, my friend", he was really friendly towards the warlord. The he noticed Perona standing next to Mihawk. He smiled his best smile and took both of her hands in his: "And who is this lovely lady at your side?" Perona was a bit startled at the open friendliness the man freely displayed. She could not do anything except go with what the man was doing. "Perona, this is mister Williams", the sword master was already used to the friendly outburst of the older man. It was nothing new to him as he was always greeted like that when the old man was walking around the docks. "Mr. Williams, this is Perona." Upon hearing that name he already recognised the name: "Oh of course! I am sorry that I did not recognise you directly. It is a pleasure to finally meet you. I have read a lot in the newspapers and could not wait to officially meet you." He let go of her hands and bowed lightly: "I am the mayor of this town. We are glad to welcome you in our city. Every friend of Hawkeye is a friend to us. We owe him so much." "It is nice to meet you", Perona replied to him with a light smile. She was still surprised by the friendliness. She did not expect for Mihawk to be greeted with such a pleasure. "What do you need today, Hawkeye?" "I need to see the blacksmith." "Again? Last time you visited us you were also running some errands there." "I have adapted my exercise. That's why I need to restock the training supplies more often." Mihawk could not say that Zoro was living with him. He decided to make this small lie and felt Perona's gaze in him. He looked at her as to get her confirmation that she would also keep this a secret and it seemed like she understood him without any words. She slightly nodded and smiled. "I understand. It is essential for you to be at your best", Mr. Williams replied, "But a blacksmith is not a place for such a fine young lady. Would you do me the honor of showing you around in our small town?" Perona was not sure how to answer his request. She thought that she would stick to Mihawk's side during their trip to make sure that she was not lost or did not do something stupid. She looked at the warlord to get him to answer for her. "Of course. This would be lovely", Mihawk answered, "I will join you as soon as I have finished my business." Perona agreed with Mihawk's decision: "I am looking forward to get to know everything." With that said the mayor hooked her into his left arm and guided her towards the market place. Mihawk watched them leave and then he went his way.

"You must know that this place is only as beautiful as it is because of the warlord", the mayor said as they arrived on the market place. "Before we got to know Hawkeye, we had a problem with ill-mannered pirates. But nobody was able to keep up with them. When he came to our island the first time, I thought that he would leave directly. He looked so disgusted when he saw these pirates lingering around." He stopped for a second and sighed. "This town was a real mess and our villagers were never safe. Many women were abducted, violated or killed during that time." He looked at the marked and smiled a sad smile. "When Hawkeye came here, I begged him for his help. By then we already knew of his position. And thank the gods he cleaned this town of all the pirates. Since then we are under his protection. We owe him everything." Perona looked at him stunned about this story. She could feel the deep hurt the mayor had and could now understand better why he was so cheery to see Mihawk. "I am glad it turned out well for you", she said, "Your town is really gorgeous and I cannot wait to see all the small shops and goods." "Of course, of course – as the lady wishes", he wiped away a stray tear on his cheek and guided her to the first market stalls, "Here you can see the finest fruits and vegetables the town has to offer." The

small booth had their goods placed neatly into some boxes. All the fruits were shimmering lightly and they looked really delicious. "Oh it looks very great!" The mayor smiled and guided her to the next stall. "This is my wife Elisabeth. She owns a small shop with jewellery", he introduced her to the woman behind the booth, "Elisabeth, this is Perona. The girlfriend of Hawkeye as I have mentioned last time out of the newspaper." Hearing that Perona's face became the shade of one of the shiniest tomatoes she has seen in the previous stall. "I ... I'm sorry but there is a light misunderstanding", she stuttered and waved her hands in front of her, "We are only working together. I ... I am not his girlfriend." The mayor was also a bit embarrassed: "Oh my god I am so sorry. I thought you two are really cute together and I never heard of Hawkeye allying with anyone – let alone a beautiful young woman. I made a wrong assumption." "No problem", Perona was still blushing heavily. For an outsider it could very well appear like he had assumed. Before she could dive further into the topic she gave her full attention to the mayor's wife: "It is a pleasure to meet you, Elisabeth. You really have wonderful jewellery on your booth." Elisabeth chuckled lightly. "Thank you, young miss." From afar a man was calling out to Mr. Williams. "Mayor, can I have a short opinion on my newest development for our sewer tunnel?" The mayor excused himself for a short moment and left Perona in the care of his wife. "I am sorry if my husband has made you feel any kind of embarrassment", she told her warmly, "He is a romantic old fool." Oh could someone please save Perona from these discussions. She was not able to regain her normal skin colour if they were coming back to that topic again and again. "Please do not worry", she managed to say, "Your husband really is a kind man." Perona looked through the jewellery in front of her as she had time to spare until Mr. Williams came back. The booth was presenting a lot of rings, necklaces and bracelets in all kind of colours. She stopped in her general admiring when she saw a necklace on the left of the market stall. It was a delicate necklace made out of silver. The chain was plain and a small silver cross was attached on it. She took the necklace into her right hand to have a closer look. "Oh you have chosen a really beautiful necklace", Elisabeth said. "Yes. It is gorgeous." Instantly Perona was reminded of Hawkeye's golden necklace with his hidden blade. "How much is it?" She asked the owner of the shop. Elisabeth grinned as she also noticed the similarity to the Hawkeye's jewellery: "Please. If you like it, then keep it." Perona was startled by the generosity of the older woman. "Oh no I can't." "No, it is my pleasure", Elisabeth answered, "We owe Hawkeye much. It is a small way to repay his kindness if I can give his lady something she adores." "What? No ... I ... I already told you", Perona stuttered. Her face darkening again. The owner chuckled: "Sure, love. But keep it. It suits you." "Thanks you very much", Perona smiled widely and put the chain around her neck. Then she remembered that she needed to buy other stuff as well. "Can I ask you for a favour as long as your husband is busy?", she was a bit shy to ask. "Of course", Elisabeth agreed, "How can I help you?" "Well ... you see. Soon it is this time of a month again", Perona started, feeling really uncomfortable, "Do you know where I can buy some utensils for women?" Elisabeth smiled at her uneasiness and came around from her booth to stand next to Perona. "Sure. Please follow me. The drugstore is around the corner."

In the meantime, Mihawk was already finished with the first stop to gather some supplies for their meals at home. Now he was waiting at the blacksmith's shop for the owner to bring him the desired training utensils. It was not much. He just needed some targets and some training weights. While he was waiting, he had a look around the crafted swords that were aligned on the wall. The swordsman knew that the owner

always had good products. But it was not like he was in need for a new sword of his own. He wielded Yoru since he was a child and he always took care of the sword. But as swords were part of his passion as a sword master, he always had a look at the ones displayed. He went from left to the middle. Pulled down one or another sword to check the handcraft. They were always perfectly balanced and well formed. When he reached the end, he saw a thin sword in a size a little smaller compared to Zoros swords. What really intrigued Mihawk was the design of the hilt and the colour of the sheath. It was designed in white and pink. "Oh come on", he muttered. It was like this sword was made for Perona. He took it from the wall and checked the craftsmanship deeply. He could not find any failure in it. "I never expected you for someone interested in such a special sword", the owner came back into the room with Mihawk's order, "The colour does not really match your outfit." "Not for me. This is for a friend", the warlord made some light movements with the sword to check the handling of it, "Do you have a matching belt?" "Sure... just give me a minute. I will go get it", the owner went out of the room again and came back with a white belt decorated with small pink flowers, "Would this fit?" Mihawk eyed the belt and nodded. "I take everything." The warlord paid for all the training utensils and the new sword and left the shop with two large bags in each hand.

Outside he used his observation haki to find Perona. It did not take long as she was exactly where he expected her to be: still in the market place. He went into her direction and as Mihawk came close he already saw her standing at the booths with four shopping bags next to her, trying some of the local biscuits and talking to the mayor and his wife. When Mr. Williams spotted Mihawk he waved at him. "You're back!", Perona exclaimed cheerily, as he was standing next to them, "Did you get everything that you needed?" The warlord nodded simply. "Did you have a good time?" "It was soooo great!", Perona answered, "Everybody is so kind here, the town is beautiful and there is so much stuff to explore. Have you seen the posters? Next month there is the annual festivity. We need to participate!" "Most definitely you need to attend. Both of you", the mayor insisted, "It is always a pleasure having you around." "We will think about it", Mihawk answered casually, but Perona interfered. "If necessary, I will personally drag him here", she chuckled. The mayor and his wife joined her in doing so. "Your friend is lovely", Elisabeth mentioned addressed to the warlord, "It was fun to spend time with her." It was nice to hear that they liked Perona. He knew that occasionally she could be very exhausting but in general she was a good person. Even though Mihawk would not admit it out loud and most times he did not act like it, but he liked having her around. When she was with him there was always something happening and the day took an interesting turn. It also made him feel less lonely and heightened his mood a bit. "It is good to hear that all of you had a great day", he said, "But we need to leave. I want to be back before it gets dark." Perona nodded. "Well then let's go", she said. She turned to the mayor and his wife to bid them goodbye: "Thank you both for everything today. It was a pleasure to meet you and I am looking forward to our next meeting." Mr. Williams and Elisabeth also said their goodbyes and Mihawk simply nodded as a gesture. Then they left and went to their boat. "It was such a great day. Thanks for taking me with you", Perona took place in front of the big throne and placed her bags next to her, "And the mayor and his wife really are kind people." "Yes they are", Mihawk agreed. He put down the bags next to his seat and tied them together so they would not fall down when they were on the sea. "While I was away getting something for Roronoas training, I found something for you", he pulled out the sword stuck in the sheath and the belt he had

bought for her, "It was basically screaming at me to buy it." When Perona saw the pink sword, her eyes widened in disbelief and she stared at it with her mouth hung open. "Really? For me?" "I doubt that this colour suits me." "OH MY GOD!", she shouted, "This is SO CUTE!" She sprung up, took the sword out of his hand and unsheathed it. Perona made some light movements with it and then lowered it. She looked at the design and she was not sure if there could be anything that was more fitting for her. "It is perfect. Thank you Mihawk!" She grinned widely, as she put on her belt and attached the sword on it. She stood before him, presenting her new sword to him. "How do I look?" He examined her from top to bottom. He could not help it. Seeing her standing in front of him, with an outfit, that was matching with his - but way girlier - that he had to admit that she was indeed a gorgeous woman. It was only then that he noticed the new jewellery around her neck. A small silver copy of his own cross. "You look beautiful", he admitted honestly, trying to be as calm and indifferent as always. That comment made her blush a bit. "Thank you", she mumbled while taking a seat again in front of Mihawk. With that they started their little trip back to Kuraigana.

## Kapitel 5: A Woman's Struggle

It was this time of the month and Perona felt like shit. Usually when she was on her period everything was ok but once or twice a year she had bigger problems. Her whole body was sore, her back and neck were tense and she had a bad headache. For two days she was barely sleeping because the pain of her lower abdomen was really giving her a hard time. Additionally her mental health was suffering from the constant rain outside. "I hate it", she whimpered as she was cuddling her teddy bear on her bed, body curled up under her blanket. Soon it would be over, but for now she needed to go through with it.

At least now she was able to buy her lady utensils like tampons on her own. The first months she was not allowed to accompany Mihawk on his trips she needed to ask him to buy everything. The first time was the hardest. He has asked both her and Zoro if they needed something special when he went on his supply trip. She has written everything on a small paper, as she did not want to say it out loud. Before he left, and when Zoro was not around, she handed him the small paper and her face became as red as a tomato. It was so humiliating for her to ask someone, who basically was a stranger to her at that time, to buy her the tampons she needed. Mihawk never minded. He always brushed it off with a "It is normal for you to need this." and always brought her everything she wanted. But for her it was embarrassing.

When the first day of her period came, she always stopped the harder workout and decided to chill and work in the garden or lay down in her bed depending on her state. She knew that in worst case her enemies did not made exceptions just because of her well-being, but this was Kuraigana and nobody ever came here to visit, let alone to fight. The two men always left her alone if she did not come to them by herself and it was good to have the solitude when needed. But right now she was craving for someone to just tell her everything would be alright. At Thriller Bark Perona had Kumashi or one of her other pets when she longed for physical comfort. When she was lucky sometimes even Moria gave her a short hug. Here she had nothing to give her comfort except for a stuffed teddy bear.

It was already way past dinner, which she had skipped, and she felt her belly rumbling. She was getting hungry. Perona sighed, got up after some minutes, went into the bathroom to the toilet and afterwards she headed downstairs to grab something small to eat.

Mihawk was sitting alone on a large couch in the dining room. His back was resting against the backrest and his legs were placed on the couch leisurely. On the small table next to him stood a bottle of his favourite red wine and a glass filled with it. He was enjoying his free time reading a book about the history of the New World and the fallen kingdoms, when Perona entered the dining room with a small plate in her hand. She sat down on one of the chairs and ate her dinner in silence.

To say that Perona was annoying the last two days was an understatement. She was in a foul mood and when Mihawk asked her what was wrong with her on the first day, she just snapped at him. That is why he decided to leave her alone until she was ready to talk to him. Out of the corners of his eyes he watched her sitting at the table. She hunched at the table, dark rings below her eyes and sometimes caressed her belly absentmindedly. When Perona was finished with her dinner, she sighed silently. It seemed like she was debating what she should do now. Mihawk pinched the tip of his

nose and let out an annoyed groan. "If something is the matter just speak, woman." He did not want to go on with this charade of her ignoring everything and her constant sulking. Perona looked up as if she did not notice Hawkeye sitting on the couch and her mood got worse in a high rate. "I am sorry to disturb you!", she shouted angry. "Are you on your period?", he asked straight-forward. "Don't ask such a thing!", she yelled, "This is embarrassing!" She crossed her arms in front of her and pouted. Why did he ask her that? It was a topic she was barely able to talk to with another woman. How could she even be able to talk to him about it. It was just something that every woman has to struggle with and men were so inconsiderate and blind about the women's period. "You don't know how it feels like, when your body is hurting the whole time, everything is so tense and you are not even able to sleep well", she started her little outburst. It seems like the lack of sleep and her bad temper had gotten the upper hand on her and the words just bubbled out of her mouth. "I hate it! Everything takes double effort and sometimes you just want to cry without a reason." Mihawk directed his gaze at her. He rubbed his temple as he could feel a headache starting to take over. He was not really in the mood for her small tantrum but at least it seems right now that she wanted to talk, or let out all her collected anger and frustration from the last two days. "Sometimes I feel so alone", Perona proceeded. Her voice getting softer and lower. "As if nobody could help me and it is frustrating to bear this pain alone." And sometimes I just want to be hugged tightly – she continues in her head but did not dare to express this out loud. A silent tear escaped her eyes but before it could get worse, she heard Mihawk asking "Have you finished your little theatrical interlude?". Perona went silent and she did not dare to look at the owner of the house. He must think of her as a pathetic little girl and she did not want to see the disapproving look in his eyes. Mihawk sighed, sat up straight, legs down from the couch. "Come here" he simply stated. Perona looked up, surprised by the sudden order and looked at him. His face was neutral. There was no sign of mock or condemnation in his features, as he pointed to the place next to him. She was debating with herself, what she should do. She could leave and try to simply forget what happened tonight or she could just go over there and get done with whatever he wanted to do. She still feared that he would laugh at her for her little show. He was a proud man. But she did not see a hint from him, that this would be the case. After some thinking she decided to float over to him and took the place on the couch next to him. Perona ensured that she was at a safe distance to him as she was unsure of what he wanted. She tilted her head towards the direction of the ground and waited for him to make the next move. Suddenly she felt two strong hands on her shoulders. At first Perona tensed at the contact. Oh no. Please. She did not behave that bad that the warlord needed to punish her. Then she felt light pressure on her shoulder blades and her neck and understood, that he was only massaging her sore neck. Oh yes. This felt so good. Perona thought she knew exactly what she craved for but only now she comprehended the extend of her need for contact. She automatically relaxed under his slow and steady movement. Perona closed her eyes and enjoyed the caretaking. After some quiet minutes Mihawk stated calmly: "You know that you can always come to me if something troubles you." He suppressed the small comment 'Even without making a scene before'. "Hmmm~", was the only thing Perona was able to answer. One or two minutes later she added: "Why is it that you are good in everything you do?" He chuckled lightly upon that question but did not answer her. Soon she felt a bit tired and her eyes began to get heavy. Perona's body felt more at ease now. The massage really did wonders to her sore body.

The warlord was not sure why he felt so light-hearted around her today. He really despised the last two days of her being out of her character and he really had the urge to help her. He wanted to see her happy. It was nice having her around. Being with her made him forget everything that was going on in the world. Mihawk noticed her sleepiness and decided to go one step further. Fortunately, the couch was wide enough for two people to fit on it. He leaned over, put one arm behind her back and one arm below her upper thighs and lifted her next to him on the couch so that she was between him and the large backrest. During the movement Perona squealed shortly in surprise. She was completely lost on her thoughts and did not see that coming. "What?" She looked at him, wondering what he was planning. Mihawk, who still had his right arm around her back, used his other arm to grab the blanket in front of him to cover both of them with it. Perona could only watch and feel the blush that was forming on her cheeks. He pulled her into a horizontal position, his back directly on the soft mattress and let his head rest on the slanting armrest of the couch. With his right arm below her back, he hugged her even tighter to himself so that she was now halfway on top of him and halfway still on his side. Her face lay on his chest. "You said you were tired before", he told her, "Try to rest a bit." Perona was frozen in her movement. This was the first time she was so close to someone other than just for a hug. Her heart was beating wildly and she hoped he could not hear it. 'How could he think that I could possibly sleep in that position?' Perona thought. At first, she did not dare to make even the smallest move. Breathing seemed impossible too. It did not help that he was almost shirtless, wearing that white buttoned-down shirt he always wore in his free-time. And damn that man was well-built with muscles. For a moment she closed her eyes to gather herself. She did not ask for this. He offered his comfort freely and she did not force him to do anything. Perona processed the last minutes and decided that she could very well be bold too and use the given situation. With one deep inhale and exhale she shifted closer to him. Perona placed her right arm above his chest to cuddle him even tighter and nestled her nose more into his chest. This moment felt so good and right in every way. She loved it. It was like all her worries were blown away and it was just them at this moment. She began to feel relaxed again in this position and sighed low and content. To give her further easing Mihawk started to caress her hair softly with his left hand. They lay like this for some moments. It was quiet and they were simply enjoying their time together. Then Mihawk's mind came back to the discussion he had with Zoro the other day about Morias crew. "May I ask you something?" Perona, who was more used to his direct way of addressing topics wondered, what made him hesitate. "Of course." He was not sure how to address the topic. He wanted to know what she has trusted Zoro with. But asking directly would give away that he had some minor information from the younger man. So, he decided to formulate the question in another way. "If it was possible, would you go back to Moria and the rest of your crew?" For her that question came out of nowhere and she was irritated why he would ask her something like that. Gecko Moria was dead. There was no way that this scenario would ever happen. That's also why she never thought about it. Mihawk interpreted her hesitation as denial. After all this time it still seemed to be a topic she did not wish to discuss. "I'm sorry. You do not have to answer." "No...", Perona interfered to erase all the wrong thoughts. She tilted her head so she could see his face out of the corner of her eyes. She wanted to see the expression on his face but as usual it was neutral. She could not read the motivation behind that question. "It is just... Moria is dead. And I never thought of this scenario since then." Mihawk nodded slowly and expected this

to be the answer to his question. Perona was quiet for some seconds. She was deeply in thoughts as it was not that easy to answer. "I owe Moria much", she started to explain her indecision. "When I was a child and I had no place to be he took me in and gave me a home." She made a short break, trying to find the right words. "He was good to me, but ...". She paused again, which made Mihawk listen more careful. "He never gave anything for free." Mihawk furrowed his brows upon that statement. "Oh god that sounds wrong", Perona chuckled slightly embarrassed. "Not that way you maybe imagine. But he wanted proof of his crew's loyalty." Lost in thoughts she started to draw circles with her right index finger on Mihawk's chest. "After I joined his crew, he took part of my shadow into his possession... For reassurance." She highlighted the word reassurance by forming quotation marks with the fingers of her right hand. Then she proceeded with the circles on his chest and paused again. "You know that he can control everyone like a puppet when he is in possession of the shadow." The words hung heavy between them. At the time she offered his shadow to him it seemed like the best decision. She did not plan to leave Moria and his crew so she had nothing to fear. She was always loyal to him and he never made use of his devil fruit powers against her will. Mihawk remained silent. He wanted to give her time to talk about everything she wanted, granting her the comfort she desired. "When I was with him, it always felt right", she admitted, "I did not know anything else at that time. I felt like I had everything I wanted until the straw hats made a mess out of my home and Kuma sent me away." In her head she replayed the day her life changed completely. She had spent a nice day in her wonder garden when she was informed by a zombie that a weird pirate crew arrived on Thriller Bark. It was not the first pirate encounter on their island. Moria's crew had fought off a lot of pirates over the years and she expected the day to be same like the others. Boy was she wrong. The notoriously depressed Usopp proved to be her natural nemesis and when she wanted to flee, she did it not like she planned to. Then she came to Kuraigana. Alone in the beginning and then in company of Zoro until Mihawk arrived. "When I first saw you, I feared that you would just kill me on sight", she remembered their first meeting on the island he called his home. "Moria hated you. He always complained about your stupid arrogance when he came back from a meeting. 'Compensating something else with that huge-ass sword.'" As she recognized that this comment could take a very wrong turn she quickly added: "His words. Not mine." On that remark he chuckled shortly. Hawkeye knew that the other warlord was never pleased when they met at the same place. He could always see it in his face, but Mihawk never cared: "I must admit that the feeling was mutual. But that is not enough reason for me to go after his stranded crewmates." "I know that now", Perona replied. She yawned. All that deep conversation was tiring and her body was already exhausted from the last two days. She closed her eyes and snuggled a bit closer to him. "But to sum it all up: No. I would not like to go back, if I could. Maybe I would have a guilty conscience about leaving after all he has done to me. But whether you like it or not", she yawned deeply, her voice getting lower with each word, "I like you. If you don't kick me out, then I will stay here." Mihawk was silent. As he felt her sleepiness, he looked down at her and watched her fall asleep while caressing her hair. Her face became soft and her breathing even. Mihawk was glad to hear these words from her. In the beginning he was afraid that he overstepped her boundaries by declaring her alliance to him in front of the marines. Listening to her explanation before the warlord could now be ensured, that she never felt forced by him. His mind wandered to the conversation before. If Gecko Moria was still alive and he wanted to make sure that Perona came

back...This could become a real problem. He would need to keep a closer eye to the news these days. As he watched her sleeping form in his arms, Mihawk decided to never let her go back to Gecko Moria. Perona belonged to him now and he would let all hell lose if the other warlord wanted to take her from him. With one last look at her, he grabbed his book with his left hand from the table next to him and went back to reading. The warlord would let her have some rest before he brought her upstairs into her room. Fortunately Zoro was already in his room. If the younger swordsman suddenly entered the dining room, he would not hear the end of it.

## Kapitel 6: The Visit

It has been a year and a half since Perona and Zoro came to Mihawks castle and they found a routine of training, living together and not annoying one another. In that whole time nobody has ever visited the island - except for that one marine incident. Mihawk received his tasks via letter or den den mushi call. To say the incoming visit was a surprise for the younger swordsman and the devil fruit user was a big understatement.

Zoro and Mihawk had a haki training session today. The warlord wanted to expand the level of his student's observation haki and also test the extent of his armament haki. "Fighting isn't all about strength", was Mihawks creed when it came to haki exercise. Whenever they did this kind of training, Perona chose to sit on the sideline of the training ground and watch them. Her ability of using haki was not even close to Zoro's. She was pretty skilled with her observation haki. Mihawk made sure that she was able to use this for self-protection. But she did not the other types of haki, which did not keep her from watching the two men fight. Other than it was interesting for her to get the details of their abilities, it also was eye candy to see the men fight with their upper bodies half-naked. She let her gaze wander to the warlord and eyed him from head to toe. Dressed in his usual fighting attire, Yoru in his right hand and not even indicating that he felt some kind of exhaustion from the training, Perona had to admit that in fact he was a really handsome man. His well shaped figure and his muscles on his chest did add up to the overall picture. His chest ... She blushed lightly as the memory of that night, cuddled together on the couch, sneaked its way back into her head. Perona buried her nose inside of the book about devil fruits Mihawk gave her, trying to hide her face. Damn it. If this stupid behaviour became regular now, she was screwed. They had not talked about it afterwards and Mihawk did not seem like he needed to. For her it was also ok. She understood that he was only giving her the kind of comfort she desperately needed – no more and no less. But to her it was also like something shifted after this evening. She eyed him more often than usual and, in the evening, she sometimes fantasized her being close to him again and repeating what they did the other day. 'Shit this needs to stop', she thought and tried to concentrate on her book again. "Focus on you observation skills", Mihawk scolded the younger man. He already sensed a ship coming into their direction, even if it was far away and would need another hour to arrive at the island. "What do you see?" Zoro grimaced at the reprimand. He tried to concentrate more but there was nothing that he could think of what the warlord wanted him to see. Mihawk waited patiently, side-eyeing the woman outside of the training grounds and checking on her. She was focused on the book he gave her. 'Good girl', he commented in his head. He was proud on her development. She was getting stronger and knowing she could defend herself put his mind at ease. The warlord could not quite put a name on these emotions he had. The evening they spent together was occupying his thoughts lately and he did not know the last time he felt so content as he was at this moment. Mihawk was not known as someone with many emotions. Growing up independently it never was something that has affected him. With the constant needed to focus and making the right decisions there was not the time for something like affection. Spending the night with a different woman from time to time was all he needed – but not more. With Perona it was something entirely else. He wanted to keep her safe, make her happy and give

her the comfort she deserved. It irritated him feeling so strongly for the first time. "There is a ship coming", Zoro interrupted his mentor's thoughts. "Good", Mihawk nodded. "A ship?", Perona looked up at the two men. She feared that the marines were coming again. Then she followed their gazes and saw it. A large ship with some kind of red dragon as a figurehead. The jolly roger pictured a skull with two crossed swords in the back and a red scar over its left eye. "Wait...Isn't this the Red Force?", Perona asked in disbelief. The Red Force was the ship of Red-Hair Shanks – one of the four pirate emperors. "Do you want me to hide again?", Zoro asked, remembering the last encounter with the marines. "No", Mihawk answered, "It's not like he doesn't know you are here already." Zoro nodded. "Why is he here?", Zoro then asked, "Isn't he supposed to be your enemy?" With Mihawk being one of the seven warlords and Shanks being one of the emperors, they were supposed to be standing on different sides. The warlords were tasked to help the marine with problems regarding other pirates. They were not allowed to ally with other pirates except for their crew or other warlords. In return their bounty was frozen and the marines looked away when they gave into their piracy. Marines and warlords were the counterparts to the pirate emperors. "One might say we are friends", Mihawk shrugged. "Get yourself presentable and meet us at the front entrance", he ordered the younger swordsman, who was sweating from the exercise they had. Zoro nodded and left. Mihawk waited until his student was gone and then turned to Perona. She still sat at the same position as before, watching the ship coming closer. He went to her until he was standing next to her. Mihawk crossed his arms and looked at the ship. From afar he could already see the famous other pirate on the deck of his ship. "I can trust you, right?", the warlord asked her. Perona was irritated by the question. She thought that after all the answer to this question was clear. She looked up at him. "Of course. You know that", she answered, "Why do you ask?" He was silent for a short moment. The ship was getting closer and it was almost already at the docks. "You will see", Mihawk said, "Let's go meet that annoying pirate." Perona nodded, stood up and turned to go into the direction of the castle. As she turned, Mihawk did the same and put his right hand between her shoulder blades as to guide her some steps into the right direction. It was like his body was disconnected from his brain. He did not think about it as made that little gesture and quickly withdraw his arm. 'What the...?', he thought, surprised about why he would do such a thing. He remained calm, as if nothing happened and walked to the entrance of the castle with Perona. There they stood, their backs to the door, and waited for the other pirates to arrive. Some minutes later Zoro joined them again. Right in time as only about 100 meter in front of them the familiar silhouettes of the red-hair pirates appeared. Zoro was looking forward to the meeting. He had learned a lot about the pirate emperor and his crew from Luffy, who spoke very highly of them. And if he was informed correctly, then Usopp's father was also part of his crew. Perona on the other side was nervous. It was also her first time meeting the legendary pirate emperor. She had heard a lot of rumours. Most of them could not be more contradictory. To some Shanks was a cold-hearted bastard, killing everyone on sight. To others Shanks was a goofy no-do-gooder who could not be taken seriously. But all of them stated on thing: He was strong and he deserved to be a pirate emperor.

Then the moment came, as Shanks and his crew stood in front of the three people. As intimidating as they were. Shanks was a tall man with broad shoulders, muscles decorating his openly-shown chest and he was staring at the inhabitants of the castle. Next to him on his right side his second in command Ben Beckman was casually

smoking a cigarette with a bored expression in his face. On his other side Yasopp and Lucky Lou, the two other most known crewmembers, stood firmly beside their captain. Mihawk crossed his arms and looked as neutral as always, not nearly impressed by the appearance of the pirate emperor. The two parties looked at each other expectantly, waiting for the first one to make a move. To Perona's surprise it was a warm greeting from Shanks. "Hawkeye, you somber, old son of a gun", he grinned broadly, "I leave you alone for a year and a half and you got yourself a student and a girl. Look at the progress you made." Shanks went straight to his friend and gave him a short, manly hug. "And you are still half the man you used to be", Mihawk replied, returning the friendly and strong pat on the back. When Shanks let go of him, he turned to the green haired man, and offered his hand in a greeting: "You must be Zoro. I heard a lot about you." "It is an honour to meet you", Zoro replied friendly. After that it was Perona's turn. "And this lovely young lady must be Perona", Shanks turned to her, took her right hand in his and kissed the back of her hand. On that she blushed lightly, not expecting him to be so gentleman-like towards her. "I was curious to meet the woman who softened that stupid swordman enough to let her become his partner in crime." Perona was overwhelmed by the friendliness of the emperor and not able to say anything. Mihawk, who had noticed her behaviour, answered instead of her: "I see you still have the ability to make anyone uncomfortable." On that remark, Shanks looked at the warlord and laughed loudly. "We need to celebrate our reunion!", the pirate emperor stated, "But first we have to talk business." Mihawk nodded and ordered Zoro to bring Shanks crew to the wine cellar. "We will go to the dining room and join you afterwards", the warlord added. As Perona wanted to join Zoro and the others, she was stopped by Mihawk. "You can stay." Shanks and Ben looked at each other with knowing gazes. Perona nodded hesitant and followed the warlord, Shanks and Ben into the dining room.

In the room, Mihawk took four glasses from the shelf and a full bottle of wine and poured each one of them a drink. Then they took a seat at their usual places when they had meetings like this. Mihawk sat on the chair that on one side of the table he occupied most of the time. Shanks sat at the opposite end of the large table and next to him was Ben. Perona decided to take the seat directly next to the warlord. "It is unfamiliar seeing someone else in this round. You are quite the loner", Shanks stated smiling and sipped some of his wine, "Though it is nice having some female company here." "I trust her", was Mihawk's simple answer to that. Shanks nodded, lowered his glass and furrowed his brows. "In your last letter you mentioned the reverie taking place again and you wanted to speak to me about it", the pirate emperor began, "What's the matter?" Hawkeye leaned back in his chair, his glass of wine in his left hand. "Rumour has it, that after what happened with Crocodile and Doflamingo, the world government wants to abolish the warlord system." That statement made everyone look at Mihawk in surprise. "We come here and the first thing you do is drop a bomb like that", Shanks admitted, "How can you be sure about this?" "In the last meeting between the warlords and the marines some of the lower ranked officers were chatting", Mihawk answered, "Fujitora never was a friend of the warlord system. I do not doubt him pushing the matter." "What?", Perona was shocked to hear that, "Why would they do that? At least now they have some control over seven feared pirates and their crews. They would give that up to hunt them down again?" Mihawk turned to Perona. "It is not like we are their lapdogs. We still do precisely what we want and in return we head out to finish some jobs for the marines." "But it would also mean, that they will spark the anger of the warlords. More reason for them to go

after the marines.” “I guess in their heads it sounds logic: Abolish the warlord system and kill all the former warlords”, Ben joined the discussion, “Seems like they forget that the people behind will fight back.” Shanks, who watched the discussion silent, added: “Loosing the warlord system will also mean that we have one information source less for our little project.” On that remark Perona looked irritated from Shanks to Mihawk and back: “What project?” Mihawk made an approving hand gesture to Shanks to allow him to explain. The pirate emperor nodded and proceeded: “You know – when the two of us were barely teenager, Mihawk and myself became rivals. We always fought against each other to test, who was stronger. And we made a promise to each other, that we will never drift away from the right path.” “Right path?”, Perona interrupted Shanks. “To keep innocent people out of our business as pirates.” She nodded at that explanation, then Shanks went on. “During that time neither one of us was really known yet. When we met on an island in the south blue that one time, we saw high ranked marines making deals with the sort of pirates we despised. So - we investigated it a bit and found out that this was not the only case. High ranked marines are corrupted by bad pirates – and when I say high ranked than I mean admiral level.” Perona’s eyes widened on that statement. “But we did not have enough proof and we did not know who we could trust there. So Hawkeye and myself made a deal after that: We wanted to put an end to the bribery. I became a pirate emperor so that we can stretch out to the pirates with influence and Mihawk became a warlord, controlling the members of the warlord system and getting contacts in the marines. And right now? We are close to bring them to fall.” Listening to the whole story made Perona speechless. She took a sip of her red wine and stared in front of her. She needed to process the things Shanks has told her right now. “Loosing the regular contact to the marine is a problem”, the pirate emperor mentioned directed to Mihawk, “Is there anyone we can trust on their side to contact, while the warlord system is still active?” Hawkeye nodded on that question: “I have contacted Garp and he knows what we are doing. He will work on this from the inside.” “That’s good.” Afterwards Shanks informed Mihawk about the latest deals he had proof of and they decided to provide this information to Garp already.

When they finished this topic Shanks looked between Perona, who was still sitting in silence and sipping her wine, and Mihawk. “There is another topic that I want to address”, the pirate emperor started. The warlord drank from his glass and waited for him to go on. “I am sure you have heard of the rumour about Gecko Moria.” Perona’s head shot up at the mentioning of the name of her former captain. “WHAT?”, she shouted. Shanks watched her in surprise until Mihawk interfered. “I do”, he admitted calmly, “She doesn’t.” Perona looked at the warlord in shock. “You knew and did not see any need to inform me?!”, she shouted angry. Then it all made sense to her: The evening when they talked about her crew. “Was that the reason you asked me the other day, if I would go back if possible?” Mihawk simply nodded. “Why did you not tell me?”, she asked, feeling a bit betrayed. Perona was true in telling him she wanted to stay. The least she thought was that he would give her the information if there were news on her former crew. Was he not trusting her enough? “News these days are not always what they seem like”, Mihawk explained, “I did not want to raise the topic until I was completely sure.” Perona crossed her arms in front of her and pouted. “Ass”, she mumbled almost non-audible. Shanks watched them and became a bit uncomfortable to be the reason the two of them were arguing. Hawkeye focused on the pirate emperor again and asked: “But you know more than just the rumour from the newspaper. What is it?” “I heard from a reliable source that he is reaching out to

his former crewmembers.”

Perona’s face fell. She could not believe what she has gotten herself into. She thought that allying with Mihawk as a warlord, who was not pleased by her former captain, was the biggest thing she could expect. After the day the woman had today, she knew better. First: Perona met the famous pirate emperor Shanks to learn, that he was friends with Mihawk. Then she was told that they were in fact scheming together to expose corrupt marines. Not only them but other allies as well. And the last big topic: Gecko Moria might be still alive. This triggered her the most. What if he really came back and wanted to have her join his crew again - which of course she would deny -? Perona was screwed.

## Kapitel 7: Keep her safe

Shanks and his crew stayed on Kuraigana for three days. In the evenings they were always having a big feast together. Drinking and talking about adventures they experienced and battles they have fought. During daytime the pirate emperor offered to support Zoro and Perona in their training. He knew Luffy well and wanted to assist him and his friends to get stronger. Shanks has seen the potential in the young boy he knew from the east blue and knew that one day he would have a real chance in becoming the pirate king.

In regards of Perona Shanks could see that she was important to his friend. To which extend he still needed to find out. He observed it in the very first evening with the looks the two gave each other when they thought the other was not watching. Maybe they were not aware of it yet but the pirate emperor noticed it. He did not have a chance to talk about it with the warlord. In his letters and her introduction Mihawk kept that topic very short. It was not like Mihawk was known to talk much but maybe Shanks could get something out of him. She was in fact the first woman his friend has shown a real interest in, which is why the pirate emperor also spent a lot of time with her to get to know her. The more they hang out with each other he understood, why Mihawk was so fond of her. Perona was a beautiful and strong woman with a good sense of humour and it was easy to like her with her carefree attitude. She was the complete opposite of the warlord and it seemed like she was good for him. In the last days the red-haired pirate has seen a softer side of the warlord. Of course, he was still grumpy and his proud behaviour was as annoying as hell but when it came to Perona he was different – one could say nicer.

“HAHAHA!”, Shanks laughed loudly, “I would have loved to see that dumb look on this old bastard’s face, when he first saw you two there.” The pirate emperor wanted to know all the details of Zoro’s and Perona’s arrival at Kuraigana and if his friend was behaving well. And as Perona was the more talkative one amongst the three inhabitants of Kuraigana, Shanks has asked her to tell him about it. “I guess you could not put together more different people than us”, she chuckled on the memory of their first days together in the castle, “A grumpy man, a second man wanted the first one dead and me in between them. Seems like a fun story for a theatre play.” Shanks laughed again, holding his stomach with his right arm. He loved the idea of his friend being completely annoyed to bear the other two in his home. Sometimes it was hard for the warlord to be in the company of him as his friend. How must it have been with the company of two complete stranger in his castle? The two of them were standing on the large balcony of the castle. From up here, they had a good view on the two swordsmen below them, who were training on armament and conquerors haki. While Shanks was here, they wanted to practise on the topics, where the pirate emperor was also good at and could add some valuable input. “But ... you know” Perona proceeded, “He is not that bad.” That made Shanks silent and he looked at her with questioning eyes. “He could have kicked us out easily”, Perona explained, “But he did not. He is a lot nicer than he appears to be.” Shanks grinned at that statement. “Yes, he is quite a loner, but he means well.” The pirate emperor looked at his friend and shouted “Which is why I really love him!” Mihawk turned his head a little into the direction of Shanks and raised his right eyebrow sceptically at him, wondering what the two of them were discussing. Perona only giggled at his reaction. Then suddenly

Shanks became serious and looked at the horizon. Another ship was approaching the island. "Hey Hawkeye, are you expecting any visitors?", Shanks asked his friend. On that question all of them directed their attention on the approaching ship. As it came closer the design of the ship was better visible. It was not from the marines. The sails were black and the jolly roger consisted of a grey skull, stylised smoke and some kind of bat wings in the background. Perona froze. Even if the ship was completely different, she would always recognise the jolly roger. "This is the jolly roger of the Thriller Bark pirates", she was barely able to say. Perona did not expect him to come here so fast. She was not prepared for a meeting with her former captain and she was unsure what would happen if it ever came to a meeting again. Would he act nice towards her? Would he force her to go with him? Or would he let her go her own way? After she overcame her first shock, she looked between the three men close to her. Shanks and Zoro were focused on the incoming ship. Not doing anything and just waiting for what would happen. Mihawk was also still watching the ship. Then he turned around and looked at her. "I will go down to the docks", he stated without any emotion in his voice or his face, "Do you want to come with me or stay here with the others?" Perona was debating that question in her head. She did not want to appear weak and Mihawk should not be the one to sort out her problems. But she was frightened. What if Gecko Moria was angered with her? Either way. She could not simply stay behind. She let out an exhale and floated down to Mihawk. "I'm coming with you", she said. Hawkeye nodded and together they went to the shore where Gecko Morias crew was currently docking their ship.

Mihawk and Perona waited at the end of the wooden bridge that connected the island with the passage to the ships. The warlord had his arms crossed in front of him and was not very pleased by the unannounced visitor. He was ready to do anything necessary depending on the intentions of the other warlord. Mihawk knew that this day would come he needed to talk with Gecko Moria when he read the information in the newspaper. He did not think that it would be this soon. He side-eyed Perona, who was floating nervously up and down on his left side. "It's going to be alright", he tried to reassure her, but it did not help her to calm down. She was frightened. She had a lot of good memories of her time with the Thriller Bark pirates and she did not wish to end this chapter of her life with a bad afterthought. Perona really liked Gecko Moria and his spooky crew, but now she liked it even better here on Kuraigana. She hesitated to look on top of the ship. When she did, she saw Moria and Dr. Hogback on the ships front. They stood next to each other, as freaky and intimidating as always and evaluated Mihawk and Perona.

"Hey Hawkeye!", Moria shouted from above and grinned, "I like your warm welcome!" Both of them jumped down from their ship and walked towards the two inhabitants of Kuraigana. "Keep that bad mood to yourself. We don't want to cause any trouble." Mihawk simply nodded into the direction of the former warlord. He was still wary on the whole situation. He did not like that weird man and he did not fully trust his words. "MORIA-SAMA!" It was not like Mihawk could ask him, what he wanted, because out of the corner of his eyes he saw Perona flying with full speed towards her former captain and engaging him in a bone-crushing hug. "It is so good to see you!" After the first words spoken between the two warlords she realised, that her fears were never justified. If he really wanted to do her harm, then he could have done that easily without engaging Mihawk directly and without the possibility of Shanks rushing to support. Moria returned the hug tightly. "Hello my dear princess", he smiled at his little girl, "It is good to see you well. Seems like that bastard has taken good care of

you." Mihawk decided to ignore the insult. Perona smiled widely, turned to Dr. Hogback and hugged him too, not so long as Moria. "I am glad that the two of you are ok", she let go of Hogback and stood in front of them, "Have you also found Absalom? Is he ok?" Hogback and Moria looked at each other and they became sad. "We found him", Moria started, "But we were too late. He was already dead when we arrived." "What?", Perona brought her right hand in front of her mouth, shocked by the revelation and tears escaped her eyes. She cried silently and was not able to say anything at the moment. Absalom was a weird guy. He was obsessed with women and every time he met one, he asked her to marry him. He was also a good friend of Perona. Mihawk, who did not want to spend the whole time outside, asked: "Do you want to come inside of the castle?" He was not interested in keeping them on his island, but he knew it would make Perona happy and if something happened, he always had Shanks as backup. Moria looked at Mihawk, slightly surprised about the invitation. "No thank you", the former warlord denied the invitation, "We want to leave as soon as we can." He looked back to Perona. "We just came because we heard that our princess is staying with you, Hawkeye", Moria explained. After a short pause, he added: "And we wanted to ask her, if she wants to join us again." That topic was discussed faster than Mihawk expected. After the friendly reunion he expected, that they would stay for some time and sooner or later address it. All eyes were directed at Perona, who was still trying to get herself together. She looked at Moria, a bit startled about the outright question of her joining the Thriller Bark crew again. "Well ...". She looked on the ground, drawing imaginary circles with her foot on the grass. Perona did not have time yet to think about how to tell Moria the best way, that she did not want to come with him. She did not want to hurt him and knew, that her answer would exactly do this. "I ...", shyly she directed her view from the ground, to Mihawk and to her former captain, "I ... I don't want to come with you." She clasped her hands behind her back. Moria knew that this could happen. He gulped shortly and wanted to reassure himself about one thing that was occupying his mind: "Is that arrogant man forcing you to stay with you?" At that comment Mihawk raised an eyebrow at the former warlord, obviously offended by the accusation he received. He wanted to defend himself, but Perona was faster. "NO!", she interfered before any more wrong ideas came up, "I like it here and Mihawk is really nice. I want to stay here. With him." She knew that the last sentence could be interpreted wrongly. Like she wanted to be with him in more ways than just his partner. And yes, deep down she was already feeling like this – too afraid to admit it out loud. But she decided to ignore it until now and just looked at her former captain with determination. "I owe you much", she added, "but I want to go my own way right now."

There was a short silence between the four of them. "Are you sure of this?", Moria asked a second time. When he set foot on this island, he knew that there was a possibility, that Perona did not want to come with him. He did not want to think of it and wanted to believe, that she would just come with them again like in the good old times. It was hard letting his little girl go. He took her in, when she was still a child and he watched her grow up into the beautiful woman she was. During their time together he would have done anything for her. He soon started to love her like a father would his daughter, which made it harder now to let her go. To leave her with a man, he always despised was even more difficult for him.

Perona nodded and smiled at her father-figure. "Yes. I really want to stay." Moria nodded in understanding. It was time for him to let her live her own life. He reached with his right hand behind his back and into a small back pocket and took out a small

glass. In it was a small dark shadow dancing around. "Then I give this back to you." He opened the glass and the small shadow flew out of it, into the direction of Perona and merged with the rest of her shadow. Moria put the glass away and went to his girl. "I hope that you will be happy here", he pulled her in a tight hug again and enjoyed the moment. It would be the last chance to savour the moment for a very long time. "Just so you know. If you ever decide to come back, we will welcome you with open arms." He hugged her even tighter and a tear escaped his eyes. Perona on her side could not stop but let out all the emotions that were stirred up inside of her. She cried openly. She was relieved about the outcome of the meeting. All her fears were washed away and she could now build up her new life without a bad conscience. Perona was glad, that her almost-father was so understanding with her and so trusting, that he would give her back the part of her shadow. "I will miss you badly", she sobbed, "Thank you for everything." She returned the hug tightly and did not want to let go, until Moria distanced himself from her. He looked at Mihawk and eyed him threatening. "I hope you know, that I give you my greatest treasure", he warned the swordsman, "If I ever hear a word of you harming her, then I will personally be the end of you." Mihawk smirked. As if that man could do anything against him. But he understood, what the former warlord wanted to tell him. He trusted Hawkeye with his beloved daughter. It was now his turn, to watch over her. "Keep her safe", Moria added. Mihawk nodded. If anything happened to her and it was his fault, he would never forgive himself. "I will." Perona was still sniffing beside him. She wiped her tears away with her right hand and smiled happily again. Moria walked back to Dr. Hogback's side and turned one last time to Mihawk and Perona. "One more thing", he started, "Blackbeard is going after devil fruit users." The sword master raised his eyebrow at that statement. Last time he heard of the pirate was during the war on Marineford. There he was already in possession of a devil fruit and it appeared like he had stolen the devil fruit of Whitebeard. "How do you know that?", Mihawk asked. Moria looked at the warlord and answered: "He killed Absalom and took his devil fruit. I suppose he wants all of his fleet commanders to be equipped with one." "Thank you for the warning", Mihawk honestly replied, "We will be careful." Moria nodded. "Goodbye. We will see each other again." He addressed to Perona as a farewell and in his thoughts, he added 'I hope without your boyfriend'. Moria and Dr. Hogback went aboard their ship and the whole time Perona waved after them, crying silently as watching their departure hurt her deeply.

## 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, unfaced 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.

## Kapitel 9: Sneaking Around

Perona's heart stopped and her thoughts ran crazy. Her mind had to play tricks with her, or was this really happening? When she saw that lily above their heads, she thought for a second that she was going to die out of embarrassment about her own thoughts. Her eyes wide open in surprise, as Mihawk kissed her.

Since that one evening they spent together and while she was in the comforting sheets of her bed she sometimes wondered, how it would be like – how it would feel like to share a kiss with him. Now that it happened Perona could not really process it. She blushed heavily. And that ass, oh what a beautiful ass indeed, used her own words against her.

The fact that this was her first kiss did not help her gain some self-confidence. During her time with the Thriller Bark pirates the only contact she had was with her crew, her pets and the zombies. When they were on a tour, they only used the time to fight against others. There was no time for emotions out there. And when she set eye on a beautiful man, she had the glare of her captain and father in her back, that would basically scare everybody away.

Now Perona was caught in this situation, overwhelmed by all the emotions she felt at once. She did not even realise that it was over and that Mihawk gave her some time to collect herself, until he softly caressed her cheek with his thumb. When she met his eyes, face as red as a tomato, his thoughts about her insecurity were confirmed, hoping that he did not go too far. The warlord did not have any problems with showing physical affection. Over the years he had spent some nights with women, whenever he felt like it. But that was the only thing he did. Never had he gotten attached to any of these women or wanted to have a deeper relationship with any of them, being the lone wolf he was.

When Mihawk first saw Perona on his island he found her annoying as hell and they could not have been more different. Over the months he was forced to live with her under the same roof, he saw that she was indeed a strong woman and not the child she displayed at first sight. He grew fond of her and he wanted to get to know her more. For the first time in his adult life, he had the urge to keep a woman by his side and protect her with all means necessary. Mihawk caressed her cheek and decided to give her time and wait for her to say something or make next move.

Perona absentmindedly touched her lips with the fingertips of her right hand and soon realisation hit her. He made the first step and now he was waiting for a response. Mihawk gave her the decision on how this would go on. When she first met the warlord, Perona was scared that this was the last face to see before she died. He was frightening, stoic and emotionless. The complete opposite of what she liked to call cute. When she got to know him better, she learned that he was not one to show his emotions of affections with words. His small gestures were the ones that showed her, he really cared for his surroundings. Being on the receiving end she felt special and sooner or later she began to like him and enjoyed his company.

Perona wanted this. She wanted to kiss him. And she wanted to have him for herself. Seeing him and feeling his touch on her cheek gave her the necessary courage to lift her hands up, her left one on his cheek and her right hand to the back of his head, to pull him towards her and kiss him again. Butterflies spread in her belly as she felt his lips moving against hers upon returning the kiss.

Mihawk put his free hand on her back to pull her closer to him, motivated by her taking the lead in their actions. Perona even went one step further and placed herself on top of his lap with her legs on each side of him, not caring about her blanket that fell to the ground. She wanted to be as close to him as possible and she wanted to feel him against her. They shared a passionate kiss, releasing the pent-up feelings they had.

After some time, not that they were able to tell how long it lasted, Perona moved her head back a little bit and leaned her forehead against his. She tried to slow her racing heart and calm her breathing. If someone would have told her this morning, that today she would have a heated make-out session with Mihawk she would have laughed at him, thinking this could not be possible. Perona smiled and looked at him. His face, usually unfazed and neutral, was soft. His piercing eyes were halfway closed and he tenderly stroke a hair strand behind her ear.

"I wanted to do this for quite some time now", Perona confessed smiling. Mihawk did not know what to say. Not really comfortable with words to express what was going on inside of him. So he did the only thing he could think of right now. Mihawk pushed her head back slightly to be able to give her a light kiss on her forehead and pulled her against his chest. He enjoyed having her cuddled against him. She lay her head onto his shoulder and closed her eyes.

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They agreed to see where their affections would lead them and to keep this relationship, that was still developing, to themselves. Whenever they had time alone, while Zoro was outside training or already in bed, they spent their time together. Sometimes they would simply sit next to each other and talk about their past. In other occasions, when Zoro was out of sight and Mihawk went to go help him with his training, she would give him a quick peck on the cheek with a "Goodbye and don't torture him too much".

One lazy morning, after the three of them finished their breakfast, Zoro went outside to go for a swim. Mihawk told him, that he will soon join him and then they would train his conquerors haki. The owner of the house was reading the newspaper as usual in his chair and drank some tea. Perona waited until Zoro was out of reach and then she floated over to Mihawk and plopped onto. She put her arms around his neck and let her arms wiggle over one of the armrests (and over one of his arms, as he was still holding the newspaper). She gave him a quick kiss accompanied with "I want a proper good morning" and grinned at his raised eyebrow. "Seems like someone is a bit needy this morning", he readjusted his left arm, that was currently stuck under her legs, and lay it on top of her to hold his newspaper again. "Yes – but you like me anyway", Perona laughed.

Another evening they almost got caught by Zoro, who came back from the shower to help out preparing the dinner. Perona was cutting the vegetables and behind her Mihawk was roasting the chicken meat in the pan in front of him, the spatula in right hand. Annoyed, Perona put away the knife and turned around to Mihawk. She crossed her arms and pouted: "Why exactly do I have to make the hard work, while you are just standing there watching the food get ready?" He turned to her and rolled his eyes on her statement. "Because", he went over to her, put his hands on the kitchen counter on each of her side and trapped her between himself and the counter. He lowered his face to her level and whispered into her ear with a low and deep voice: "You would just let the food burn." Perona blushed at the sudden closeness. He chuckled shortly and pulled her to him to give her a passionate kiss. Then he sensed Zoro almost

entering the room and in a swift motion he was back at the frying pan, cooking their food.

When the younger swordsman entered the kitchen, he was irritated to see a heavily blushing Perona cutting zucchinis and tomatoes.

However, there was one line they did not cross since the festival. They had their separate rooms and they never visited the other in their chambers. It is not like they had agreed on something like that or talked in general about sleeping arrangements. The only benefit to this behaviour was that if Zoro accidentally passed one of their rooms, he would not start questioning, why there was not only one but two persons in one bedroom. So, when Mihawk was in his room this evening, ready to go to sleep he did not expect to hear a light knock on his door. He could already tell that it was Perona who was waiting on the other side. The question was: Why? She already went to bed some hours ago and by now she should be soundly asleep. Only dressed in a pair of briefs he opened the door a bit to reveal a shy looking Perona in her long, pink plush pyjama. Quickly she came in and Mihawk closed the door behind her. "What's the matter?" he asked, a bit irritated about her behaviour.

When Perona knocked on the door she believed it was a good idea. She had a bad dream and woke up because of it. When she remembered it, it was hard to suppress the tears that sneaked their way into her eyes. Since Perona and Zoro landed on this island almost two years have passed, which means that Zoro would leave soon to join his crew again. And when he grew even stronger, he would challenge Mihawk again to a duel about the title of the world's strongest swordsman. For a few days she had reoccurring nightmares. She dreamt about a future fight between Zoro and Mihawk and the younger one would win, leaving Mihawk to die. Perona sat up straight in her bed and felt the urge to see him and reassure herself, that he is ok. She floated over to his room and knocked.

When Perona entered the room, she soon recognised that this was a big mistake. She looked at him only for a short time and averted her eyes as she saw him almost naked in front of her. Her cheeks flushed at the look. Perona has never seen him in only his shorts and she tried to avoid to look at him at any cost. She fidgeted with her fingers and tried to form any kind of sentence but the image of his almost naked body kept coming back into her head. She felt like a silly little girl.

Mihawk was not able to interpret her actions so he stepped closer to her, cupped her cheeks with his hands and forced her to look at him. "What is wrong?" Perona inhaled and exhaled shortly and then answered with a low voice: "I had a bad dream." He did not know what to reply. Really – a bad dream? This is the reason for her to come to him at this late hour. Either this was a stupid and childish reason or there was more to it. Mihawk lay his right arm around her and pulled her in a comforting hug. With his left arm he caressed her hair. "Do you want to talk about it?" Perona put her arms around him and snuggled into his chest. She was silent for a few moments then she explained: "Now that Zoro will leave soon I have always the same dream of you losing your fight against him." She hugged him even tighter while telling him and a few silent tears escaped her eyes.

Mihawk wondered why her head came up with these thoughts. The younger swordsman was by far not ready to challenge him into a worthy fight. And even then, he would give him a hard time. As she really seemed to struggle with the topic, he decided to try and lighten up her mood: "You know, even if he becomes a worthy opponent. To challenge me means that this knucklehead would need to find me first. Given his orientation skills this will take forever." Perona chuckled lightly about this

comment.

When she loosened her grip on him to be able to look him in his face, he saw the few tears on her cheeks. Mihawk wiped them away with his left thumb. "Is it ok if I spend the night here?", he heard her ask more mumbling than clear, "I am not sure if I can go to sleep alone right now." "Sure", he nodded.

His bed was large enough for the two of them to easily fit in. Mihawk was the first to lay down on his side. He lay on his side and held up the blanket for Perona. A bit unsure on how to act, she joined him in bed and lay stiff on her back with a good distance between them. What was she supposed to do now? Her thoughts were interrupted and as if Mihawk could hear her inner struggle he lowered the sheets above them and in one movement pulled her towards him with the arm, that was formerly holding the blanket. "Oh my god he is spooning me" She thought and the colour of her cheeks became even darker. How was she supposed to fall asleep, when her back was pressed so close to him?

But Perona could not deny it. To her it felt great and she liked it. The warmth of his body was comfortable and the cuddling gave her the assurance she needed: That he was safe and he was with her. Perona felt completely loved, when his arm, that was not hugging her, caressed her hair and she felt his lips on the back of her head. Her eyes grew heavy due to the late hour and the comfy position she was in. "Sleep tight, princess", was the last thing she heard before she fell asleep in his arms.

## Kapitel 10: Of saying Goodbye and Farewell

"The next time we see each other I will take that title of yours."

"We will see."

Today was the day Zoro reunited with his crew again. Two years have passed since Kuma sent him to Kuraigana and he started his training under Mihawk. The potential, the warlord had seen in him the first time they met, was confirmed by how far his student's skills had improved during his stay.

The three travelled together to the direction of Sabaody Archipelago. Mr. Williams was generous in his offer to borrow them one of his smaller ships, as the coffin boat was not able to carry all of them for this long distance.

The original plan was to send Perona and Zoro alone. He was not needed to accompany them and other things regarding Marine orders required his attention, but a week before they left, Mihawk received a call from Shanks, stating that he will travel to an island close to Sabaody for two reasons:

First: See Luffy and his crew off from the distance.

Second: There was a rumour that Blackbeard wanted to make a move on that island and get in contact with some of the corrupt Marines.

The mentioning of Blackbeard spotted close to Sabaody was reason enough for Mihawk to not let Perona leave on her own, which is why he accepted Shanks' request to meet him at that island.

The coffin boat was attached on the back of the ship with a large rope. They brought it with them, as Mihawk wanted to leave them a bit earlier. "I will join you after I finished my business with Shanks", Mihawk said, addressed to Perona and jumped on his boat. He gave his student one last look, who watched him with his arms crossed and a grin on his face. Then he looked at Perona who waved at him with a smile. He took a seat on his throne-like chair and headed into the direction of the island.

The Red Force was the first thing Mihawk saw when he arrived at the harbour. It was by far the biggest ship docked on this small island and recognisable without the well-known jolly roger. When he reached the harbour with his boat, he hopped onto the bridges with easiness. Knowing his friend and his crew, the tavern was the first place he would look for them.

The village was quiet and peaceful. Some people walked through the streets to enjoy the light summer breeze or went shopping. There was nothing close to suspicious around here. Was Shanks information about Blackbeard really correct?

The tavern was close to the harbour and when Mihawk entered, he already saw the red-haired Yonko with his most trusted crewmates seated on a round table. Of course, Shanks already noticed his friend when he entered, which is why he shouted a loud: "Hey Hawkeye! How nice of you to join us."

Mihawk rolled his eyes at that comment. "It's not like you gave me much of a choice." "Come on, old friend", Shanks grinned, "Sit down with us." Mihawk took Yoru out of the mounting of his jacket and leaned it onto his chair, to be able to sit down. "Tell me what you know."

Shanks slid over a small empty sake cup and filled it with the bottle on the table. "Drink something." "We are here to talk business", Mihawk replied flatly, but accepted the cup and drank the sake.

"You know that Blackbeard is after the devil fruits", Shanks started, "You told me that

Gecko Moria already confirmed it. But what we did not know is that he is selling the ones, he does not want to himself, to the Marines for a high price." "To the Marines?", Mihawk asked, "Why would he work for them?" "In return they give him free reign in his piracy", Shanks answered. "Which is kind of what we have for the warlords, except he is not one of them." "Exactly!", the red-haired pirate confirmed. "And let me guess: Only selected higher ups are aware of that." Shanks nodded. "My last information was, that he is currently snooping around the Sabaody Archipelago to look for the next devil fruits." "Do you think he knows, that the Straw Hats are reuniting these days?" "Possible. But how would he know?" "On our way we passed many Marine ships. At first, I was wondering, if this was only a coincidence. If the Marines know about today, then Blackbeard should have that information too."

"Hey handsome", the waitress came over with a serving tray below her arm and a small notepad in her hand, "If I were you, I would leave Blackbeard alone. He is a creepy fellow." She pulled out a pen from the pocket of her skirt and looked at them again. "Do you want something else to drink?"

"What do you know about Blackbeard", Mihawk asked, ignoring the question from the waitress. She shrugged her shoulders in disinterest. "Not much. He was here yesterday with a neatly dressed guy and kept on blabbering how he wanted to go after some monkey." "A monkey?", Shanks raised his eyebrow and looked over at Mihawk, "She means Luffy. He knows that they are there. His crew has four known devil fruit users."

"Shit", Mihawk cursed, "Then he is already there."

Perona.

Mihawk stood up and put Yoru on his back. Even if he was only one island away - how could he be such an idiot to let her go on her own, when Blackbeard was around. He could have assumed that he would be after the Straw Hats. And when they left before they made contact, then Perona was all to herself. If Blackbeard found out that she was on Sabaody as well he would make a move on her.

"Meet me at Sabaody", Mihawk said while walking to the door. He needed to get there as fast as possible.

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Zoro's destination was Shakky's Rip-off Bar. He did not know, if the Sunny was still where they left it two years ago or where the crew would meet, so this was the best starting point. Perona agreed to accompany him, until they were close enough for him to not get lost again.

It took them more time to get to the bar than any normal person would need. Even if it was only a straight way with a stoned path and signs directing to the bar, Zoro had his problems with his orientation. On various occasions Perona needed to use her hollows to block him from wandering off.

As they stood only 50 metres away from the bar, Perona could be sure, that he would find the house. She turned to him and smiled. "I guess this is goodbye then." Zoro nodded. "As much as I hate to admit it, but I guess I will miss you, mosshead", Perona laughed, "Take care and make sure to become stronger. I want to hear a lot of stories when we see each other again." "You can bet on that", Zoro ruffled Perona's hair and she pouted on that action, tried to push his hand away and muttered something like Don't! You idiot. "Don't annoy that old man too much", he added, "We don't want him to kick you out." "Oh", Perona smiled knowingly, "I think we will be just fine." Zoro raised an eyebrow on that comment, but decided to leave it at that. She gave him a quick hug and grinned. "Goodbye." "See you, ghost girl." He turned and went in the

direction of the bar. She watched him go and only left when she saw him step inside – just in case.

“So, what do I do now?”, Perona brought her hand together behind her back. She did her job and Mihawk told her he would come here. “Might as well use the time for a shopping trip.” She giggled to herself. Perona headed back into the direction of the town. The way was nice and lead along the cliff, where one had nice view over the sea. That was the moment she saw two large pirate ships. The first one under the jolly roger of the Thriller Bark Pirates and the second one she could not identify. Not that she cared, when she saw the first ship.

“Moria-sama is here!”, Perona exclaimed in joy. Now she had a new target. She wanted to find him and say hello, tell him about everything that had happened since their last encounter and listen to what he had experienced since then. She used the bit of observation haki Mihawk has shown her to check, if Moria was on his ship, but was not able to sense him there, which meant, that he was already on the island. She focused on the direction of the village and there he was: Not far away from her and running into her direction.

Moria must have sensed her too, why would he run into her direction, if he hadn't? Perona turned into the direction and waited, looking forward to their reunion.

He just came over a small hill and looked terrible. She paled. “MORIA-SAMA!”, she shouted and flew over to him as fast as she could.

Moria never felt worse. His whole body was covered in bruises, cuts and other kind of wounds and he was glad he made it this far. He just hoped that he got rid of his persecutor. When the former warlord heard his name, he looked up and saw Perona some metres ahead. “Shit. What is she doing here?” He could not believe his eyes. Were the rumours true? Was she here because the Straw Hats were back together? And where was that stupid Hawkeye. Why did he leave her alone?

Too many thoughts were in his head, as his ‘daughter’ plunged into him and hugged him. “I am so glad to see you!”, Moria winced on the sudden contact. Perona let go of him only to inspect his wounds. “What happened?” That brought him back out of his stupor. Moria grabbed her by the arms, stared at her with a stern face and said: “We need to leave as fast as possible! Blackbeard and his crew are here.” “WHAT?”, Perona asked. “He killed Hogback and now he is after m...”

A gunshot ringed in her ears.

Moria's eyes widened in front of her. He coughed up blood, that fell on her dress.

Then his lifeless body slumped down, halfway falling onto Perona, who barely caught him but the size of his body made her stumble backwards and fall to the ground, with his upper body on her angled legs.

She froze in her motions. For a second the world stood still and Perona tried to process what had just happened. One second, she was happy to see her old captain again and the next she had his limp body in her arms. Perona looked at him and saw a big gunshot wound in his back. Absentminded she touched it and felt the warm blood on her fingers. She shook her head, tears formed in her eyes and tried to wake Moria up without success.

“Zeeehahahahaha”, a loud laughter out of the direction Moria came from, “Today is a lucky day. So many weaklings that want to give me their devil fruits.” Perona looked over and saw Blackbeard walking casually towards her.

Perona growled. She was furious. She freed her legs from Morias body and stood up. “How dare you!”, Perona yelled at him, which only made him laugh a second time.

Perona knew that she was no match for him. Blackbeard was by far stronger and more

skilled compared to her. But running was also not an option for her.

Where should she run to?

Zoro and his friends could already be on their ship, she did not know where it was located.

Mihawk was not here.

Blackbeard would be able to find her in the woods, Moria already showed that he was not able to escape.

And her ship was not fast enough to outrun his.

The only possibility was to fight him and delay her death.

Perona unsheathed her sword and flew towards him. He was fast enough to draw his own sword and block her attack. Their swords clashed.

Blackbeard laughed again. "Zeehahaha. Let's play a bit before I kill you."

Their swords clashed again, and again, and again. With the last strike he pushed with enough force, strengthened by armament haki to push her about 20 metres away. This bought him enough time to draw his gun and aim at her. She already flew at him again, when he fired his gun three times at her.

Perona was able to dodge the first bullet. The second bullet striped her left arm which made her stumble and the third one hit the left side of her thigh. She fell to the ground and yelled in pain, as she got hit by the third bullet.

"You are weak", Blackbeard stated flatly. He walked over to her - slow but steady.

Perona looked at her thigh and inspected the wound. It was only a flesh wound but it hurt like hell. She hissed, as she touched it. Then she focused again on her opponent, as he came closer. "Negative hollow!", Perona, still on the ground, raised her hand and released a hollow. It flew over to Blackbeard only to bounce off of his chest. His armament haki making it impossible for it to go through. "Shit", she cursed and sent another hollow. Again, without success.

Perona floated upwards, not wanting to put pressure on her leg. She raised her sword again and attacked him one more time.

Blackbeard easily dodged her attack with his sword and in the same swift movement he grabbed her neck and held her high above ground.

"You are as weak as your captain", he said in disgust, "No wonder your crew died so fast."

As Perona was grabbed by him, she let her sword fall to the ground and grabbed his arm with both hands. She tried to wiggle free, as the air was forced out of her lungs due to the pressure on her throat. She kicked with her legs, not reaching him. Desperate to get free from his grip.

"Pathetic", with his free hand Blackbeard pressed his fingers into her wound on her leg, causing her to cry in pain. "Does it hurt?" He laughed.

Black dots formed in her vision due to the pain. Behind him she could - more guess than - see other men coming towards them. All of them with a shabby look and laughing at the scene. It was his crew.

Shit.

Was this the way she was going to die? Even her former captain was not able to stop Blackbeard. How could she survive this situation.

She closed her eyes.

Defeated.

A tear ran down her cheek, as she tried again to break free.

They say that in your final moments your life passes by. You are reminded of the good and bad things of your life. See the faces of the loved ones.

For Perona, the only thing she felt in this moment was a huge wave of air, that separated her from her opponent and made her fall to the ground.

Wait. What?

She opened her eyes, as another person jumped right in front of her.

Mihawk.

"Hands off of her", he was furious. He stood with her back towards her, facing Blackbeard. Yoru in his right hand only waiting for the next move.

Perona felt relief inside of her. He was here. She was no longer alone. And she was alive.

"Hawkeye. How nice of you to join us", Blackbeard said, "We were just having a good talk."

"Retreat", Mihawk threatened.

"Do you believe you are in a position to make demands?", Blackbeard laughed again, "Do you really think that you have a chance against me and my crew?"

Mihawk stared at Blackbeard and at the crew in his background. And evil grin on his face. "Yes."

A short pause.

Blackbeard looked at him, startled by his self-confidence.

"But I am not alone."

What Blackbeard did not notice until now, was that Shanks and his most trusted crew members stood a bit away and watched the whole scenery in front of them.

"If you want a fight, then you can have it", Mihawk said, "You will lose."

Blackbeard ground his teeth. That was not how he had planned this day to end. Originally, his focus was on the Straw Hats. He had gotten the information of his arrival on Sabaody from his Marine contacts. When he saw Moria, it was a nice addition to his plan and Peronas devil fruit would have been just the cherry on top.

A fight with Mihawk, Shanks and his crew was nothing he desired. He knew, that combined they were stronger than him.

"You are in luck", Blackbeard stated, "I don't want a big fight. We will leave." With that, he turned, commanded his crew to leave and went back to his ship.

After Mihawk was sure that Blackbeard had left for good, he put Yoru back on his back, turned to Perona and knelt beside her. "Are you ok?", he asked, voice soft and calm now, hiding his inner turmoil.

He blamed himself, as reality hit him hard. If he had interfered only some minutes later, she would be dead. And it was his fault for leaving her on her own while knowing that Blackbeard was around here. He inspected her wounds and his gaze fell onto the large flesh wound on her thigh, that was still bleeding: "We need to put pressure on it to stop the bleeding."

Perona just sat there and watched the confrontation in front of her. She was not able to progress anything at the moment. Her mind was blank. It was over. She looked at Mihawk, as he knelt in front of her. He said something which she did not really understand due to her spacing out. She even forgot the pain, she felt. Glad, that he found her in time.

Perona threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly. She nestled her head into the crook of his neck and enjoyed the contact. "You came", she whispered, relieved. Mihawk loosely put an arm around her. "Of course,", he answered in a similar hushed tone and gave her a comforting kiss on the top of her head, "But we need to treat your leg, before you lose too much blood. Let's get you to the ship." Perona nodded on that statement. She let go of him and tried to stand up, but was interrupted, as

Mihawk put his arms around her upper body and her legs and lifted her to carry her himself. "Just put enough pressure on your leg." Perona hummed in approval. She put one of her arms around his neck to support her to not fall down and the other was pressed on the wound on her thigh.

In the meantime, Shanks had walked over to them: "We will take care of Moria."

Mihawk nodded. "Take him to Kuraigana. We will bury him there."

"We will. Ben and Yasopp will accompany you on your ship."

Both of them knew that Mihawk and Perona would be fine on their own on the little ship if both of them were in perfect condition. With Perona's hurt leg the support from the red-hair pirates was necessary to steer the ship properly. "Thank you."

~\*~

As soon as they were back on the ship, Mihawk and Perona retreated to a small cabin to treat her wounds, while Ben and Yasopp attached the coffin boat on the back of the ship.

It took them five days to get back to and Kuraigana.

The first night Mihawk and Perona did not leave the cabin. When her wounds were treated, all the emotions from the day hit her. The joy of seeing her former captain, his death, her near-death experience. She let it all out, overwhelmed by the events of the day and cried bitterly in Mihawk's arms as they sat on the bed, cuddled under a blanket. He caressed her hair and her back, whispering soft words of comfort, as she could not stop herself from shaking. After a long time of mourning sobbing and crying, she fell asleep in his arms.

When Perona woke up the next day, she still felt the deep loss in her heart, but starting from today, she wanted to be stronger. She could not always hide in a room and cry over the death of her former captain. Moria would not like to see me like this, she told herself. She looked around to see that Mihawk was no longer in the room. She assumed that he was helping Ben and Yasopp. Perona stood up, still wearing her partly torn and dirty from yesterday, and changed her clothing to a simple shirt and a short skirt. She could not wear tights yet, as her wound on her leg still hurt and the bandage needed to be changed regularly. She combed her hair, tied it into two ponytails and exited the room. The sadness was still written all over her face, but helping outside was the first step to getting better.

~\*~

On Kuraigana, on the backside of their castle they prepared a small grave for Moria. While mostly Mihawk, Shanks and Ben prepared the grave and buried the body, Perona was tasked to design the tombstone. As a base she used one of the larger stones from the city ruins and carved Moria's name, date of birth and date of death in it. Below all she added a stylised version of the jolly roger of the Gecko Pirates. The men brought the tombstone to the grave and Perona collected some flowers to add on top.

When they finished the grave, they stood in silence in front of it for some minutes and paid their last respects to the deceased captain and former warlord. A silent tear escaped Perona's eye. She was still sad, that she had lost her father figure but the last days surrounded by friends made her feel better. She smiled lightly, thinking of all the good memories with him, as she took Mihawk's hand in hers for comfort.

~\*~

Shanks and his crew stayed for one more night. They celebrated one more time before they left to their next stop. Together they drank and laughed all night.

The next morning came and Mihawk and Perona accompanied Shanks and his crew to

the shore, where his ship was docked. Perona hugged the pirate emperor and his most trusted friends with a big smile in her face and thanked them for everything they did the last days.

All in all, Perona was happy. When she came to Kuraigana two years ago she would have never imagined her stay to be like this. She may have lost one of the most important persons in her life, but she also gained valuable new friends. And a boyfriend. She giggled to herself, as she side-eyed Mihawk.

They said their goodbyes to each other, but before Shanks left, he could not suppress a "I hope you invite me to your wedding!" with a big grin on his face.

Mihawk rolled his eyes at that statement.

Perona laughed.

They watched their friends set sail and soon, the Red Force disappeared at the horizon.

For the first time, the two of them were alone on this island.

"Now it is just you and me", Perona said.

"Don't drive me mad, woman", he answered.

"Aww. I bet you would like it", she hummed in a sweet voice.

Mihawk grabbed her hand and pulled her to him, planting a kiss on her lips. "Maybe."