

A Warlord and his Princess

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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. Damnit. 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.