

One Piece 631

Chapter 631 -: Meeting the Godfather

"Purple is very charming."

With that, Daren went right back to devouring his food, chewing loudly as if nothing else mattered.

Stussy: "..."

She nearly lost her breath.

That bastard!

Was that supposed to be a compliment? Did I even ask for one?

And that line—how half-hearted could it be?

Stussy took a long drag from her cigarette, her chest rising and falling in frustration. The confidence and atmosphere she had so carefully crafted just moments ago had been shattered by Daren's unfiltered rudeness.

No. She wouldn't let it end like this.

She gritted her teeth, face tight with unwillingness.

She'd come here to savor the taste of victory—how had this turned into a feast for that glutton?

"Are you done eating yet?!"

Her voice turned cold, the frost in her eyes as sharp as her arched brows.

Daren blinked, then quickly tore through a roasted beef shank, tossed the bone aside, and let out a loud burp.

"Well, I guess I'm halfway there."

He wiped his hands with a napkin, lit a cigar, and leaned back with a grin.

"My esteemed Queen, getting a little impatient, are we?"

"But speaking of which..."

He gave her a playful wink.

"You do look stunning tonight."

"Hmph."

Stussy huffed and finally relaxed her raised brows.

She waved off the remaining waitstaff and dancers, signaling them to clear out.

Once the grand, echoing banquet hall was empty save for the two of them, she finally let out a small laugh, the corner of her lips curving in pride.

"Say, Vice Admiral Daren, haven't you forgotten something?"

"Forgotten something?"

Daren blinked innocently.

"You invited me. I didn't think I was supposed to bring anything."

Still playing dumb, huh?

Stussy narrowed her eyes at his flawless act. She twirled a lock of hair around her finger, her smirk turning razor-sharp.

"Giggling like that, Vice Admiral Daren... so forgetful, aren't you? Already forgot about our little..."

She leaned in slightly, her curves pressing against the edge of the table, drawing the eye to every deliberate line of her body. Her lips parted, voice low and honeyed, and she winked.

"...bet."

With her seductive tone and suggestive posture, the air between them thickened, heavy with tension and heat.

She was a master of charm—dangerously so. And with her natural beauty, poised demeanor, and tonight's stunning dress, she radiated allure like no other.

Beneath the shimmering chandeliers, she was mesmerizing.

"The bet..."

Daren paused, then frowned.

"If I remember correctly, the terms were that the final roster of the Shichibukai would be determined by my nominations."

"Stussy, of the six confirmed so far—Douglas Bullet, Gecko Moria, Crocodile, Dracule Mihawk, and Fisher Tiger—every single one was my pick."

"So even by the bet's rules..."

His gaze sharpened.

"I've already won, haven't I?"

"Giggle, giggle... not necessarily."

Stussy laughed sweetly, her eyes glinting with the thrill of a coming victory.

"Wasn't the sixth member just finalized?"

She stared straight at him, savoring the shift in his expression, her tongue flicking across her lips as she purred,

"Honorable Vice Admiral Daren, I'd like to introduce you to a friend."

"What do you say?"

Daren's face darkened, his whole demeanor turning guarded.

"I don't need any more friends."

Stussy's smile widened.

Yes. That flicker of alarm, that shadow of doubt in his eyes.

Perfect.

And this was only the beginning...

You have no idea that I've already allied with your enemy. That I risked everything to push his nomination before the Five Elders, and made sure he was selected as a Shichibukai.

You'd never guess I invited him to this very dinner.

Just so I could win this bet—beautifully, gloriously—and step right over you.

Watching Daren's grim, unsettled expression, Stussy felt a rush of triumph swell in her chest.

Finally... finally, she had the upper hand over this damned man.

She would reclaim every ounce of pride and dignity she'd lost.

A thrill surged through her, setting her cheeks ablaze with a flush of excitement. Her body trembled faintly, her long legs instinctively drawing together.

This feeling...

It was almost euphoric.

"Giggle, giggle, this isn't up to you anymore."

Stussy rose gracefully, her elegant purple fishtail dress blooming like a violet. She looked down from above at the Marine Vice Admiral seated across from her, extending the hand holding her lady's cigarette ever so slightly.

"Now, let me give Vice Admiral Daren a formal introduction to my partner..."

A teasing curve lifted the corner of her eyes as her lips bloomed into a mischievous smile.

As her words fell, the side door of the banquet hall slowly opened, pushed by the man in the black suit.

A defiant figure stepped out, hands in his pockets, walking with an air of insolence. A sinister smirk played on his lips, his presence flickering in and out of the corridor's shadows.

The moment she spoke, Stussy's captivating gaze locked onto the Vice Admiral.

Come on, Daren...

I've been preparing for this reveal for so long.

Let me savor the look on your face when you're utterly defeated!

As the figure came closer, his footsteps grew more distinct.

The smile tugging at Stussy's lips became harder to contain. Her whole body trembled with anticipation.

Almost...

Victory is almost mine...

With a proud lift of her hand and a delighted laugh, she grandly declared:

"The honorable Shichibukai... the 'Flamingo'—Donquixote Doflamingo!"

Clack.

The blond youth finally stepped into the banquet hall.

His pink feather coat radiated wild arrogance, and under the lights, his golden short hair gleamed like a crown.

He looked at Stussy first—then paused noticeably when his gaze fell on Daren.

"Fufufufufu... So that's what this is..."

Doflamingo suddenly gave a chilling smile.

"That's right."

Stussy giggled charmingly.

"Doflamingo, this is the friend I wanted to introduce you to—Vice Admiral of Marine Headquarters—"

"I know him."

Doflamingo cut her off with a sinister grin, his tone carrying an odd amusement.

Stussy froze.

Something felt wrong.

Because the tension, gloom, and hostility that had clouded Daren's face all vanished in an instant.

What replaced them was a look of inscrutable mockery.

This was...

An overwhelming sense of confusion and dread slammed into Stussy's heart like a tidal wave.

"Doffy."

Daren spoke slowly, with a smile, and casually raised his right hand.

D-Doffy?

That nickname...

Stussy's expression shifted, and she instinctively stepped back.

Could it be... the relationship between these two wasn't as antagonistic as she had assumed?

But before she could react, the new Shichibukai—the man brazen enough to rob the Heavenly Tribute and snatch spoils from the World Government and the Five Elders—gave a nod.

Then, step by step, he walked up to Daren.

He dropped to one knee, and with the utmost respect...kissed the back of Daren's hand.

"Godfather-sama."

He bowed his head and said.

G-Godfather-sama!?

Stussy was struck as if by lightning.

Her mind went completely blank!

Chapter 632: How Should I Punish You?

What... what the hell is going on!?

Stussy staggered back two steps, as if struck by lightning. Her wide eyes stared in disbelief, red lips slightly parted, and the color drained from her face.

Her complexion grew paler by the second.

"N-No way..."

She swallowed hard, blinking rapidly—only to realize, in despair, that this wasn't some illusion or a bad dream... It was really happening.

That Doflamingo, the one who sneered even at the Five Elders—

That Doflamingo, who dared to plunder the Heavenly Tribute and made a complete mockery of the World Government—

That Doflamingo who arrogantly declared he would swallow the entire New World underground...

Was now kneeling submissively before Daren!?

On one knee. Kissing the back of his hand. The highest ceremony of mafia loyalty.

Godfather... Godfather!?

Impossible!!

Donquixote Doflamingo is a Celestial Dragon!

Even if he lost the right to live in Mary Geoise, the blood of the world's nobility still flows through his veins. He's a god among mortals on this sea!

That bloodline is precisely why he dares to challenge the World Government—even the Five Elders!

And yet now...

That noble, mighty "god" was kneeling willingly before a Marine... and calling him "Godfather"!?

Stussy could hardly believe her eyes.

What on earth did that bastard Rogers Daren do to bring someone as arrogant and unyielding as Doflamingo to heel!?

A Celestial Dragon, recognizing a common human as his "godfather"...

That had to be a joke.

No one would believe it even if you told them.

Just then, Daren chuckled and began speaking slowly.

"Right... I forgot to introduce him to you earlier, Stussy."

He glanced at her, a half-smile tugging at his lips.

"I took in a godson back in North Blue. Hmph... he wasn't exactly a standout, so I never mentioned him to anyone."

"But lately, the brat's been working hard. Even managed to become one of the Shichibukai... Makes me proud, as his godfather."

He suddenly patted his forehead, feigning apology.

"Look at me—my memory really isn't what it used to be."

"You probably knew all along, right? I mean, he wouldn't have gotten that title without a little help from you..."

Stussy trembled again. Her face alternated between red and pale, chest heaving.

"You... you... you..."

The Vice Admiral's casually spoken words pierced her heart like an invisible blade.

She bit down on her lower lip—so hard it bled.

"Well then, Doffy... Let me introduce you properly."

Daren shook his head and gently helped Doflamingo to his feet, smiling.

"You've crossed paths before, sure—but only as business partners."

"This lady here is Ms. Stussy, Queen of the Pleasure District. She's a very dear friend of mine."

Doflamingo grinned, excitement flashing in his eyes, and gave a refined bow like a nobleman.

"Fufufufu... It's a pleasure to see you again, Ms. Stussy."

Daren beamed, twisting the knife a little deeper.

"Come to think of it, we owe her quite a bit..."

"If not for her arranging such a lavish banquet, we wouldn't have had the chance to catch up."

The moment those words landed...

Stussy looked as if she'd been struck by a thunderbolt. Her face turned ghostly white.

She stared at everything around her.

The luxurious banquet hall, the meticulously prepared gourmet spread, the performances by kabuki actors...

Doflamingo's appointment as Shichibukai, her personal risk in front of the Five Elders...

The hair, the makeup, the custom-tailored gown she paid a fortune for, all for this night...

...It all felt like a cruel dream.

Stussy's vision blurred, her pupils losing focus.

Everything around her seemed to come alive in that moment—laughing at her in sharp, mocking glee.

"It's impossible..."

"Absolutely impossible..."

She muttered to herself, her eyes lifeless, unable to accept the reality before her.

Especially when she thought back to the smug expression and confident smile she'd worn since the beginning of the banquet... an overwhelming sense of humiliation flooded her chest.

Her ten delicate toes, encased in those crystal-clear peep-toe heels, curled tightly with shame.

"Oh, it's very possible."

Daren let out a sigh, his tone tinged with mock guilt.

"After all, I'm a very compassionate man."

"And everyone knows—I'm great at making friends."

"Whether it's Marines, pirates, government officials, or even Celestial Dragons... everyone seems to enjoy being friends with me."

He tilted his head slightly, giving Stussy a deliberate wink.

"Otherwise, how could we have ended up such close, friendly... partners—ah, no, friends... right?"

Stussy's expression twisted.

Looking at that infuriatingly smug grin on Daren's face, she suddenly clenched her fists and hissed through gritted teeth.

"So this was all your setup!?"

She turned to Doflamigo, eyes blazing with killing intent.

"You played along with me from the start!?"

Doflamigo spread his arms, his smirk cold and twisted.

"Fufufufu... Don't blame me for this."

"You were the one who proposed the partnership, remember?"

Stussy froze.

She opened her mouth, but no rebuttal came out.

Yes...

She had brought this all upon herself.

The schemes and ambitions she'd been so proud of—seen through Daren's eyes, they were nothing more than a clown's petty theatrics.

Wait...

"So... having Doflamingo raid the Heavenly Tribute—that was your idea too?!"

She stared at Daren in disbelief.

He shrugged.

"I had no choice. The Five Elders didn't want Doffy to become a Shichibukai, so I had to take more... drastic steps."

"You know me—I'm a man of peace."

Stussy stood stunned.

So that's how it was...

What an act...

This man had fooled everyone...

Not just her—but the Marines, the World Government, even the Five Elders had been wrapped around his finger.

She finally saw the whole picture.

A dark, indescribable weight pressed down on her—helplessness, despair—cloaking her heart like a storm cloud.

Seeing her frozen in place, Daren smiled inwardly.

Time to claim the spoils of victory.

"Doffy, head out for now."

Daren's eyes gleamed with amusement.

"I have something... important to discuss with Ms. Stussy."

Doflamingo gave Daren a look, then glanced at the clearly shaken Stussy. He grinned, gave a small nod.

"As you wish, Godfather-sama."

He shoved his hands into his pockets again and swaggered out of the banquet hall.

Bang—the doors closed with a heavy thud.

Now, in the golden grandeur of the hall...

Only the two of them remained, facing each other from across the room.

"W-What are you planning...?"

Stussy watched as the Marine Vice Admiral stepped toward her, heartbeat out of control, a flush creeping across her panicked face.

She backed up unsteadily—until her hips bumped into the banquet table, arching her figure into a full, pronounced curve.

In a gasp, a large, rough hand suddenly wrapped around her slender waist.

Her breath hitched. A wave of strong masculine scent overwhelmed her senses.

Before she could say a word, another hand lifted her chin playfully.

"So... looks like I won the bet."

"Tell me... how should I punish you?"

The Vice Admiral's gaze was deep, filled with teasing menace, and his palm roamed without restraint, brushing against the delicate ripples of her purple evening gown.

"...My Queen."

Chapter 633: What a Strange Switch

"P-Punishment?"

Stussy's voice trembled as she instinctively turned her face away, unable to meet Daren's deep, penetrating gaze.

As his hand began to roam freely, her body shuddered, a wave of tingling numbness washing over her like a current. Her legs grew weak beneath her.

Even though this wasn't the first time something like this had happened—and the damned man before her clearly knew what he was doing—Stussy couldn't shake the feeling that this time was different.

From absolute confidence at the beginning... to utter defeat now.

She hadn't yet adjusted to the shift. Everything had changed too fast, leaving her disoriented and... off balance.

"That's right..."

Daren gently stroked her smooth, pale cheek, his smile full of teasing amusement.

"What was the bet again?"

He pretended to think.

"Do you still remember?"

The bet...

Stussy's face flushed a deep red. A flood of embarrassment and shame surged in her chest, and she squirmed involuntarily.

Was she really about to accept defeat and say that humiliating word?

No!

She couldn't lose like this!

Suddenly, Stussy gritted her teeth, and the air around her shifted sharply. A fierce determination flickered in her eyes.

Whoosh!

A pair of slender black bat wings burst from her shoulder blades, ripping through her evening gown and unfurling wide.

Her soft golden eyes turned blood-red, and sharp vampire fangs sprouted from her mouth!

With a powerful flap of her wings, she broke free from Daren's grasp in an instant.

A wild wind swept through the banquet hall, sending plates of exquisite food flying. Dishes crashed to the floor and shattered everywhere.

At the same time, a long, thin black tail slipped out from beneath her skirt, swaying in midair with an arrow-shaped tip.

Ribbons of phantom-like black flames wrapped around her body, giving the floating Queen of the Pleasure District an aura of mystery, nobility, allure—and danger.

"Daren, I'll never submit to you!!"

She glared at him, gritting her teeth, as she unleashed the powers of her newest breakthrough.

"Don't think you're the only one on this sea who can grow stronger. I'm not who I used to be!"

Vampire: Perfect Form!

"So you've awakened your ability. No wonder you've got the guts to fight back."

Daren didn't seem surprised by her sudden outburst—just watched with mild interest.

"The Devil Fruit's development went further, huh? Even grew a tail..."

His gaze lingered on the swaying tail behind her, and a strange look crept over his face, as if something had just occurred to him.

Stussy immediately noticed his expression. After all they'd been through, she could guess exactly what kind of filthy thought had crossed Daren's mind.

Her face burned with fury and embarrassment.

"You're asking for it!!"

Whoosh!

With a flap of her black wings, she vanished.

Her speed reached its peak, leaving countless afterimages flickering through the air.

The Vampire form's true strengths—speed and agility—were on full display.

In the blink of an eye, she reappeared behind Daren like a ghost.

A sweet fragrance closed in.

Stussy opened her mouth wide, and her razor-sharp fangs aimed straight for the Vice Admiral's neck.

If one looked closely, they would see swirling strands of purple-black aura encircling her fangs, reflecting a deadly gleam under the ornate lights.

In that moment, confidence surged in her eyes.

She hadn't invited Daren to this banquet without preparation.

To prevent him from denying the bet or going back on his word, she'd spent a long time using CP0's internal resources to push her strength to the limit.

Not only had she developed her Vampire form to its "awakened" state, drastically enhancing her vitality and regeneration...

She had also strengthened her Armament Haki.

Though she hadn't reached Internal Destruction, she had studied extensive CP0 archives—especially intelligence on the "Indestructible Body."

With her current level of Haki and raw power, she was certain she could break through Daren's defense!

It wouldn't kill him—but it didn't have to.

She just needed a single wound.

Once she broke through, even slightly, she could use her Vampire Fruit's powers to put him into a deep sleep—maybe even alter his memories.

Then, she'd have him under her control.

Closer...

At this range, with this speed—he couldn't possibly react in time!

A bright, seductive smile curled at the corners of Stussy's lips.

She bit down hard!

"Giggle... looks like I still won—"

Crack!

A crisp sound snapped through the air. Stussy froze mid-flight, her triumphant smile abruptly locking into place.

Fine fractures spread across her four vampire fangs...

Then, with a soft snap, they broke clean off.

Stussy: "..."

Daren turned his head with practiced calm, glancing at her with a trace of exasperation.

"Haven't you used that move before?"

Stussy stared blankly, as if caught in a dream.

"This... this can't be real!"

She snapped back to her senses, disbelief flooding her voice.

"My strength—I've clearly gotten so much stronger this time!"

Daren shook his head, his expression turning oddly solemn.

"You really have no idea... how many times I've been to the toilet in the past two months."

Stussy: ???

He raised a hand and touched his neck, where four shallow indentations remained.

Yeah, not even a scratch.

If this had been two months ago—before enduring Magellan's 'toilet hell'—his "Indestructible Body" might've only had a 90-point toughness. Maybe then she could've pierced the skin.

But now? After suffering through endless, soul-crushing bouts of diarrhea day and night, his physique stat had climbed to a solid 96.

His rectum—no, his whole body—had reached unknown levels of resilience.

"Anyway... done with the foreplay?"

Daren tilted his head, smiling.

Stussy stiffened.

Her heart seized, a sudden wave of fear rushing through her chest.

With a snap of her wings, she instinctively tried to escape.

But Daren moved faster.

In a single blur of motion, he stepped forward—faster than lightning.

A rough, powerful hand clamped tightly around her throat.

"Damn it!!"

Stussy gasped in panic.

But in the very next moment—

Daren's other hand shot out...

And grabbed her tail.

Stussy jolted violently.

The fierce anger on her face evaporated, replaced by an uncontrollable flush. Her entire face turned beet red.

Daren paused, puzzled by the unexpected reaction.

Then, driven by a strange curiosity, he gave the tail a squeeze.

"Mm—!"

Stussy let out a soft, involuntary moan, delicate and sweet, as if her entire body had short-circuited. The sound was soft as silk and impossibly alluring.

Her strength drained away like water.

She collapsed bonelessly into Daren's solid arms, her lips parted as she gasped for air. Her eyes shimmered, teary and dazed.

Daren blinked.

Looking at the black demon tail in his hand, he fell silent for several seconds.

Then his smile slowly twisted.

...What the hell kind of switch did I just find?

Chapter 634: Five Hours of Waiting

As if he couldn't believe it, Daren gave the tail another squeeze.

"Mmm..."

A soft moan spilled from Stussy's slightly parted red lips, her voice a little hoarse, carrying a soul-stirring allure that seemed impossible to resist.

So Daren, naturally, didn't stop.

His eyes glinted with mischievous amusement as he continued to knead and twist the black tail into different shapes like a new favorite toy.

"No... don't..."

Stussy shuddered violently, as if jolted by electricity.

Her cheeks were flushed crimson, her breathing grew ragged.

Her body felt increasingly weak and helpless, forcing her to instinctively cling tighter to the Vice Admiral in front of her.

If Daren hadn't been holding her slim waist, she would've already collapsed into a heap.

"So that's how it is..."

Daren chuckled with growing interest.

"In your complete vampire form, that tail isn't just for show—it's a dynamic balancing tool."

"The devil's tail is packed with nerve endings, letting you sense even the tiniest shifts in the air as you move at high speeds... helps maintain balance. Fascinating."

He leaned close to Stussy's ear, his voice low and teasing.

"In other words... your tail is an incredibly sensitive, forbidden zone."

Stussy trembled all over.

Her eyes burned with shame and resentment, her teeth sinking into her lip.

This bastard... he figured it out!

Even worse...

His hands, somehow, seemed to possess a strange magic—making it harder and harder for her to resist the sensation overtaking her body.

"So, shouldn't you fulfill your forfeit now, my Queen?"

"No, I won't—mmm...!"

Stussy suddenly froze.

"You... you bastard...!"

She weakly cursed, overwhelmed.

This shameless bastard had tugged hard on her tail!

"You're not being very obedient..." Daren said with a soft laugh.

"Aren't you actually enjoying it?"

Watching the once-proud Queen reduced to such a state gave him an indescribable sense of satisfaction.

"No... I'm not..."

"You're so dishonest..."

Daren sighed dramatically.

"Looks like I'll have to get serious."

Stussy, gritting her teeth against the chaos surging through her body, stubbornly declared,

"I've awakened my Devil Fruit powers... I won't lose to you!"

"Oh? Acting tough now that you've awakened?"

Daren glanced at the black flames swirling around her, his tone filled with teasing amusement.

"But that just makes it more fun."

He leaned close and whispered something in her ear.

Immediately, Stussy's face went pale, and a flash of fear crossed her eyes.

"No... that's impossible!"

Daren didn't give her a chance to react.

He pressed her down against the banquet table.

"Then let's test it."

As the words left his mouth...

Stussy's mind went completely blank, as if struck by lightning.

Her eyes widened to their limit.

All thought was wiped away in an instant.

"G-Giant..."

...

At the same time...

Outside the banquet hall.

A group of security personnel stood guard in solemn silence, eyes sharp, waiting for their leader's command.

"Sir, should we... go in?"

The man in the black suit frowned slightly and shook his head.

"Her Majesty's orders were clear—no matter what we hear inside, we do not interfere."

"This is all part of her plan."

Just then, faint sounds began to drift from within the hall.

A man's voice, laced with pain, like a low beastly growl.

A woman's voice, heavy with restraint, tinged with subtle pleasure.

The corners of the man's lips curled into a proud smile.

As Stussy's most trusted confidant, he knew better than anyone how much she had sacrificed and prepared for this moment.

Countless days and nights of grueling training and bloodshed—Her Majesty's power had advanced by leaps and bounds, reaching an unprecedented level.

He had personally witnessed her, in that powerful and graceful awakened form, shred a pirate with a bounty exceeding 200 million Belly in under five seconds.

"Do you hear that?"

"Her Majesty has already succeeded. That so-called 'King of North Blue,' 'Legend's Slayer,' 'Future Sky Admiral'... has already fallen before our noble queen!"

"Soon enough, Rogers Daren will be like all the others—completely devoted to Her Majesty!"

Upon hearing their leader's impassioned words, everyone turned fevered eyes toward the banquet hall doors.

"Amazing!"

"The Queen always plans everything to perfection!"

"..."

Cheers rose spontaneously from the group.

As expected of our queen...

Even someone as legendary as Rogers Daren had been effortlessly subdued.

In time, this entire sea would surely belong to their beautiful, noble queen!

...

Meanwhile, inside the banquet hall...

Doflamigo lounged comfortably on a plush leather sofa, wine glass in hand, flipping through the latest newspaper with idle amusement.

Beside him, Senor stood silently, a lit cigarette in his mouth, his posture straight and respectful.

"Fufufufufu..."

Doflamigo suddenly let out a dark chuckle, as if remembering something amusing.

"Senor."

"Yes, young master," Senor replied in a low voice.

"Curious to know who that woman introduced me to?"

Doflamigo turned his head, an amused gleam in his eye.

Senor hesitated briefly, then nodded.

"I admit, I am curious."

Doflamingo grinned wickedly.

"It was my godfather."

Senor stiffened.

Daren-sama!?

Since when had he gotten involved with the Queen of the Pleasure District?

"Should I go pay my respects?" Senor asked cautiously after a moment's thought.

He was well aware of Doflamingo's code—no matter how complex his feelings were toward that man, the young master had always upheld proper manners.

"No, no... he's probably a bit tied up at the moment," Doflamingo said with a smirk, shaking his head.

"But still, I didn't expect this..."

"My godfather really is something else."

"Silently taking down Stussy—the Underworld's dark empress—just like that. That entire empire... fufufufufu."

"Let's give them a little more time. I'm sure they'll finish up soon."

Senor nodded without another word.

They had all the time in the world. A little patience wouldn't hurt.

...

And so,

They waited five hours.

Chapter 635: Master, Master

The grand banquet hall was now a scene of utter disarray.

Shreds of an exquisite purple fishtail gown lay scattered across the floor, mingled with fragments of a glittering diamond necklace. The air was thick with the mixed scents of perfume and spilled gourmet dishes.

Daren buttoned his crisp suit jacket, a freshly lit cigar between his lips, adjusting his tie in the reflection of the floor-to-ceiling glass.

Once he finished tidying up, he exhaled with satisfaction, feeling completely refreshed. Turning around, his gaze fell on the graceful figure sprawled across the banquet table. A smirk of amusement tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"So, my Queen... What do you think of this 'Giant's Body' I trained just for you?"

Stussy's delicate form was still trembling slightly. Her once-perfect hairstyle was in complete disarray, clinging damply to her sweat-slicked forehead. Her face remained flushed, eyes glazed and dazed.

"Y-You... bastard..."

She muttered weakly, her voice barely audible.

Her long black bat wings were folded tightly against her back, her vampire fangs still faintly visible, and the limp black devil's tail hung down over the table's edge.

"Oh? Still got some spirit left in you?"

Daren strolled over with a grin, reaching out to gently stroke her cheek.

The instant his rough fingers brushed her skin, Stussy trembled again, as if jolted.

"You know, that's not what you were calling me just a moment ago."

Daren teased, his smile growing wider.

"Wanna say it again?"

Stussy's cheeks instantly turned crimson.

"I-I won't..."

"Really? Well then..."

With a feigned sigh, Daren reached down, carefully removed one of her peep-toe heels, and cupped her smooth, delicate foot in his palm.

With his other hand, he pinched her tail.

Stussy's pupils quivered.

"N-No..."

She turned her face away, unable to meet his teasing gaze. Swallowing her shame, she murmured softly under her breath,

"M-Master."

Her voice was like liquid velvet—gentle, seductive, and utterly intoxicating.

Daren burst into hearty laughter.

In that moment, an overwhelming sense of triumph surged through him.

...

In the adjacent private banquet lounge.

Senor stood frozen, barely daring to breathe as his young master's expression grew darker by the minute.

Five hours.

They'd been sitting there waiting for five full hours.

Ten fruit platters, four bottles of red wine, a mountain of cigarette butts in the ashtray, and between the two of them, eight trips to the restroom.

Senor had watched it all—watched his young master's mood shift from amused patience to simmering frustration, and now to a brooding, dangerous silence.

He knew full well: Doflamingo was not someone known for his patience.

If the one they were waiting on weren't Daren-sama, his young master would have already torn the entire building apart.

But the look on Doflamingo's face now made it clear—he was right at the edge.

Senor felt cold sweat forming at the back of his neck.

And just then—

The door to the lounge creaked open.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Doffy."

A tall, imposing figure strode in, a cigar between his teeth and a smug grin on his face. It was Daren.

Senor recognized that expression all too well.

The Donquixote family also ran their fair share of pleasure businesses—though nowhere near the scale of the Pleasure District, they still ranked among the top in the New World. As an executive, Senor had been involved in managing those operations and knew the look of a man walking out of such a place.

That face of Daren's—filled with a certain pride and smug satisfaction—was unmistakable. It was a look only men understood.

What the hell...

Instinctively, Senor turned his eyes to the woman behind Daren.

There stood Stussy—the Underworld's shadow empress, the Queen of the Pleasure District—now dressed in an elegant black gown that accentuated her graceful curves. Her golden hair hung loosely, and on her feet were a pair of diamond-encrusted peep-toe heels.

Senor quickly noticed the flush in her cheeks, the faint daze in her eyes, and the unnatural sway in her step.

Did she get hurt? Was it a failed negotiation that led to a fight between her and Daren-san...?

He quickly reached his own conclusion.

"You must've waited a while, Doffy. Apologies. The Queen and I were... deep in discussion. I lost track of time."

Daren dropped into the leather sofa and poured himself a glass of wine.

Stussy followed quietly, settling down on the opposite end, her face calm and composed—on the surface, at least.

"But we did manage to reach a final agreement."

Daren raised his glass toward Doflamingo with a cheerful smile.

"The generous Queen here is willing to gift you 30% of the Pleasure District's shares. A show of good faith to kick off long-term cooperation with the Donquixote family."

Doflamingo was stunned.

Daren's words landed like a pleasant surprise, instantly blowing away his simmering irritation.

He glanced at Stussy.

Stussy was seething inside, but all she could do was force a polite smile.

"Indeed. Daren-san will serve as a witness to our alliance."

"Fufufufu... so that's how it is."

Doflamingo blinked, then chuckled with satisfaction.

"Then I must thank Her Majesty for her generosity."

He poured a glass of wine for Stussy and raised his own.

"To Godfather Daren-sama and Her Majesty—may your friendship be everlasting!"

He downed it in one gulp.

Daren mirrored the motion, clinking his glass with Stussy's and giving her that damn smug look.

Stussy nearly ground her molars to dust, but she forced herself to raise her glass, clink it hard against his, and chug the whole thing in one go.

...

Half an hour later.

In a luxury suite atop the hotel.

"Have they left?" Stussy asked coldly, staring down at her kneeling subordinate.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The man in the black suit tried hard to suppress his excitement.

"Congratulations, Your Majesty. Not only did you successfully subdue Rogers Daren, but you also forged a partnership with the Donquixote family."

"Truly, your foresight and brilliance never cease to amaze me!"

He had seen it.

The look on the Vice Admiral's face as he left the banquet hall—full of satisfaction. The exact same expression those poor fools had worn after Stussy erased their memories in the past.

As for the 30% of the Pleasure District? It had to be part of Stussy's plan!

She must've offered a portion of the business to lull Doflamingo into complacency, win his trust, and then, when the time was right—devour the Donquixote family's operations in one clean sweep.

She had used this tactic more than once, and it had always worked.

"Get out."

A cold voice snapped him from his thoughts.

"Pardon, Your Majesty?"

He looked up in confusion.

Only to see Stussy's face dark as ice, her gaze murderous.

"I said... get out!"

The man paled and fled the room at once.

Outside, he leaned against the wall, gasping for breath, his face pale.

"What... what's wrong with Her Majesty?"

"Isn't everything going exactly according to plan?"

...

Inside the suite.

Stussy took a long drag of her cigarette, her expression shifting unpredictably.

One moment cold as frost, the next flushed with shame. Her legs fidgeted restlessly.

At one point...

She slowly reached down and lifted the hem of her black dress.

Higher and higher—from her shapely calves to her slender knees—until, faintly visible on the smooth, pale skin of her thigh, was a drawn "正 (I am rightly yours)" mark.

In her mind, the Vice Admiral's low, magnetic voice echoed again, laced with an almost unnatural charm.

"Don't let me find out you washed it off... or you'll be severely punished..."

Stussy's face went crimson. She crushed the cigarette with her bare fingers and growled through clenched teeth.

"What a vulgar, filthy, shameless bastard!!"

"Daren... just you wait!!"

Chapter 636: The Bronze Statue of Fish-Man Island

The New World, 10,000 meters beneath the sea.

Fish-Man Island.

A tall figure in a hooded cloak slowly stepped into Fish-Man Street.

Fisher Tiger frowned as he looked at the moss-covered, run-down, and filthy surroundings.

From the shadows, he could clearly feel the hostile, watchful eyes glowing faintly green—like wolves in the dark.

"Intruder! You're asking for death!!"

Suddenly, a bulky figure leapt from a patch of green algae behind him.

With muscular arms tensed in an attacking stance and thin streams of water swirling around him, the man threw a punch straight at Fisher Tiger's back!

"Fish-Man Karate: Samegawara Seiken!"

Fisher Tiger, already on guard, spun around and threw a punch of his own!

Same technique. Same move.

With a dull thud, a wave of water burst out like a shockwave.

The attacker stumbled back a few steps, his eyes wide with shock as he stared at the mysterious hooded figure.

"Such powerful Fish-Man Karate... Who are you!?"

He had stormy brows and wild sideburns, a thick black beard on his chin, a lightning-shaped scar at the corner of his left eye, and a wide frame. He wore a yukata embroidered with swirling patterns.

"I didn't teach you Fish-Man Karate so you could use it against your own kind..."

Fisher Tiger raised his hand and pulled back the hood, revealing his face. A faint smile appeared on his rough features as he looked at the young whale shark man in front of him.

"It's been a while, Jinbei."

Jinbei's eyes widened before a rush of joy overcame him.

"Tiger! You're back!!"

"It's been so long with no word from you... I thought..."

His eyes turned red, and he clenched his teeth.

Fisher Tiger reached out and ruffled his hair with a smile.

"Yeah, I ran into some trouble along the way, but everything's settled now."

Just then, cheers and excited voices rang out from every corner.

"It's Boss Tiger!!"

"Boss Tiger's back!!"

"Hahaha! This is amazing!"

One by one, fishmen cautiously peeked out from the shadows. The moment they saw the "intruder" was Fisher Tiger, their faces lit up and they rushed out.

"We missed you so much!"

"Yeah, Boss Tiger! Next time you set sail, take us with you!"

"Let us see the outside world too!"

...

All eyes were on their revered boss of Fish-Man Street, shining with the eager curiosity and dreams of youth.

"Yeah, Boss Tiger, we've grown up."

Jinbei, now calmer, grinned with excitement.

"You saw just now, didn't you? I've trained hard in the Fish-Man Karate you taught me. Even if we face enemies, I'll fight alongside you!"

He struck a karate pose, glowing with pride.

Fisher Tiger stared at the group of young faces—thin, smudged with grime—and their clothes, worn and full of patches. His heart sank.

Because of human hunting, most fishmen spent their entire lives shackled by fear of slavery, never daring to set foot outside Fish-Man Island.

Those of noble birth had it better—Fish-Man Island was vast, and their environment more livable.

But those born in Fish-Man District, the so-called "low-class" fishmen, had no choice but to grow up in these filthy, foul-smelling gutters. Some twisted into violent criminals, while others wasted away from sickness and poverty.

Within Fish-Man Island, Fish-Man District was synonymous with "violence," "filth," "chaos," "disease," and "inferiority."

Fisher Tiger had once been just like these kids, chasing after violence and rebellion in hopes of changing his fate.

So he chose to set sail, to explore the world in search of a way to change it all.

But...

My adventure wasn't nearly as wonderful as you all imagine.

Fisher Tiger sighed inwardly, unable to bring himself to tell them the truth, and forced a smile.

"Later. There'll be a chance later."

"Awesome!!"

The boys from the Fish-Man District immediately burst into excited cheers.

Fisher Tiger ruffled Jinbei's hair again and smiled.

"Nothing's happened on Fish-Man Island lately, has it?"

Jinbei thought for a moment, then shook his head.

"No. Compared to before, it feels a lot more peaceful."

"I heard there've been way fewer poachers showing up around Fish-Man Island too."

Fisher Tiger nodded, a bit of the worry in his heart easing.

"That's good."

It seemed that Daren-san's advice had been right.

Word must have spread that he was about to become one of the Shichibukai, and many illegal poachers had caught wind of it, keeping them from making any reckless moves.

This was a good thing.

Even if it couldn't completely eliminate poaching, at least it could greatly reduce the number of fishmen being hunted.

Jinbei and the others had stayed in the Fish-Man District the whole time, cut off from the outside world, so they still didn't know that he was about to become one of the Shichibukai.

"But don't get complacent. You all need to grow stronger as fast as you can."

Fisher Tiger looked around at everyone, then fixed his gaze on Jinbei.

"Especially you, Jinbei. We may be from the Fish-Man District, but fishmen and merfolk are, at the end of the day, the same people... If you get the chance, go to Ryugu Castle and report there."

"The future of Fish-Man Island depends on all of us to protect it."

Jinbei bit his lip and nodded, though a little reluctantly.

Fisher Tiger patted him on the shoulder without saying much more.

Some things couldn't be explained with just a few words.

The Fish-Man District was like the slums of Fish-Man Island. It was only natural that those who grew up there harbored resentment and hatred toward the "upper class" living in Ryugu Palace.

Fisher Tiger had once felt the same way.

They were all members of the Fish-Man race, so why could some live under the warm sunlight and in clear waters while others were left to rot in filthy, stinking sewers?

It wasn't until Fisher Tiger traveled across the seas that he slowly realized slums were a common reality everywhere.

Even a place as wealthy as Fish-Man Island couldn't escape it.

Compared to the external threats facing Fish-Man Island, the internal divisions among fishmen were practically meaningless.

"Alright, that's enough for now. I need to head to Ryugu Castle. There's something important I want to discuss with King Neptune."

After a few final instructions, Fisher Tiger turned and strode toward Ryugu Castle.

Step by step, he walked out of the cramped, shadowy Fish-Man District. Outside, the clear, warm sunlight poured down, bathing his body in a fiery red glow.

On the path toward the light, however, images of bloodstained, smiling faces kept flashing through his mind.

"Escape, fishmen."

It was as if he could hear those cheers again.

He clenched his fists tighter and walked forward with even more determination.

Until he saw something that made him stop dead in his tracks.

It was the Gyoncorde Plaza of Fish-Man Island.

At the center of the square stood a bronze statue, about three meters tall.

The statue's sharp, deeply carved lines clearly captured someone's rugged features and wild, defiant spirit. It was obviously crafted by the master sculptors of Fish-Man Island—so lifelike it seemed ready to step down from the pedestal.

Fisher Tiger's mouth twitched uncontrollably.

The figure immortalized in bronze...

He recognized it instantly.

Chapter 637: They Need My Help

Daren...san?

Fisher Tiger stared at the human statue standing at the center of Gyoncorde Plaza, momentarily stunned.

Gyoncorde Plaza was a place reserved for major gatherings and solemn ceremonies on Fish-Man Island. It held great prestige—so much so that even King Neptune of Ryugu Castle wasn't allowed to erect his own statue there.

Yet now, there was a statue of a human!?

If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, Fisher Tiger would never have believed such an absurd sight.

This was Fish-Man Island!

Could it be that what Daren-san had said before was true?

Had his visit to Fish-Man Island truly forged such a deep friendship with Ryugu Palace and the Fish-Man tribe that even the islanders were willing to set aside their hatred of humans and raise a statue of him in Gyoncorde Plaza?

"That's incredible... It seems Daren-san really did have a strong bond with Ryugu Palace."

Muttering to himself, Fisher Tiger continued making his way toward Ryugu Castle.

In less than half an hour, he crossed the connecting corridor and arrived at the castle gates.

The guards on duty immediately recognized him and exclaimed,

"Tiger-san, you're back!"

"This is wonderful!"

"..."

"Yes, could you please inform His Majesty? I would like to request an audience."

The guards hurried off to deliver the message. One of them smiled and said,

"Tiger-san, please wait a moment. There's a big celebration happening at Ryugu Castle right now—everyone's been running around preparing!"

A big celebration?

Fisher Tiger paused, curious.

"What kind of celebration?"

The guards, holding their tridents, beamed and answered,

"It's about His Majesty."

"His Majesty is about to get married. Soon, Ryugu Castle will finally have a Queen!"

"Queen Otohime is so beautiful, just like the daughter of the Sea God—radiant and breathtaking!"

"Yes, and she has such a gentle nature. She often shows concern for the lives of the people in the lower districts of Fish-Man Island."

"They say Queen Otohime has already proposed to His Majesty that after the wedding, more support and aid should be directed toward Fish-Man District..."

"..."

Queen Otohime...

Fisher Tiger quietly listened to the guards' heartfelt praise. From their descriptions, he slowly pieced together an image in his mind—a gentle, elegant mermaid with a noble aura.

If the future Queen of Fish-Man Island was truly as they described—a woman both kind and wise—then perhaps she really could help lead the Fish-Man people out of their current hardships.

"Tiger-san, His Majesty Neptune invites you in!"

A solemn voice called from the gates of Ryugu Castle.

Fisher Tiger looked up and saw a figure standing there with a turtle shell on his back and a pair of distinctive sideburns. Though the figure was a bit short and hunched, his face radiated a calm dignity.

"Prime Minister, it's been a long time."

Fisher Tiger smiled and bowed politely.

The Turtle Prime Minister was the cornerstone of Ryugu Castle, one of King Neptune's most trusted advisors.

He had served faithfully for many years, skilled in both governance and diplomacy.

"Tiger-san, no need for formalities. Please, this way."

The Turtle Prime Minister raised his hand with a friendly smile.

Soon, Fisher Tiger was led into the banquet hall of Ryugu Castle, where he finally met "Great Knight" Neptune.

"Hahahaha! Tiger-san, it's been ages!"

Neptune greeted Fisher Tiger with a booming laugh and a warm hug.

"You're back at the perfect time. Let me introduce someone to you."

As Neptune spoke, a graceful figure slowly entered the hall.

Her golden hair rippled like waves, glistening under the soft glow of the night pearls. Her deep sapphire-blue eyes shimmered with a gentle smile. An orange, crown-shaped hairpin adorned her head.

She wore a flowing robe patterned with fish scales in hues of orange, with white sashes elegantly draped around her.

"This is my beloved Otohime. We will be getting married on Fish-Man Island in three days!"

Neptune smiled triumphantly and held Otohime's hand.

"I have met Tiger-san before."

Otohime's face turned slightly red, and she bowed elegantly to Fisher Tiger.

Fisher Tiger bowed awkwardly and said, "It's nice to meet you, Queen Otohime."

"Hahahaha, you are too kind."

Neptune smiled and said,

"Come, dinner is ready. Tiger-san, you haven't been back to Fish-Man Island for so long, let us welcome you today!"

As he spoke, young mermaid maids brought in all kinds of delicious food and fine wine.

Unable to refuse such hospitality, Fisher Tiger took his seat and soon began to drink cup after cup.

"...So, Your Majesty Neptune, on my way to Ryugu Castle, I saw a statue in Gyoncorde Plaza."

After three rounds of wine, Fisher Tiger finally couldn't resist his curiosity and tentatively asked.

Neptune's mouth twitched, and he forced a smile with a stiff expression and said,

"That... That is a statue of Vice Admiral Rogers Daren of the Marine Headquarters."

"Yes, when Vice Admiral Daren last visited Fish-Man Island, he helped us drive away the evil pirates and saved Fish-Man Island."

"Out of gratitude, the Prime Minister proposed to build a statue of Vice Admiral Daren in Gyoncorde Plaza to prove the lasting friendship between him and the Fish-Man tribe."

"I see..." Fisher Tiger suddenly understood.

"No wonder Daren-san told me that he had a good relationship with Fish-Man Island. So that's how it really is."

Neptune: ...

Turtle Minister: ...

"Wait, Tiger-san, you've met Vice Admiral Daren?"

Neptune suddenly realized something and couldn't help but ask.

Fisher Tiger nodded.

A look of pain gradually appeared in his eyes, and he sighed,

"I was able to return to Fish-Man Island alive thanks to Daren-san's help."

He gritted his teeth, raised his hand to grab the hood of his coat, and with a look of determination in his eyes, he pulled hard!

Rip!

The sound of fabric tearing echoed through the room, and the sight that met Neptune and the others' eyes caused their expressions to change drastically and their pupils to contract.

"What is that..."

"The Hoof of the Soaring Dragon!"

They stared in horror at the fierce and tragic blood-red tattoo on Fisher Tiger's chest, their hearts trembling.

Under their shocked gaze, Fisher Tiger slowly recounted everything he had experienced with a sad expression...

...

A full half hour later.

The banquet hall was deathly silent.

Neptune and the others sat there with grief-stricken expressions, as if they were still unable to recover from the huge shock.

"...That's how it is."

Fisher Tiger gritted his teeth and clenched his fists.

"Your Majesty Neptune, Queen Otohime..."

An indescribable determination surged in his eyes, making his skin turn even redder.

"I will do everything in my power, even if it costs me my life, to save those poor people who have suffered the same fate as me!"

"Those slaves living in hell on earth... they need my help!"

Neptune was struck as if by lightning.

Otohime couldn't help but let out a long sigh.

From Fisher Tiger's heart, she heard a heart-rending cry.

"But I won't act so quickly. Now is definitely not the time..."

As if he had said everything he wanted to say, Fisher Tiger's inner pressure was relieved, and he gradually calmed down and said in a deep voice,

"Right now, Fish-Man Island still needs my title of 'Shichibukai' to protect it, so I will wait patiently for the opportunity."

"There are less than ten days left until the Shichibukai appointment ceremony. When that time comes, I will do everything in my power to fight for the greatest rights for Fish-Man Island!"

Chapter 638: Listen to the Doctor

"Vice Admiral Daren, everything is normal. Your wife and the baby are both in good health."

Marine Headquarters, Marineford, Military Hospital.

The female doctor slowly closed the examination form in her hand, looked up, and smiled.

Hearing this, Daren and Toki both smiled with relief.

"That's great, thank you, doctor."

Daren stood up with a smile and extended his hand.

"You're welcome."

The middle-aged doctor smiled and gently shook Daren's hand. When she leaned in slightly, she lowered her voice and said gratefully,

"I haven't properly thanked you for what you did for my stinky kid last time."

Daren smiled slightly and said,

"We're friends, it's normal to help each other. It was no trouble at all."

"Kentaro is an excellent young man and should have been promoted long ago. He was stuck at the rank of Captain at headquarters, which was indeed a waste of his talent."

The female doctor shook her head.

No one knew her son better than she did. She was well aware of just how much ability he really had.

If he truly had enough skill, he wouldn't still be an ordinary Captain in the Marines at nearly thirty years old.

She would be retiring in two years, and now that she had finally become the personal doctor of Vice Admiral Daren and his family, she took great care of Toki while also trying to use this opportunity to give her son a helping hand.

She had only intended to give it a try, but she didn't expect Vice Admiral Daren to agree so readily.

What had he said at the time?

"Lieutenant Commander? No, Commander! Commander Kentaro!"

In less than two days, the transfer order came through.

Although it was just a civilian officer position in the logistics department, and likely the peak of her son's career, at least he wouldn't have to step onto a battlefield.

For her ordinary son, it was a position that suited him perfectly.

"How amazing... such scorching influence, almost like he can cover the skies with one hand!"

The female doctor couldn't help but sigh in admiration.

What others saw as a casual "favor" had completely changed her family's fate.

"Let's go back, Toki."

Daren carefully helped Toki to her feet, speaking gently.

Toki was already several months pregnant, her belly now clearly showing. She couldn't walk as lightly as before, and moved with some difficulty.

Even so, due to hormonal changes, her skin became smoother and fairer.

Even with her slight weight gain, it did not diminish her graceful figure and composed demeanor, radiating the beautiful glow of motherhood.

"Okay, husband."

Toki bid farewell to the doctor and, supported by Daren, walked out of the ward.

But as if she remembered something, she smiled and said,

"Husband, why don't you wait outside? I have something to ask the doctor."

Daren paused for a moment, then nodded and said,

"Sure."

It must be something personal.

He didn't think too much about it.

After all, the examination results were perfect, and the fetus was strong and healthy.

According to the doctor, once born, their child would be several times stronger than an ordinary baby.

Two minutes later, Toki walked out of the ward, smiling as she hooked her arm around Daren's.

"Let's go home."

Daren didn't use his ability to carry her back.

Following the doctor's advice, pregnant women should exercise actively to strengthen their bodies and immunity.

The two of them strolled hand in hand along the streets of Marineford, attracting envious gazes wherever they passed.

"Daren!"

A passionate voice suddenly rang out from a distance.

Daren froze.

Looking ahead, he saw dust flying up as Kuzan rushed toward them with great excitement, then braked sharply and stopped steadily right in front of them.

"Dahahaha! I knew you'd be back!"

Kuzan glanced at Toki, who looked curious, and suddenly bowed deeply.

"Hello, sister-in-law!"

He straightened up and said proudly:

"I am Kuzan! I am Daren's lifelong friend and rival! So far, we have fought 135 times, with Daren winning 85 times and me winning 50 times!"

Toki looked at Daren in confusion, and the latter shrugged and replied with a helpless smile.

So she thought for a moment, pursed her lips, and smiled at Kuzan.

"Hello, Vice Admiral Kuzan. My name is Amatsuki Toki... My husband has mentioned your name many times before. He often said that you are indeed a very powerful opponent, and that he values your friendship very much."

"Really!?"

Kuzan's eyes suddenly burst into a fiery glow as he stared intently at Daren.

Daren: ...

"Um, I guess so, but I don't have time to fight you right now, Kuzan."

Kuzan was so excited that white smoke came out of his nostrils as he nodded vigorously and said,

"It's okay, next time."

"I came to give you this."

With that, he took out an invitation and handed it to Daren.

"The Member Nations of the World Government, Fish-Man Island, and King Neptune of Ryugu Palace will hold a grand wedding ceremony in three days, and cordially invite representatives of the Marines to attend."

Kuzan put his hands on his hips and said,

"You and I are both representatives of the Marines!"

Neptune's wedding?

Daren was taken aback for a moment, then took the invitation, which was stamped with an exquisite pattern of fishmen swimming.

He casually flipped through it, and his eyes lingered on the name "Otohime" for a moment.

"Hmm, I see."

Daren smiled and said,

"When it's time to leave, come and get me."

...

After accompanying Toki on a tour of Marineford's commercial district, Daren enjoyed a rare moment of leisure.

When he returned home, he had just taken off his cloak and hung it up.

As soon as he turned around, he froze on the spot, unable to take his eyes off her.

He saw Toki standing there gracefully, looking at him tenderly, her hands gently loosening the sash of her kimono.

Her cheeks were slightly red, her skin was delicate and warm, and her beautiful hair shone slightly in the sunlight, exuding the charm of a mature woman.

"Toki, what are you doing..."

Daren was stunned.

This familiar scene...

And those familiar white socks...

"We haven't done this in a long time..."

Toki shyly lowered her head, her beautiful face tinged with a pretty blush, determined to show her beloved husband her most beautiful side.

"I asked the doctor earlier, and she said it's okay... as long as you're gentle... it can even promote healthy development..."

She took a gentle step forward, raised her head, and the young and mature charm of a young woman radiated from her eyebrows, making one's mouth dry.

A sweet and satisfied smile appeared on her beautiful and refined face, her eyes were exceptionally bright, blooming with the happiness and anticipation in her heart, and she said shyly,

"...I want you."

Boom!

Daren's mind exploded in an instant, and he had no other thoughts.

"Then we have to listen to the doctor!"

He said solemnly.

Chapter 639: A Troublesome Gang

"Daren! Daren! Let's go!"

Early the next morning, Kuzan's passionate voice rang out from outside the family compound.

Daren, who had just woken up, rolled his eyes in annoyance, gently tucked the quilt around Toki, who was still fast asleep, and got up to wash and dress.

"Stop shouting, I'm coming," he said.

He replied, washed up quickly, changed into the military uniform Toki had prepared for him, and walked out of the house yawning.

As soon as he pushed open the gate, he saw Kuzan standing there in his military uniform, looking energetic and excited.

He raised the copper gong and milk he had bought earlier, bared his teeth in a smile, and said,

"Dahahaha! Daren, it's finally our turn to go on a mission together!"

"I've been waiting for this day for so long, and it's finally here!"

Daren took the breakfast Kuzan handed him and began to eat, muttering,

"It's not a special mission, just representing the Marines at King Neptune's wedding."

"Is the warship ready?"

With that, he headed toward the military port.

Kuzan followed closely behind, jumping up and down restlessly.

"Everything is ready! Garp-san will also be going to offer his congratulations, so we'll be riding on his flagship this time."

"Also..."

He corrected him with a serious look on his face.

"Although there probably won't be any fighting, this is our first mission together!"

Kuzan's eyes were filled with longing.

"This is truly a memorable day!"

Daren ignored this hot-blooded fool, but another thought crossed his mind, and he asked,

"Isn't Vice Admiral Garp busy fighting Roger's pirate crew?"

"How does he have time to attend a wedding at Ryugu Palace on Fish-Man Island?"

Kuzan scratched his head and said,

"I'm not sure about that. It seems that Roger got away again not long ago, and Garp-san lost track of him, so he returned to headquarters first."

Is that so...

Daren sighed inwardly.

Roger really is a man favored by fate. He's not so easy to kill.

Judging by the time, he shouldn't be far from reaching the final island, Laugh Tale, and becoming the "Pirate King" that countless people would sing about for generations to come.

Should I go find that guy and cause some trouble?

As soon as this thought popped into his head, Daren secretly rejected it.

With his current strength, he probably wouldn't be as passive as before when facing Roger. Overall, he could barely manage a 60-40 split.

But after the last "Celestial Dragons frame-up incident," he guessed that if he faced Roger again, Rayleigh and the others probably wouldn't give him and Roger a chance to fight one-on-one.

It would be fine if it was just Roger, he could always run away if he couldn't beat him.

But if Roger, Rayleigh, and Gaban, the three legendary pirates, joined forces to attack him, Daren guessed that he would definitely not end well.

Once the three of them joined forces, he wouldn't even have the chance to use his flying ability to escape.

"Hey, Daren... What are you thinking about? Did you hear my proposal?"

Just as Daren's mind was wandering, Kuzan waved his hand in front of Daren to get his attention.

"Oh? What did you say? A duel, right?"

Daren's eyes flickered for a moment, then he came to his senses and replied casually.

"That's right!"

Kuzan clenched his fists and stared at Daren with a fierce fighting spirit.

Daren sighed helplessly and decided to go along with it.

"All right, from now on, we'll have a duel."

"Whoever speaks first loses, how about it?"

Kuzan was taken aback and quickly covered his mouth with both hands and nodded vigorously.

The world was finally quiet!

Daren was instantly relieved.

But before he could take two steps,

"I lost!"

Kuzan's face turned red as he "broke free" from his own hands and said with conviction,

"You really are my 'lifelong rival'. I lost to you again, Daren!"

Daren: "..."

The corners of his mouth twitched painfully, and he had no choice but to endure Kuzan's chatter all the way to the military port.

At the military port, a strangely shaped dog-headed warship was docked, and marines were busy repairing and maintaining it.

"Bwahahaha, Daren, you're here!"

Garp, wearing a dog-head military cap, stood at the port, happily munching on a bag of rice crackers. Seeing Daren's arrival, he laughed loudly and gave him a hug.

Daren took a step back in disgust, calmly blocking his big hand stained with rice cracker oil, and greeted him with a smile:

"Vice Admiral Garp, long time no see."

Garp didn't mind and looked at Daren with admiration.

"Hmm, you're a good kid."

"—And me, and me, Garp-san! I'm here too!"

Kuzan jumped out from the side, looking like a puppy waiting for praise, and looked at Garp eagerly.

"Kuzan, you're here too. Hmm, you're not bad either."

His tone was a little perfunctory, but he still gave Kuzan a warm hug.

Daren clearly saw Garp wipe the grease from his hands directly onto Kuzan's military uniform.

"..."

Noisy Kuzan, mischievous Garp... Daren felt a headache coming on and was uncomfortable all over.

It seemed that he wouldn't be able to relax on this trip to Fish-Man Island.

He took out a cigar, put it in his mouth, lit it, and took a deep drag.

Daren would rather go fishing with Borsalino or go on a mission with Sakazuki to fight pirates than stay on the same ship with this pair of idiots.

There was no other reason—they were just too noisy.

With Borsalino, at least they could each have a beach chair, not disturb each other, sunbathe, drink watermelon juice, and be comfortable.

As for Sakazuki, he was always quiet and kept to himself, and even when they were fighting pirates, Daren could sneak off and slack, since Sakazuki would jump in to handle everything anyway.

However, he could understand Sengoku's arrangement.

The people chosen to represent the Marine Headquarters at the Fish-Man Island wedding were all doves within the Marines.

This was equivalent to the Marine Headquarters sending a friendly signal to Fish-Man Island.

Otherwise, it would not be appropriate to send Borsalino and Sakazuki.

The former would affect the image of the Marines, and the latter's temperament was not suited to attending a joyful event like a wedding.

"I hope that only the two of them will be the representatives of the Marines this time, otherwise I'll have a headache..."

Looking at Garp and Kuzan, who were grinning from ear to ear, Daren couldn't help but pray silently.

However, as soon as he turned his head, he saw a face with a lecherous smile and a sloppy drawing style.

Daren: ...

Tokikake: (*~~~~~)

Daren: ...

"Hehehe, you didn't expect this, Daren... Even if you didn't let me go to G5 to protect Fish-Man Island, I still found a way."

Tokikake rubbed his hands together excitedly, winked at Daren, and gave him a look that only men would understand.

"..." Daren covered his face in agony.

Chapter 640: Poor Daren

Marine Headquarters, Admiral's Office.

"Sengoku, are you sure it's okay to let Garp, Kuzan, and Tokikake attend the wedding?"

Staff Officer Tsuru stared at Sengoku, who was leaning back on the sofa, her expression complicated.

"What else can we do? We can't send Sakazuki and Borsalino, can we?"

Sengoku looked helpless and spread his hands.

Staff Officer Tsuru opened her mouth but stopped herself.

After holding it in for a long moment, she let out a long sigh and shook her head with a look of resignation.

It made sense.

Sengoku and she were completely tied up. The Shichibukai appointment ceremony was just around the corner, and headquarters was already overwhelmed—there was no time to spare.

As for Borsalino and Sakazuki, they were completely unsuitable for the job.

"Besides, no matter how much trouble those three cause, Daren is watching them, isn't he?"

Sengoku adjusted his position on the couch, getting more comfortable.

Staff Officer Tsuru gave him a side glance, a flicker of suspicion rising in her heart.

She had the feeling Sengoku had deliberately arranged to send the three of them away.

After all, those three were—

One who snuck around stealing rice crackers every day.

One constantly shouting about wanting to go chase down Roger.

And one endlessly whining to be reassigned to the G5 branch.

It was very likely Sengoku just couldn't put up with their nonsense anymore and shipped them off to get some peace of mind.

The one being wronged here... was poor Daren.

Staff Officer Tsuru recalled the boxes of high-end tea Daren had sent after the "Heavenly Tribute Robbery Incident" not long ago, and suddenly felt a pang of guilt.

...

The warship cruised steadily across the open sea, leaving a clean white trail in its wake beneath the brilliant blue sky.

On deck, however, the scene was pure chaos—filled with song, dance, and an atmosphere more like a festival than a mission.

"Barbecue!"

"Wine!"

"Let's sing!"

"Kick, spin... This is the Marines' victory dance!"

"..."

Daren stared at the three idiots kicking and dancing with their arms around each other, his mouth twitching as dark lines floated above his head.

"Come on, Daren, join the fun!"

Kuzan waved at him, his face flushed with excitement.

"No, thank you."

Daren glanced at the group of Marines watching from the railings, crossed his arms into an exaggerated "No" gesture, and wore a completely serious expression.

A firm and absolute refusal.

They might not care about appearances, but he did.

He was a disgrace to the Marines—not a complete idiot.

He ignored the three "keep dancing, keep playing" morons, found a spot on the deck, sat down, and opened a folder of intelligence reports.

Inside was the guest list for the upcoming grand wedding on Fish-Man Island. Marine Intelligence had done its homework.

Daren lit a cigar and skimmed the names quickly, spotting several familiar ones.

Alabasta Kingdom, the 12th King, Nefertari Cobra;

Dressrosa Kingdom, Riku Doldo III;

Germa 66, Vinsmoke Judge;

...

Aside from that, since Fish-Man Island was a member of the World Government, many other affiliated nations had also received invitations.

For example, the Kano Country, home of the Happs Navy.

And the Drum Kingdom from East Blue's cold-climate region.

"Looks like we'll be running into a lot of familiar faces this time..."

Tokikake strolled over at some point, chewing on a toothpick with his hands in his pockets, then crouched beside Daren.

"Germa 66, hehehe... That self-righteous evil army got their asses kicked by us!"

"It was just me. Not 'us,'" Daren said flatly.

Tokikake froze for a second, then shamelessly grinned.

"Eh, same thing! We're all on the same side, aren't we?"

Daren shook his head in exasperation.

"So, how did you get Admiral Sengoku to let you attend a wedding on Fish-Man Island?"

Tokikake instantly perked up, flicking the tuft of feathers on his head with a flamboyant shake.

"With my dashing good looks, isn't it the perfect choice to represent justice at such a grand wedding banquet?"

"Be honest, or I will take that card back," Daren said coolly.

"I got down on my knees," Tokikake replied, deadpan.

Daren: "..."

He couldn't help giving Tokikake a thumbs up.

"Right, almost forgot..."

Tokikake glanced around, making sure Garp, Kuzan, and the others weren't watching, then lowered his voice.

"I got something good for you."

He furtively pulled a small glass bottle from his coat, filled with dozens of small blue pills.

"Take this... and you'll get stronger!"

He opened the bottle with visible reluctance, clearly intending to share some with Daren.

Daren's mouth twitched violently. He couldn't hold it in.

You're going to a wedding.

Not a rave!

Why the hell are you bringing this many pills? What are you, trying to overdose!?

"No thanks."

Daren made a sharp "no" gesture and turned him down without hesitation.

"You sure?"

Tokikake pressed, dead serious.

"I shelled out a fortune for this stuff! Just this tiny bottle cost me five million Belly! You'll seriously power up with this!"

"What do you mean, 'power up'?"

A voice suddenly rang out behind them.

Kuzan stared intently at the pills in Tokikake's hand, lightning-quick as he snatched a few. His eyes practically glowed with anticipation.

"Unbelievable, Daren! You've been secretly juicing up and didn't even tell me!?"

"I'm not gonna lose to you!"

Before either of them could react, Kuzan popped the pills into his mouth.

"No!!!" Tokikake howled in agony.

Gulp~

Kuzan swallowed them down in one go.

Tokikake: ...

Daren: ...

Kuzan: (*)

"Th-this..."

Tokikake's lips turned pale as he collapsed to the ground, trembling.

"It's over... I'm done for..."

He'd tested the pills himself—just one let him sprint up five flights of stairs without breaking a sweat.

And Kuzan had just downed a small handful.

...At least ten.

...

Half an hour later.

Looking at the disturbingly lifelike "ice sculpture" standing on deck, Daren clutched his head in silent despair.

What the hell even is this mess!?

Tokikake, the culprit, was being punished by Garp and now squatted in the far corner facing a wall.

Well, at least it was quieter.

So damn exhausting... Daren grumbled inwardly.

Kuzan had looked like he was about to spontaneously combust.

"Hey, Daren."

Garp walked over just then, arms folded, eyeing him with curiosity.

"What kind of crap have you gotten into again?"

"Not long ago, I went after Roger. I mentioned your name, and the guy practically lost his mind trying to fight me!"

Daren raised his hands, feigning innocence.

"I seriously have no idea."

"But Vice Admiral Garp, even without mentioning me, wouldn't Roger still flip out the second he saw you?"

Garp paused, then nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, that checks out."

Daren: ...

Watching Garp nod like it was the most obvious thing in the world, Daren realized none of his prepared excuses were going to work.

"Vice Admiral Garp! We're approaching the outpost ahead!"

A Marine lookout shouted from above.

"Dock the ship!"

Garp responded.

Their warship would be coated at the outpost before diving ten thousand meters beneath the sea to reach Fish-Man Island.