

A Warlord and his Princess

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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.