(No) Strings Attached

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Summary

Five months of dinners, movie nights, a drawer at Zoro’s apartment and Christmas with Zeff. Sanji was sure it was all casual. Then Zoro asked him to meet his family as his boyfriend and Sanji laughed.

Now he has to win back the man he didn’t know he was dating and survive Perona and Mihawk while he’s at it.

Notes

Hi all! First fic on this site. I'll be migrating most of my works from AO3 here so hope you all enjoy.

Sanji had had to do many hard things in his life. Enduring life under Vinsmoke Judge's roof was hard. Losing his mother before he hit his double digits was hard. Living on the streets at nine years old was hard. Accepting that he could have a family with Zeff and the other chefs of the Baratie was hard. Even with all that, standing over the trashcan and dumping another pan of burnt food hurt something in his soul.

"Oi Sanji, did you burn the croquettes again? That's the third batch. The boss won't like that one bit."

"Yes Patty, I know. Thanks for pointing it out," Sanji replied through gritted teeth.

"You got a death wish or something?"

Sanji rolled his eyes as he stalked past him and slammed the fry basket back onto the countertop.

"You've been distracted all night. You sure you're okay," Carne asked, peeking over from his station.

Wasn't that a loaded question.

The thing is Sanji *was* okay, he was more than okay. *He* wasn't the issue. Or at least he didn't think he was. It would be nice if Zoro would just call or text him and tell him as much, but he hadn't heard from the mosshead in days, five to be exact, not since the… incident.

With as pissed off as Zoro had been, maybe Sanji was foolish for thinking he'd get a call or text at all. Besides, Zoro wasn't the most loquacious guy. Sanji was usually the one who texted him first, but once he did, they texted each other back and forth a majority of the day. There were long pauses in between as Sanji focused on his shifts at the Baratie and Zoro focused on teaching his Kendo classes and training for his tournaments, but there was usually an open line of communication between them even if it was just lobbing insults back and forth or sending pictures.

Zoro couldn't be that angry at him, could he? He wasn't the type to hold grudges over petty things, although that seemed to apply to everyone except Sanji. And, to be fair, what happened between them wasn't a petty thing. It was a misunderstanding, a lack of communication. Totally not Sanji's fault, although he might've felt a little guilty about how their conversation went, all things considered.

He shouldn't. It was Zoro, the idiot muscle-brained Mosshead who bathed too little and slept too much. That stoic bastard had maybe five emotions that he swapped out at random for any given situation. That being the case, Sanji was unsurprised by how deeply they had miscommunicated their intentions but was simultaneously surprised by the nature of their misunderstanding.

He'd been thinking things over for the past five days and maybe his thoughts were distracting him more than usual tonight. He couldn't help but wonder if he had led Zoro on somehow.

Sure, he stopped by often to make dinner, but he was a chef and he cooked for their friend group all the time. Though, he was certain most people probably didn't schedule regular dinners with their fuck buddies.

And sure, they hung out at the gym for hours but that was because they were sparring, which usually led to fucking because of the nature of their activities (though, notably, sometimes it didn't and they would end up going back to either of their apartments to hang out for a bit). And because he was around Zoro's so often, he might've left some things at his apartment but Sanji had an entire drawer at his own place with all his friends' miscellaneous things that had at some point ended up left behind (although none of them had left a toothbrush and Sanji had left several expensive skin care items behind in Zoro's apartment too, knowing full well that hygiene deficient heathen would never use them, plus Zoro had expressly offered him a drawer for Sanji's clothes and he had accepted.)

Sometimes, during Luffy and his brothers' many raucous parties, he and Zoro would escape to a quiet corner of the room because all the noise and conversation and people were a little intense for him. He preferred quieter spaces alone and, despite being Luffy's friend, was not comfortable with being around all the people Luffy also called friend. Often when that happened, they would drink or talk or spar verbally in their own little space. They even danced a few times.

And Zoro did join him and Zeff for Christmas dinner, although he had met Zeff before in passing. He had ostensibly done so because a blizzard settling in kept him from travelling to see his father and sister. He hadn't just visited for dinner, he ended up staying the weekend as well. They hadn't even had sex, partly because Sanji felt weird about doing it with Zeff in the apartment. The place was not big enough that his father wouldn't know what they were up to. But also because it hadn't come up.

Shit.

Sanji had really screwed things up.

Looking back, it was easier to see. Zoro had had a certain way of looking at him. Sanji had questioned it a few times, but only ever to himself and he always dismissed the thoughts as soon as they appeared as wishful thinking. Not that he wanted Zoro to look at him with affection, more that Sanji had spent a long time wanting any of his partners to look at him that way and had gave up any hope of that happening. He knew what he was good for and he never asked for more, except he didn't have to because Zoro just did it. Casual affection that didn't overshadow the antagonistic relationship they still enjoyed. Sanji had taken it for granted that anything Zoro did outside of sex was down to them being friends, but their other friends didn't caress his cheek. Their friends didn't give him impromptu gifts. Their friends didn't throw their arms over his shoulder and cuddle up to him during movie nights (well, Luffy did, but he did that with everyone).

Damn it, Sanji was an idiot.

A cruel idiot at that.

He had laughed. Any number of things he could've done and when Zoro had suggested Sanji come with him to officially meet Mihawk and Perona as his boyfriend, Sanji had laughed and dismissed him and any idea of them being in an actual relationship.

He grimaced as he recalled Zoro's hurt and furious face. He deserved every bit of vitriol he had thrown at him that night. He was a dumbass for not setting the record straight ages ago and letting things go on like that for so long.

Sanji was ripped from his thoughts as a hand settled on his shoulder. He turned to see Zeff's scowling face.

"What's this I hear about you burning food?"

Sanji rolled his eyes a little.

Bloody Patty.

"I'm not any more happy about it than you are, old man."

"I highly doubt that seeing as how it's coming out of my pocket and the customers' mouths," Zeff retorted.

His voice was gruff, but his eyebrows were knitted in a hint of worry.

"What's the matter then? You haven't burned food since you were a little runt."

"I—"

Sanji was cut off as his phone started buzzing in his pocket. He began fumbling to get it out of his pocket, wondering if Zoro was finally calling him. He nearly dropped his phone into the grease vat before finally getting hold of it, ignoring Zeff's raised brow.

He deflated a little when the Caller ID told him it was Nami rather than Zoro. He was always happy to hear from a goddess such as her, but he couldn't help but be disappointed. Still, he would never ignore a lady's call.

"I've gotta take this."

"While you're at it, hang up your apron and get out of here."

"What? I've still got three hours to go."

"I like my kitchen to remain standing. I can't afford you distracted. Go."

Sanji opened his mouth to protest but Zeff already began limping away. He grit his teeth but quickly went to the back so he could talk to Nami.

"Hello, my dear. To what do I owe the pleasure of hearing your lovely voice?"

"Hey, are you home?"

“I’m at the Baratie but I think I’ve just been kicked out.”

“Good, I’m coming over to yours.”

“Is something wrong?”

“I think Vivi and I broke up and I just really need a friend right now, so…”

“Oh, well in that case, of course. I’ll get home as soon as I can.”

“Thanks.”

~*~*~

Thanks to Sanji’s sense of cleanliness, he didn’t have to do much to prepare for Nami’s arrival other than create a veritable nest of blankets on the couch and bring out the good wine and ice cream flavors he knew she liked before pulling up Netflix for her to choose whatever movie she wanted to watch.

He glanced up when the door opened. Nami had long ago gotten a key to his apartment so it wasn’t strange for her to let herself in. What was strange was the redness of her eyes and cheeks. Sanji’s eyes widened before he ushered her towards the couch and pressed a wine glass in her hands. Before he could fill the glass, Nami snatched the bottle away and took a long swig.

“That bad, huh?”

She laid her head on his shoulder after finally coming up for air.

“I think I really fucked things up, Sanji.”

“It can’t be as bad as you think.”

“No, for real. I think I… I really stepped in it this time.”

“What happened?”

“We were arguing, I don’t even know what it was about specifically, but it came back to what our arguments always come back to. I love Vivi, but she’s so damn naïve. Sometimes it’s like talking to a brick wall for how much she can’t see the real world. She always wants to see the best in people. I guess that’s why she’s with me in the first place because I am not like her. I’m not good like her.”

“Nami—”

“Don’t even, Sanji. Need I remind you how this friendship of ours started? I led you on for months when we first met and let you think I was interested in a relationship with you, knowing I’m a lesbian, so I could get free meals from the Baratie. And I started dating Vivi because I planned to use her for money.”

Sanji couldn’t refute all that but still.

“We both know that. We love you anyway. We can see past that uncaring mask you put up for the person you really are.”

Nami groaned at that before burying her face into Sanji’s shoulder.

“Yeah, well, your caring friend told her girlfriend that she was a spoiled brat with too much privilege to know what the world was really like. I told her she had a bleeding heart and let herself be taken advantage of because she wanted to believe every sob story she ever heard and that if she wanted someone who was going to hug trees, paint peace signs everywhere and save the whales with her, then she should go date someone else. And the look on her face, she looked so hurt. She walked out without saying anything and it just felt like… it felt like things were over.”

Sanji’s eyes widened as he felt his shoulder growing wet. Nami wasn’t the crying type, at least not unless she was using her tears to get something, so he knew that all of this was more serious than he realized. He placed the wine bottle down and pulled her into a tight hug, rubbing her back comfortingly and stroking her hair. He waited for Nami to calm down before he said anything.

“Have you talked to Vivi since then? You shouldn’t assume anything, not unless you two actually talk to each other first.”

“It just happened a few hours ago. I’ve called but she’s sent me to voicemail and hasn’t answered my texts. I don’t think I want to be alone in our apartment tonight.”

“You can sleep here. You know the spare bedroom is always open for you. Take the night and calm down. You can try to call again in the morning. Maybe she’ll be ready to talk then. Vivi loves you, she wouldn’t just end things without a word, no matter what you two were arguing about.”

“I guess. Maybe she just needs some space, right? Maybe she’s gone somewhere to calm down.”

“Exactly. Give her time, okay?”

Nami nodded with a sigh before snatching up a spoon and the pint of ice cream left on the table. She cracked open the lid of the citrus breeze vanilla ice cream and moaned around a spoon of it. A few months ago, Sanji would’ve swooned over that sort of sound. Now, his stomach only flipped a little.

“If it makes you feel any better, I don’t think you fucked up the worst out of the two of us when it comes to relationships.”

Nami paused at that.

“I knew you were seeing someone. Usopp kept saying I was crazy and if you were dating someone, we’d all know about it. Except I know you too well. Whenever you’re dating a guy,

you get all secretive and embarrassed about it even though we all already know you're bi."

"I'm not… I wasn't dating anyone… not really anyway. It's… it's complicated."

Nami turned to face him completely.

"You might as well spill. I need a distraction from my sad love life."

Sanji pursed his lips a little, not sure if he wanted to bring up him and Zoro with a mutual friend. It wasn't like Zoro wasn't out or anything, it's just that Nami might be a little too close to the situation to be objective. Technically she was Zoro's friend before she was Sanji's, so maybe her loyalty was more to him. Sanji realized well enough now that he was the one who had fucked up more in this situation anyway, so—

"Ow!" Sanji exclaimed, rubbing his head after Nami smacked him.

"You're taking too long and thinking too much. Just talk."

Sanji grabbed the wine bottle off the table and took a fortifying gulp before speaking.

"So, its… I, maybe, might've, sort of, been sleeping with Zoro."

Nami's eyes widened as she sat up straighter.

"Really?"

There was a strange note in Nami's voice. It wasn't shock, more like surprise and something else, something close to delight maybe? But that'd be weird.

"It wasn't serious or anything. It was casual. We were just blowing off steam together. You know how much we rile each other up and then one day things got heated and then it kept getting heated… like, *a lot*."

"Less details, I don't actually want to know how many times you two fucked."

Nami's eyes narrowed in thought.

"So, what? You two were just friends with benefits? No feelings involved?"

"Yeah. We still hung out obviously, we've always done. I mean, maybe we hung out a bit more than we usually did once we started having sex, but it was still all casual. At least I thought it was. And then last week when I made him dinner and we were watching a movie, he asked if I would come with him for the weekend to officially meet Mihawk and Perona as a couple. And me, being the idiot I am, laughed at him and asked him why he would think we were a couple because it was just sex and that I had never considered dating him."

"Oh. Holy shit. Damn Sanji. Oh my god."

"I *know*. I feel like shit. I thought he was joking or something, I don't know, I…"

“Jesus Christ,” Nami groused, running her hand over her face.

“The way he looked at me… When I fully explained that I thought there was no strings attached, he blew up and threw me out.”

“Can you blame him?”

“No. I fucked up. If he never talks to me again, I wouldn’t fault him. I think I hurt him. I didn’t realize he thought we were dating. Why would I? Now I can’t stop thinking about everything that happened while we were fucking and I’m rethinking everything from before that too. If he thought we were dating, did that mean he had *feelings* for me the whole time?”

Nami shifted uncomfortably at that. Sanji’s eyes narrowed on her.

“What’s that look?”

“Look? I don’t have a look.”

“Yes you do. You know something.”

“Look, I love drama as much as the next gal, but that is a can of worms I am not getting into. You’re my friend and so is Zoro, I am staying neutral.”

“Oh my god, he *does* have feelings for me.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to, your face said it for you.”

Nami’s lips tightened at that as Sanji ran a weary hand over his mouth.

“You knew about it?”

“It’s not like I was keeping anything from you. First of all, it wasn’t my secret to tell. Second of all, it wasn’t like Zoro was hiding it very well. Third of all, he felt that way for so long that I didn’t think anything was ever going to change, even after you came out. If he didn’t jump on you then, I figured he never would, which wasn’t my problem.”

“Wait, how long has this been going on?”

“Long enough that even Chopper and Luffy have picked up on his feelings,” Nami mumbled around a spoonful of ice cream.

Sanji’s eyes widened even more at the most innocent and densest members of their friend group picking up on emotions that Sanji, self-proclaimed love cook, hadn’t.

He had known Zoro for six years now, having met him when he was 16 years old in high school after transferring to East Blue High following his and Zeff’s move from the North.

He and Zoro had butt heads almost immediately upon meeting one another even though they had shared many friends in common. Thanks to being sucked into Luffy's orbit, they found themselves hanging around each other a lot and then when they went off to college together ahead of the rest of their friends, fate had seen fit to make them roommates. Sanji had been certain they were going to kill each other those first few months of cohabitation, but eventually things cooled off. They still bickered and fought with each other, but there was a more friendly edge to things.

Due to their close proximity, Sanji hadn't been blind to Zoro's sexual preferences. He kept many partners throughout their college years, all male, but no one ever stuck around for long. There was a moment with Trafalgar Law where Sanji thought maybe Zoro was actually ready to settle, but that had fizzled out after a few months too. Sanji didn't dwell on it. If Zoro wanted to keep a parade of lovers, it wasn't Sanji's business. He had his own parade to indulge in, a parade that got even larger when he realized he liked men as well as women.

Things didn't take a turn with Zoro until five months prior. It was at one of Luffy's parties. The 19-year-old didn't go to college in favor of joining his brothers to be a firefighter, but he certainly threw enough parties for anyone to think he was firmly in his fratboy days. Zoro would also attend the large bashes, but he'd remain glued to the walls, drinking alone. During one particular one, Sanji had noticed that Ace was busy chatting up Law while Zoro stood to the side glaring at them. Sanji, feeling the need to intervene for the sake of friendship, had saddled up to Zoro and started bickering with him to distract him from the two. They ended up going to the kitchen where Sanji made him onigiri before they retreated upstairs with the snacks and drinks. Sanji might've been a little tipsy when he pressed his lips to Zoro. He still wasn't sure why he did it, but Zoro had reciprocated with more passion than Sanji had been expecting. From there, things were a whirlwind of clothes and skin on skin and unrestrained passion.

Zoro had never said anything about feelings even once during the five months they had spent together. Talking for them was usually a battle of verbal lobs but there were times when they could be serious. Zoro had told him how he ended up being adopted by Mihawk, why he was so passionate about Kendo, the loss of his friend Kuina. Sanji had told him about losing his mom, a little bit about Judge and his brothers, how he ended up adopted by Zeff. Sanji didn't mention those things to anyone, not even Luffy and Nami. Hell, he barely mentioned it to Zeff. Why the hell had he told Zoro about it?

Maybe it was because of the sex. Sanji always felt soft and floaty after he'd been with Zoro. It was like all his reservations were gone and his walls had dropped for as long as the afterglow of his orgasms lasted. Zoro was probably the best lover Sanji had ever had. He was generous, attentive, strong. And frankly, his cock had felt like heaven. Sanji was going to miss that. He was going to miss him.

"You gonna pop a boner or something?"

Sanji was startled out of his thoughts by the question.

"Nami!"

“You were clearly thinking about Zoro if that blush on your face was any indication. And sex, your nose only bleeds when you’re thinking about sex.”

Sanji’s fingers flew to his nose before he hastily grabbed a tissue to clean himself up. It wasn’t his fault. Zoro’s cock was, objectively, gorgeous. That was all. Not that Nami could appreciate such things.

“So what are you going to do?”

“What do you mean? I told you, Zoro never wants to see me again. Besides, we want different things. He wants a boyfriend and I…”

“*You* are a hopeless romantic constantly searching for love in every and any corner you can find it. And because of that, you settle for people who are never going to give you even half of what you give them because you don’t want to be alone.”

“That’s not true.”

Nami gave him a dubious look.

“That’s literally what happened between us.”

“We were kids then, teenagers who were still trying to get over the abuse we both went through. You couldn’t trust being in a serious relationship without there being some sort of transaction because you couldn’t trust people, you thought everyone wanted something from you so you wanted to be upfront and take what you could get before they could take something from you first. I couldn’t trust that people would want to stick around with me and love me for who I really am because I was too afraid Judge was right about me being a failure and that I’d chase someone off by being myself.”

“What’s it say about us that we’re barely any different than how we were before, huh? I keep trying to run away from Vivi and you can’t even admit that things could’ve been serious with Zoro because then things would be real. We’re both too afraid of getting hurt.”

“I never said I wanted anything serious with Zoro.”

Nami gave him a look at that.

“You have always been yourself with Zoro, even more than you have with me. He’s about the only person I’ve seen that could keep you on your toes and you like, even if you’d never admit it. He is, objectively, attractive. You two must’ve been doing things outside of sex if he thought you were dating and he must’ve been good in bed if you decided to sleep with him for… how long were you sleeping with him?”

“…five months.”

“Five months?! You thought you were fuck buddies for five fucking months, Sanji?!”

“I know, I know.”

“I think the longest relationship I’ve ever seen you keep has been three weeks. You were in a relationship with someone for five months and you didn’t realize it might’ve been worth investigating that things were beyond just friends with benefits? Something more than sex must’ve been going on and it must’ve been subtle enough for you to keep going back without freaking the fuck out and torpedoing things.”

“He was very good in bed, like scarily good. Let’s just say four-sword style is very much on the table for him.”

Nami choked at that before smacking Sanji on the arm.

“I told you I didn’t want to know about the sex between you two. I’m in a committed relationship you know… or I was anyway.”

“Don’t be so dramatic, you still are.”

“Yeah, well. We’ll see,” Nami replied, taking another swig of wine.

“Either way, you win the contest for most fucked up love life so congratulations.”

“I don’t feel like I’ve won any prizes here.”

“Blame yourself for that. Five months. Jackass.”

Sanji let himself fall back against the couch, his gaze drifting to his phone as he did so. No calls, no texts, no messages.

He didn’t know why he expected anything different. When Zoro was done with something, he was done. There was no in-between. Sanji’s eyes were drawn to the lockscreen of his phone. It was a picture of Zoro and Chopper at the animal shelter. The two of them had accompanied their young friend to get a new cat and the thing was plopped on top of his head, causing Zoro to scowl while Chopper beamed at the camara. Sanji had made the picture his wallpaper after he took it.

Shit, the more he thought about things the more evidence he saw for why Zoro would think they were dating in the first place. Sanji really was a piece of shit.

But whatever it was he and Zoro had was over now.

Sanji’s lips twisted as he leaned forward and placed his head on Nami’s shoulder, Zoro’s angry and hurt face flashing through his mind.

“You alright,” Nami asked.

“Not really. My fault though, isn’t it?”

Fuck, this was going to be a long night.

~*~*~

Sanji did his best to stick to his routine for the rest of the week. He completed his shifts at the Baratie, went to his classes for his last year in the culinary program at his college, he took over other duties as well at the restaurant. He had turned himself in a janitor/stock boy. Thanks to him, the fridges were fully stocked and the restaurant was gleaming in a way it hadn't since Zeff first bought it. The old man raised an eyebrow at his behavior but since Sanji was no longer burning food, he let it go.

His work kept him busy and that meant his mind was working too much to spare Zoro any thought. Except even with all the new duties he took on, he found he had much more free time than he realized. Unbeknownst to himself, he had carved out time in his schedule specifically for Zoro. He had quit the gym he went to before in favor of joining the one Zoro frequented. He took the early shift three days a week so he would have time to stop by Zoro's in the evening, cook dinner and relax together. Now that he and Zoro weren't a thing, Sanji had to fill up that time with something or he'd just spend it dwelling.

Nami helped. She was still at his apartment after her blow up with Vivi. Sanji had been pushing her to call her girlfriend, but Nami had decided to dig her feet in and declared that Vivi ought to call her first since she was the one who stormed out in the first place. Sanji thought it was a ridiculous standpoint to take but a) he'd never say so to a lady and b) he didn't exactly have any high ground when it came to relationships. He and Nami spent their evenings moping while cuddled up on the couch together watching romance movies to pass the time. It reminded Sanji a little too much of him and Zoro spending evenings throwing popcorn at each other, making fun of each other's movie picks, falling asleep in each other's arms… why the fuck did he think their behavior was things friends with benefits did? How the fuck could he not realize they were dating?

God, he was an idiot. He couldn't even make a plate a sushi at the Baratie anymore without feeling sullen for hours.

"How much longer are you going to stomp around this place being miserable," Zeff asked as the two closed at the restaurant one night.

"I'm not miserable," Sanji retorted around the cigarette between his lips.

"Right. And you're also not chain-smoking worse than usual either, right? I've already accepted that you've chosen to die before me, but why are you trying to speedrun the cancer lately, boy?"

Sanji rolled his eyes at that.

"It's nothing, I'm just… dealing with something."

"This have anything to do with the Cabbage boy? Haven't seen him around in a while."

Sanji rounded on Zeff wide-eyed at that.

"What?"

“He usually stops by on Wednesdays on your lunch break, even though you seem to think I don’t notice. Haven’t seen him in a while. Not that I’m upset about that group of vagabonds you call friends making themselves scarce. Figure I have to make an exception for your boyfriend though, however reluctantly.”

Sanji’s eyes widened at that.

“Boyfriend? You think Zoro is my…”

Zeff gave him a deadpan look at that.

“You brought the cabbage-headed brat over to spend the holidays with us, what else would I think? I know you seem to think I’m too senile to notice that you like men as well as women, but it’s just getting ridiculous now. You expect me to act like I don’t know about it when you parade your partner in front of my face?”

Sanji opened and closed his mouth several times before he closed his eyes and let out a miserable sigh.

“Zoro and I were never dating. Except maybe we were and I didn’t realize it. He certainly thought we were and then I went and mucked things up by thinking that we weren’t and now he hates me, so no, you won’t be seeing him around.”

Zeff took a moment to take all of what Sanji said in.

“You mean you’ve been moping around here with a broken heart for someone you didn’t even think you were dating?”

“I’m not broken hearted, I’m… I’m adjusting.”

“Adjusting to being single when apparently you had always thought you were single in the first place?”

Sanji groaned in reply.

“Look, it’s not finest moment, alright?”

Zeff snorted in reply.

“I’ve seen you be dumb about love more times than I care to think about, and God knows I don’t need or want details about your love life, but you’ve been lighter these past few months, happier. Figured it was on account of Cabbage.”

Sanji straightened a little at that.

“I have?”

“Anyone with eyes could see the difference, Eggplant. I don’t see why you can’t.”

Sanji bit his lip at that, unable to find an answer.

~*~*~

Sanji loved Nami, truly he did. However, after a week and a half had passed with no signs of her and Vivi reconciling, he was beginning to get antsy.

Vivi had eventually reached out and the blue-haired woman had simply said that she needed time and space to think.

Nami had spiraled about what it meant, claiming it was Vivi's way of breaking up with her, causing Sanji to have to talk her down more times than he could count on one hand.

It didn't help that they were both sulking over their respective fuckups, which brought the mood of the apartment down significantly. So, by the time the weekend rolled around again, Sanji was practically crawling out of his skin with the need to do… something, to fix something.

"I'm going to talk to her."

"Huh? Who?"

"Who do you think? Vivi."

Nami jumped up at that.

"What? Why? What are you going to say to her? Please don't embarrass me."

"What could I possibly do to embarrass you?"

Nami gave him a look at that.

"Do I need to remind about how you bled all over her because she wore a mini skirt to Luffy's New Year's bash?"

Sanji's cheeks turned bright red.

"I was drunk! Are you ever going to let that go?"

"She was wearing white."

"Ugh, look. I'm not going to embarrass you. I just don't see the point of both of us sitting here being miserable. Zoro and I are pretty firmly over, there's nothing I can do about that, but your love life is salvageable. I don't know if I can fix it, but you're my best friend so I'm going to try. One of us deserves to be happy."

Nami stared at him for a long moment before she threw her arms around him.

"Sometimes you're the worst but you're also sort of the best."

"What a glowing compliment coming from you, my dear."

Nami pushed him away after a moment and swatted his shoulder.

“Go, go. Go save my love life.”

Sanji quickly bundled himself up before he made the walk to Nami and Vivi’s apartment. It was a 20-minute walk, but the brisk air would do him good. He’d spent too long cooped up in stuffy places feeling sorry for himself lately.

He got to the girls’ apartment quickly enough but once he was there, the nerves started setting in. He didn’t actually know what to say and he’d feel like shit if he returned to Nami empty-handed after running out of the apartment to go on a heroic mission for her benefit. Recent events hadn’t proven him to be the most tactful or perceptive person when it came to relationships. Maybe he should’ve given this a little more thought.

Before Sanji could decide whether to press forward or run away, the door to the apartment swung open. Vivi froze as she saw Sanji standing there. He pasted a smile on his face immediately.

“Hello, dearest. I was hoping it would be a good time to catch you, but you seem to be heading out.”

“I’m going to Hatchi’s.”

Hatchan was an old enemy turned friend who owned a takoyaki and sushi place a few blocks from where the local college was. The crew had spent many afternoons lounging around and leeching off Hatchan’s guilt-laced magnanimity to chow down on the free food he offered them as well as the good company. Sanji hadn’t been by in a while.

“Do you mind if I walk with you? I was hoping we could chat.”

“Is this about Nami?”

“Well, yes.”

Vivi sighed at that. Sanji hated putting any emotional distress on a lady, but he was equally unwilling to see the crestfallen look on Nami’s face if he came back with nothing to show.

“I guess we can talk.”

Sanji smiled and followed Vivi down the stairs and onto the street towards the restaurant.

“I guess she’s been staying with you, huh?”

Sanji nodded in reply.

“Makes sense. I think she’d chew her own arm off before choosing to cohabitate with Luffy or Zoro, or Brook for that matter. I doubt she’d want to stay with any couples, so that’s Usopp and Kaya along with Robin and Franky off the list. Chopper’s still with Kureha and she and Nami have a weird thing happening. I haven’t gotten any angry phone calls, so that crosses out Nojiko. That leaves you or Jinbei.”

“I don’t mean to pry and get into anything I shouldn’t be involved in.”

“But?”

“But I just… I don’t know, I guess I’m just concerned. Nami’s been spiraling and I can’t help but spiral with her. It’s got me worried.”

“She told you I said I need space, right?”

“She did. I’m not here to say that you’ve had enough time to think or that you two should figure everything out now. I don’t mind having Nami with me. A few years ago, this would’ve been a dream come true. Hell, it still is. I just want to offer some words on her behalf before you decide anything.”

Vivi narrowed her eyes at that.

“Okay.”

“She said that you guys argued, that she said some… harsh words.”

“She said I was a precious princess with a case of affluenza who had no idea how to survive on my own. She told me to my face that I should date someone else.”

“That’s not what she meant.”

“Are you sure about that? Look, I’m not delusional. I know that, compared to the rest of you guys, I’ve had it pretty easy in life and sometimes that might make me come across as naïve or overly optimistic. I’m Nami’s exact opposite in a lot of ways. She gets people in a way I don’t sometimes, but that doesn’t mean that there isn’t value in giving people a chance every now and again, choosing to trust and ask for help. Choosing to be vulnerable with people. I feel like there are days even now that we’ve been dating for a year where Nami is still hiding herself from me and if I point it out, she’ll invent something to argue about and say something that’s hurtful enough for me to want to stop trying. I’m resilient, Sanji. But I have my limits too.”

“Vivi, none of are going around comparing sob stories about who had it worst. Nami isn’t either. It’s like you said, she just gets frightened sometimes about getting close to people. And the closer she gets, the more scared she gets and sometimes it makes her lash out, even when she doesn’t mean it. Or she’ll shut people out, even if she doesn’t want to. Hell, she’s done it to all of us at one time or another. She’s doing this now because she loves you. She knows it’s real with you and she thinks that you’re better than she is, that you deserve better than her. You’ve just gotta… give her a good knock upside the head sometimes.”

Sanji found himself looking down for moment, his words hitting a little too close to home. That wasn’t what he did with Zoro though. He and Zoro weren’t dating in the first place so there was no reason for him to shut him out or lash out or hurt him. Sanji was an idiot unintentionally. He wasn’t doing anything to protect his heart, he just hadn’t realized that Zoro was putting his on the line.

And then Sanji had gone and stomped all over it.

The blond shook his head, dispelling his thoughts as he knocked his shoulder into Vivi's lightly.

"And don't sell yourself so short. You were one of the first people I've met that managed to get Luffy to change his mind about something. That's a herculean feat all on its own, trust me."

Vivi giggled a little at that.

"We all enjoy having you around, Vivi. We all love you. Nami loves you the most out of all of us. You know that, right?"

"I know. Just hard to see past everything else sometimes."

"Take your time. There's no rush or anything. Like I said, I'm not here to tell you to get over it. Just… remember the good times too instead of only wallowing in the bad."

Vivi nodded slowly to herself.

"Thanks, Sanji. I… I think I needed to hear that."

Sanji smiled in reply, throwing an arm around Vivi's shoulder to pull her into a side hug.

"Of course, my dear."

Sanji's heart swelled with a sense of accomplishment. At least he had done something right.

"Oh, Sanji watch out," Vivi warned just as they turned the corner.

Sanji looked up but couldn't stop in time before he ran straight into someone else.

"Sorry," they muttered, moving to the side.

Sanji stopped in his tracks at the flash of green.

"Zoro?"

Zoro looked like he had intended to keep walking towards his destination but stopped upon hearing his voice. His eyes widened a little when he looked at Sanji before his face settled into its usual stoniness.

"Sanji, this is a surprise."

Sanji glanced back at where Zoro had come from. His apartment was a little way away from Hatchi's. Sanji didn't know how he could forget that, but it wasn't like they were actually passing Zoro's apartment so he hadn't considered that he might run into the man.

He looked like he was dressed to go to the gym. He wasn't wearing a jacket despite the chilly weather.

"Are you trying to catch cold, Mosshead?"

There were any number of things that probably would've been better to say.

Are you alright? Are we alright? Do you still hate me? Can we still be friends? What are we going to do when we have to see each other at group hangouts? I didn't mean to hurt you. It was a misunderstanding. I'm sorry.

Zoro stared back for a moment before shrugging.

"It's good training. Besides, I've felt shittier, very recently in fact."

Sanji couldn't help but feel like that was a dig at him. He was hyperaware of Vivi standing there staring between the two of them with curiosity and confusion.

"Right. Um, listen, I—"

"Doesn't matter, you can forget it. I have."

"I was just going to say—"

"I don't wanna know. I don't *care* to know. Just drop it."

Zoro's gaze was utterly cold, devoid of any warmth or affection or fondness. Sanji had come to expect it without even realizing the connotations of such feelings existing in the first place. He had told himself it was just friendship, no more and no less, and now he couldn't even call them that much. He found himself floundering, looking for something to say in the finality of Zoro's blatant dismissal, but before he could a shrill voice came floating from down the street.

"Idiot! What did I tell you about getting ahead of me?! And I told you to wear a damn coat!"

Zoro rolled his eyes and looked back at a pink-haired woman who was storming up to them holding a coat.

Perona, Zoro's older sister.

"Put it on, idiot."

"Don't need to, Rona."

"I wasn't asking," the woman retorted, throwing it in Zoro's face.

She turned to look at the two, staring with wide eyes.

"Do I know you two?"

"You might've seen them before. This is Sanji and Vivi, Nami's girlfriend."

Perona's eyes immediately switched to Sanji before she gave him such a withering look that he felt like a worm beneath her boot. He was struck with the urge to flee lest her wrathful gaze strike him dead right then and there.

“Hmm, much less cute than I pictured, though I wasn’t expecting much anyway,” she muttered to herself, looking Sanji up and down like she was dissecting him.

“Come on, Rona. We’ve got better things to do. Don’t you have a reservation?”

“Which we’ll be late for since you decided to run off the wrong way. The restaurant’s back here, dummy.”

Perona grabbed Zoro’s arm and started dragging him back the way they came without so much as a backward glance. Part of Sanji wanted to call out. For what? He didn’t know, he doubted any good would come from it. Still, he couldn’t help but feel even lower as he watched them disappear.

Vivi immediately rounded on him.

“What was that?”

Sanji swallowed hard.

“Consequences of my own fuck-up.”

Vivi raised an eyebrow, but Sanji waved her off.

“I’m sure Nami will tell you all about it when you decide to talk to her again. Far be it from me to steal away her gossip. Maybe call her soon. I love her, but she is driving me a little crazy.”

“You’re not staying with me? I thought you’d join me for lunch.”

“I’d better go. I probably have some work I’ve been neglecting.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. Don’t worry about me. I’m perfect, more than perfect. I’ll see you around, yeah?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Sanji walked away in the opposite direction, feeling a heavy weight in both his stomach and behind his eyes. He blinked away the stinging ruthlessly. Like hell was he about to cry in the middle of the street because his ex-not boyfriend gave him the cold shoulder and apparently talked to his family about Sanji, so now they all hated him. He should probably be a little concerned about that. Dracule Mihawk had a dark reputation, but the threat to Sanji’s life notwithstanding, it was his heart that was feeling particularly wretched at the moment.

It’s done, it’s over. There was nothing there but sex. You did something stupid and Zoro hates you now, there’s no use dwelling on it. Just forget about it.

The words did nothing to quell the rapturous feeling inside of him though. God, Zoro really did hate him. Worse, he couldn’t even be bothered to give Sanji the time of day anymore.

Sanji.

Zoro had called him Sanji. Not Cook. Not Curly. Not Dartboard. But Sanji. He rarely called him that and if he did, it was in the throes of passion. He never said his name like that, in that impersonal way like Sanji was a stranger to him. Like he didn't matter to him.

Sanji was a mess. Not just of anxiety and some strange, indefinable emotion but the second he saw Zoro, his heart started pounding in his chest, his palms got sweaty, a swooping, fluttering filled his stomach. Hearing Zoro's voice, no matter how cold it had been, had felt like a sweet melody in his ears. He found himself longing for a few minutes more with him, even if Zoro had ended up spitting vitriol at him and hatred.

Fuck, I missed him. I want… I want him back.

The realization struck him like lightning. He wanted Zoro back. He wanted the sex, yes. It was good sex, but he wanted the quiet moments too, the fiery moments, the fighting, the cuddling, the comfort, the companionship. He wanted it all. He had *had* it all and he threw it away like an idiot and now Zoro would never… he wouldn't ever…

Nami was beaming by the time Sanji walked into the apartment in a daze. She practically tackled him in the doorway.

"Vivi called! I don't know what you said or did, but she said she missed me and she wants me to come home. I told her I missed her too and I was packing right now, so… Sanji?"

Nami's excitement seemed to trail off as she got a good look at Sanji. He didn't know what she was seeing but she snatched his hand and dragged him to the sofa.

"Whose ass do I have to kick?"

Sanji laughed humorlessly at that, the tears he'd been holding back on the street finally falling down his face. He swiped them away furiously, but they kept falling no matter how he tried to rid himself of them.

"Sanji, what happened?"

"I… I saw Zoro."

Nami blinked at that before sagging.

"That bad, huh?"

"He hates me. He despises me. I disgust him."

"Sanji—"

"I think I love him."

Nami's jaw dropped at that.

“What?”

“I miss him and I haven’t stopped thinking about him this whole time and no amount of justifications I keep telling myself is fixing the fact that I miss him *so much*. I think I was scared and I didn’t want to admit… I’ve lost him forever. He won’t… he’ll never…”

Nami latched onto Sanji’s hands and gently removed them from his hair. He hadn’t even realized he was pulling at it.

“You need to breathe before you go into a full-blown panic attack.”

“But I—”

“No. We’re going to pause and breathe first. You know how this works so breathe with me.”

Sanji let himself be led through the familiar breathing exercises as he came down from his emotional overture.

Nami eyed him for a moment as she ran her fingers through his blonde locks.

“I’m going to talk to Zoro.”

“No! No, just… just leave it.”

“Sanji—”

“I screwed up. It’s my fault. I should’ve realized… I was an idiot and I made this bed for myself, I’ve got to lie in it.”

Nami pursed her lips at that, obviously disagreeing but not putting up any more of a fight. She let him rest his head on her shoulder as she wrapped her arms around him.

“What are you going to do then?”

Sanji had no fucking clue.

~*~*~

Sanji was miserable.

No, he was downright gloomy. He knew he probably wasn’t fun to be around, not since he’d run into Zoro. The sous chefs had taken to giving him a wide berth. His classmates left all the seats near him empty due to his mood. Zeff looked like he wanted to brain him by the end of every shift. All his friends had noticed by now and had one comment or another about it. The only quiet ones were Luffy and Robin who had both given him contemplative looks before settling into mysterious smiles. Still, Sanji was miserable and because of that he was a misery for everyone else. Hell, he was fed up with himself by now but that was nothing new.

So, when Nami showed up to tell him that she had gone against his wishes and talked to Zoro, he wasn’t exactly enthused to hear it.

“Before you freak out, he wanted me to tell you that you could stop by tomorrow and pick up anything you left at his place.”

“Great. That makes me ecstatic.”

“That’s your chance to smooth things over, idiot. He could’ve just thrown your things out or asked me to pick it up if he really didn’t want to see you. Clearly, he’s leaving the door open for you so don’t waste it.”

Sanji took a moment to think about that. He supposed that was true. Zoro wasn’t the sentimental type, at least not about things that weren’t swords. Sanji was surprised he still had any of his things given it had been nearly a month since their break-up.

“I swear, only you would realize you’re in love with your fuck buddy after you’ve already broken up with him. You’re lucky I love you. I won’t even charge you for my services. I’ll consider it payback for you helping me out during my shit with Vivi. You just need to figure out what you’ve got to say to get Zoro to give you another chance. Which means you need to be honest with him, and I mean really honest. Uncomfortable, vulnerable levels of honest. It’ll suck but it’ll be for the best in the end. If I can do it with Vivi then you can do it with Zoro.”

Sanji bit his lip at that. He and Zoro had been more honest and vulnerable with each other than Sanji had realized at the time, but it was still a daunting task to think of what he could tell Zoro that would make him forgive him and give him another chance. He didn’t want to make excuses; Zoro wouldn’t care for that. What could he really say that would make a difference though?

Should he try to seduce him? No, that sort of thing got them in trouble in the first place. Sex wouldn’t make things between them any clearer. Though Sanji really did miss the sex between them, he was more pent up than he had been in months thanks to his and Zoro’s healthy sex habits, but he had to go into this thinking with his brain and not his dick. He wanted Zoro back, that was no longer a question he had to equivocate about. He had been slow to come to the conclusion, but once he did, he couldn’t deny it. He didn’t want to get his hopes up but if Zoro was willing to give him even just a minute so that Sanji could explain or apologize, then maybe Sanji could fix things.

Even if Zoro didn’t want him back in a romantic sense, maybe they could figure out how to be friends. It hadn’t been an issue so far, but they shared a friend group. Sanji didn’t want their friends to be in a position where they felt they had to choose between them or for things to be awkward whenever he and Zoro were both attending group outings. It wouldn’t be fair to the rest of the crew to be dragged into drama that Sanji’s own stupidity had created.

Still, all he could do was apologize and hope that maybe he would get a second chance. Whether Zoro forgave him or not wasn’t up to him.

He was a riot of nerves and anxiety on the day he arrived at Zoro’s apartment. Part of him wanted to flee but he forced himself to walk up the stairs. His fingers hesitated at the intercom, but someone opened the door before he could even press the button, so Sanji slipped inside and made his way up to Zoro’s apartment. He lingered outside the door, trying

to psych himself up before he finally took a deep breath and knocked. The door opened after a moment and Zoro stood there, his face blank.

“Hi,” Sanji greeted lamely, instantly feeling like an idiot for doing so.

Zoro stared back for a moment before holding the door wider and walking away.

Sanji took that as permission to come inside. The apartment didn’t look much different from when Sanji had last been here a month ago. It was a little untidy, clothes thrown on the back of the couch with shoes piled up at the door. When Sanji had been frequenting the apartment, he’d always harass Zoro about putting his clothes away properly. He even bought a shoe rack for him since he kept kicking his shoes off near the door and then proceeding to trip over them in the morning. Sanji didn’t see the shoe rack now.

He looked over as Zoro approached him with a glass a water. Sanji took it gratefully and took a long sip, not realizing how dry his throat was until he did.

The two stood there for a moment, not saying anything. Sanji’s eyes kept darting around the apartment, not sure what to say or how to start.

“So, you talked to Nami.”

“Nami didn’t give me a choice.”

Sanji winced a little at that. Nami wasn’t the softest person in the world. It wasn’t out of the realm of possibility that she had threatened or blackmailed Zoro into speaking to Sanji again. He couldn’t find it in himself to be mad about that though, not if it meant he had a chance now. He took another sip of his water before taking a fortifying breath.

“I’m an idiot,” he said abruptly.

Zoro raised an eyebrow at that but was otherwise silent.

“I should’ve realized that things were more serious than I was telling myself it was. I… I don’t know if I meant for things to get serious. It was just… it was *easy* to be with you. I’ve never been in a relationship like this and I didn’t know… I just thought… Most of my relationships have been about what I could do for someone else, what I could give them. You don’t need me to protect you, you don’t like all my flowery romantic shit, food is a matter of necessity in your mind. The only other thing I could offer was sex so I didn’t think that you would want anything from me beyond that. I’m an idiot for not realizing how much of our relationship existed outside of sex. I know I probably gave you a lot of mixed signals and I’m so sorry for that. I’m sorry I hurt you. I never wanted to do that.”

Zoro’s expression didn’t change for a moment before he shrugged lightly.

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay. Your things are in a box by the coffee table. I packed up anything I could find. If there’s anything else, I’ll send it over.”

“Wait, but—”

“You said what you wanted to say. You apologized. There isn’t anything else to say, is there?”

Tell him you love him, tell him how you feel, no matter how scary it is. Just tell him.

“I… no, I guess not.”

Zoro nodded in response before turning to walk towards the kitchen. Sanji turned to the box filled with clothes and miscellaneous items. His heart was pounding painfully in his chest as he lifted it and started walking towards the door. He stared at the wood for a moment, not able to make his feet move anymore. He bit his lip before turning back to face Zoro who was taking out ingredients for a protein shake, seemingly indifferent to Sanji’s presence.

And damn it, Sanji couldn’t just walk away and leave it like this.

“I lied. I do have something else to say.”

Zoro looked up at him with a dubious expression.

Sanji dropped the box he was holding and made his way into the kitchen, standing on the other side of the counter across from Zoro.

“After things ended between us and after my initial denial, I realized something important. I realized I miss you… a lot.”

“Pretty sure you could’ve found someone else to fuck.”

“Not just sex. Well, obviously the sex too but it was the other things, the things I didn’t even realize we were doing. I missed getting to argue with you over the dumbest things. I missed waking up with you practically roasting me alive with your ridiculous body temperature. I missed your Wednesday visits on my lunch break. I missed competing with you at the gym and sparring with you. I missed our movie nights. I missed complaining about you not showering enough and throwing your clothes everywhere. I missed texting with you all throughout the day. I missed cooking for you and hearing you laugh at dumb things and cutting your hair and forcing you to wear nice clothes when we go out and you calling me out on my shit when I’m being too much and teasing me about how I am with women and calling me dumb names and brushing your fingers through me hair in the morning when you think I’m sleeping and I just… I really miss you. I just miss being with you.”

Sanji let out a deep breath after his tirade. He chanced a glance up at Zoro and saw the man was still regarding him skeptically.

“Why’d you kiss me?”

“Huh?”

“That night, the first night, at Luffy’s party. Why’d you kiss me?”

Sanji thought back to the night, the music thumping through the walls, the intimacy of the bedroom that he and Zoro had spirited themselves away into, the quiet companionship as they shared a bottle while laying out on the bed side by side. Sanji had found himself staring at Zoro’s face, the way his eyelashes fluttered against his dark tan skin, the way his lips wrapped around the bottle of liquor, the softness of his gaze on Sanji.

“It was the way looked at me. It was like… You were looking at me like you wanted me. In hindsight, I don’t think it was just sexually, but I couldn’t admit to it being anything else because I wouldn’t know what to do with that. But I… I think even then I wanted you too. I just didn’t know what to do.”

“So you kissed me?”

“So I kissed you.”

Zoro took in his words with a contemplative look before he sighed and nodded towards the seats at the island.

“Sit down.”

Sanji hesitated for a moment before doing so. Zoro took the seat next to him. He was silent for a while before he turned to Sanji abruptly.

“I know you’ve got… *things*. Issues with yourself and people and how you think people see you. I don’t ask because it’s not important to me. It doesn’t change how I see you. I don’t feel the need to push you. If there’s something you want me to know, I figure you’ll tell me. Yeah, sometimes you’d lash out if we got too close or if you told me something important, like about your mom or Zeff, but I understood that.”

“I know.”

“Nami says you’re afraid of relationships getting too deep because then if someone rejects you, you’ll think your birth father was right and you really are a failure.”

Sanji winced at that. Hell, that woman never pulled her punches, did she?

“Did I ever make you think I’d do something like that?”

“No, no. You didn’t, I just… it’s my own shit. I’ve believed it my entire life. I gave Zeff hell on earth as a kid and you remember how I was with Luffy at first in high school.”

“Yeah, you were a disaster then.”

Sanji scoffed a laugh at that.

“Don’t think I’m much better nowadays.”

“I thought you were, before this.”

Sanji sighed at that, feeling disappointed in himself. He thought he was better too. He knew his trauma from his childhood would never fully go away, but he hated how it got in the way of all his relationships and here it was stopping him from something that could've been real.

"Nami told me something too. Although it was more like not saying something than actually saying something. However, not answering the question sort answered the question, so..."

"Just spit it out."

"She implied that you had feelings for me and had for a while, long enough that all our friends knew about it."

Sanji waited on bated breath to see how Zoro would answer.

"Do you think I'd be this pissed off or hurt by someone who I didn't care about?"

"So that's how you feel? You… you care about me?"

"Are you fishing for something, Cook?"

Sanji felt warmth flood his chest at the moniker, at being 'cook' to Zoro again. Maybe it was that more than anything else that forced him to say what he had been dancing around this whole conversation.

"I really did miss you, Zoro. After things blew up between us, I was a mess. I thought of you all the time. I kept telling myself there was nothing I could do and to just get over it and move on, but I couldn't. It took me a stupidly long time to realize why."

Sanji's heart was thundering in his ears, his blood was rushing hot and fast to his head, making him slightly lightheaded. There was a ringing in his ears and his tongue felt heavy, but he knew he was going to do this regardless. No matter what happened afterwards, he had to say it or he'd regret it for the rest of his life.

"I realized that I'm in love with you," Sanji blurted out with much less finesse than he would've liked.

"I think I've felt this way for a while, probably from before the party which is why I kissed you at all. I was just too much of an idiot to see it and too insecure to try in case it didn't work out. It shouldn't have taken me hurting you and myself to realize that. I'm sorry that it did."

Sanji held his breath, his body tense as he waited for Zoro to react or say something. He jumped slightly when Zoro abruptly stood up and began pacing back and forth, looking for all the world like a tiger in a cage.

"You made me feel like an idiot. You laughed in my face when I called you my boyfriend."

Sanji winced at that.

"I'm sorry."

“You said that already.”

“I was an idiot.”

“You said that too.”

“I… I don’t know what else to say.”

Zoro scoffed a little as he continued pacing before he stopped abruptly and stared at Sanji.

“Do you know how long I’ve wanted to hear those words from you? How long I wanted to even get the chance to be with you at all? Then you kiss me and it’s a dream come true. I didn’t want to fuck it up. I know you, I figured you’d freak out if we try to put any labels on it. You usually do when you’re in a relationship with a guy.”

“I don’t…”

Zoro gave him a dubious look in reply, prompting Sanji to trail off.

Zoro groaned ruefully before dropping back down beside Sanji.

“It’s possible that I might’ve made a mistake by assuming anything without talking to you first. Not saying you don’t have a majority of the blame or anything, but I could’ve made sure we were on the same page too.”

“You did give me plenty of hints, not your fault I couldn’t read them.”

“You’re definitely the bigger idiot here but, to be fair, I was an idiot too.”

The two of them were quiet for a moment before Sanji let out a sigh.

“I don’t expect your forgiveness. I certainly haven’t earned it, or a second chance for that matter, but I would really like if you could give me another chance to do things right.”

Zoro exhaled softly.

“I’m still pissed at you. It was fucking humiliating. I told my father and sister about us and then…”

“Fuck, Zoro. I’m so sorry—”

“Still, regardless, my feelings for you haven’t actually changed. Hell, I’ve felt this way about you since 10th grade, I don’t expect it to change any time soon.”

Sanji looked up abruptly at that.

“What? Since… but… that was six years ago.”

“Yeah, well…”

Sanji stared at him, gobsmacked. All this time, all this time Zoro had held a torch for him, maybe even loved him and Sanji never noticed? Sanji had spent his life starved for affection, thinking he only deserved it in brief moments, fleeting kisses, passionate but short affairs. Then, when he finally had someone who wanted him, who wanted to stay, he hadn't even recognized it.

He felt a warm, melting sensation inside of him, turning his blood to goo and his heart to mush.

"Oh, poor sweet Marimo. I kept you waiting for so long."

Zoro's eyes widened at that as Sanji took his hand in his and kissed the back of it. The green haired man blinked before his cheeks turned red.

"I'm not… I don't… I don't want pity or…"

"I could never pity you. I love you. I'll spend however long it takes to convince you of that if I need to. I can't promise I won't screw up again, but I promise I'll never take your heart for granted again."

Zoro opened and closed his mouth a few times, seemingly struck speechless.

"I'm still mad at you."

"I deserve that, but if you give me a chance I won't ever do something like that to you again."

"You better fucking not or I'll slice you into sashimi."

"So? Can we go back to how things were? Except with both of us actually agreeing to be a real couple and do real couple things… which was basically everything we were doing already, except this time, officially."

"I'm going to hold this against you for a while," Zoro warned.

"Noted. Would it help if I begged? I can beg. Don't know how good I'll be at that outside the bedroom, but I can try. One time offer though."

Zoro huffed in exasperation at that.

"You're not helping me not be annoyed with you."

"Is it our regular level of annoyance? Because I can live with that."

"God, I'm going to regret this."

"Does that mean…"

"It means we need to take things slow. If we're doing it, we're doing it right. But you can also unpack that box. Might as well have your stuff here from when you need it."

Sanji beamed at that before throwing himself at Zoro, holding his cheeks as he pulled him into a kiss. He kept it light, not wanting to push beyond any limits that were in place between them. Zoro returned the kiss, so that was a good sign at least.

“Thank you,” Sanji breathed against his lips.

Zoro pulled back slightly to meet his eyes. Sanji could read uncertainty, hope, caution, happiness, maybe even love. It caused another burst of warmth to fill his chest.

“I won’t make you regret this, Mosshead.”

“I hope not.”

~*~*~

“Why are we doing this again,” Nami asked as they walked into the fourth sword shop they’d visited that day.

“It’s not a birthday or a holiday or an anniversary. I don’t see why we need to be traipsing all over the East Blue for a sword.”

“Because Zoro’s been wanting this sword for forever and I want to show him that things are different between us now. It’s been a few weeks but we’re still adjusting. I want to make a gesture to show I’m serious.”

“You wanna buy his forgiveness with an expensive sword, got it.”

“That’s not what I’m doing. Oh god, is that what I’m doing? Do you think he’ll think that’s what I’m doing? Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe we should just go home and—”

“Jesus, it was a joke. Didn’t mean to send you down the spiral of doom.”

Sanji sighed in return. He and Zoro were still in a weird place. They were texting each other again, though still less frequently than before. Sanji stopped avoiding the gym for fear of seeing Zoro. Zoro had visited him this past Wednesday during his lunch break the way he used to. However, Zoro was keeping him at arm’s length. Neither had visited the other’s apartment. They hadn’t kissed since their talk. Zoro hadn’t even technically agreed that they were officially boyfriends. That was not a misunderstanding Sanji was going to let happen again. With that in mind, he had invited Zoro to his apartment for dinner in hopes that they could finally rectify that. He didn’t want to do so empty handed though. He planned to make Zoro’s favorites and begged some of Zeff’s good sake off him, but he wanted to give Zoro something special and personalized to show that Sanji was all in this time.

“I don’t want to fuck this up. I know a sword isn’t going to fix what I did, but—”

“But a romantic gesture does go a long way, I get it. I bought Vivi rings that double as weapons and convinced a curry chef to cook for us at our apartment for a romantic dinner date.”

“Convinced?”

Nami smiled serenely in response.

“Right. Suppose I can’t complain. I need your particular set of skills to help me get this sword’s price down.”

“You can count on me for that.”

Sanji smiled as he looked around the room. Zoro’s sword collection included his beloved Wado Ichimonji, Yubashiri, Sandai Kitetsu and Shusui along with the first two swords he’d ever been gifted who remained nameless.

Beyond that, Zoro had long been obsessed with the idea of owning the sword Enma, which apparently had belonged to some legend in the kendo scene. His daughter had chosen to sell it after his death and now it had found its way to a sword shop in the East Blue. Of course, the article where Sanji read this didn’t specify what sword shop, thus he and Nami had been trekking all over, looking for it.

Sanji approached the man sitting at the desk and flashed him a charming smile. The tag stitched on his shirt labeled him as Ipponmatsu.

“Hello, I’m looking for this sword. I’m hoping you have it in your inventory.”

Sanji slid over the picture of Enma.

Ipponmatsu stared at the photo for a moment before looking up at Sanji skeptically.

“You don’t strike me as a swordsman.”

“I’m not, I’m hoping to gift it to my… friend. He’s really into this stuff. He’s been after this sword for months.”

“Rightfully so. It is a rare legend, a jewel in this shop.”

“So you do have it?”

Ipponmatsu hesitated a moment more before disappearing to the back and then returning with a box. He lifted the lid and removed the sword which was still in a lilac sheath. He retracted it only a little, revealing a sharp gleaming blade. Sanji wasn’t much for swords, but even he could tell the craftsmanship was singular.

“This blade is among a special class of 21 Great Graded swords, one of the best in the world. Whoever gets this sword cannot be someone who will misuse it.”

“Trust me, Zoro won’t.”

Ipponmatsu’s eyes gleamed at that.

“Roronoa Zoro?”

“Yes. You know him.”

“I’ve followed his career closely. He has bought swords from here before, Yubashiri and Sandai Kitetsu III. He is a skilled man, there’s no doubt of that. However, Enma is still a rare blade and so it must go for a fair price.”

Nami quickly slid in beside Sanji at that.

“I 100% agree. Let’s talk price, shall we?”

She flashed a bright smile that Sanji could see was tinged with mischief, but he let Nami do her work unimpeded and wound up getting the sword 35% off the original price. It was still an exorbitant fee that was going to set Sanji back a couple months, but it was worth it.

“You owe me, by the way,” Nami declared as they walked out of the shop.

“You helped me with Vivi and I helped with Zoro, so that was a wash. However, this is above and beyond those services, so I expect repayment in the form of those lemon bars Vivi loves and tangerine tarts for me next weekend. We’re going on a picnic date and that would be perfect dessert.”

“Done. I’ll even make some sandwiches for you as well. Thanks again, Nami.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re lucky to have me. Just make sure you and Zoro have an adult conversation about your relationship this time.”

Sanji nodded resolutely in reply.

It didn’t take much to set up his apartment for his dinner date with Zoro. He felt nervous about it, but he had set the table for two with the best dining sets he had on hand, nice glasses for both the wine and sake he had available and a menu with three courses. Onigiri for appetizers, fish and rice as a main dish and mochi for dessert. He planned to give Zoro the sword during dessert.

He put on some music on low and had candles lit around the room to set the mood. He hoped he wasn’t overdoing it. Zoro usually teased him for all his “love-cook crap”, but he wanted to show Zoro he was willing to make the effort for him.

The mosshead showed up 30 minutes late, which Sanji had a mini breakdown about before reminding himself that Zoro probably got lost. Zoro was dressed casually in jeans and a green graphic tee. Sanji was in his version of dressed down, a button up and slacks.

“Was I supposed to dress up or something?”

“No, no. It’s fine. You’re perfect exactly as you are.”

Zoro lingered at the door before Sanji waved him inside.

“The table’s all set. The sake and wine are chilling on ice.”

Sanji turned around and drew back as a bouquet of flowers was unceremoniously shoved in his face.

“Is… is that for me?”

Zoro scowled in reply.

“Who else?”

Sanji blinked in surprise before taking the bouquet of roses, carnations, lilies, delphiniums and baby’s breath.

“They’re beautiful,” Sanji smiled.

“Robin picked them out,” Zoro shrugged, shuffling uncomfortably.

Sanji was struck with the urge to kiss him, even if just on the cheek. He didn’t want to overstep so he held himself back.

“I’m going to find a vase. You can go ahead to the table.”

Sanji was quick to put the flowers away and join Zoro at the table.

The two made light conversation throughout their meal, telling each other about their days and any updates they hadn’t mentioned over text. Sanji mentioned his latest project for culinary school, to create a full menu based around cuisine from a certain country. Sanji had been assigned Dressrosa and so he had taken to a lot of experimentation with their unique seasonings. Zoro had a tournament coming up and was prepping for them.

“Competition is tight this season. Most of the people from Isshin Dojo are competing but thanks to a transfer, Kozuki’s Dojo has been rezoned so now we’ll be facing them a lot sooner than we usually do. Before, we got a buffer and only had to face them during Nationals. They’re the toughest dojo to beat by far.”

“Kozuki? Why does that sound familiar?”

“You might’ve heard me talking about Kozuki Oden before. He’s a legend in the martial arts world. He’s already been inducted into the Hall of Fame. His swords are legendary in their own rights.”

“Ame no Habakiri and Enma, right? Your birth family forged Enma.”

Zoro blinked at that.

“How’d you know that?”

“You’ve mentioned it before. I remembered. I do listen from time to time. Plus, I was doing research about it.”

“You were? Why?”

Sanji hesitated before standing.

“I was going to save this for later, but since we’re already on the subject.”

He quickly darted into his bedroom and retrieved the gift box which held the sword. He laid it in front of Zoro and stood back nervously.

Zoro opened the box with a confused face and immediately stiffened upon seeing Enma inside. Sanji felt a spike of nerves.

“You got me a sword?”

“Yeah, well I… I remember you mentioned that it was sold by his daughter and ended up in the East. I tried calling sword shops first but none of them would tell me if they had Enma on the phone. Then Nami and I started visiting shops instead. Had to go to four of them before we finally found it and then Nami had to haggle the price down. We did end up with a discount on account of it going to you. Apparently, the shopkeeper is a fan of yours. It’s the right sword, isn’t it? Please tell me it is and I didn’t get scammed or something, because I might’ve used a third of my savings to get it even with Nami’s help and—”

“Cook,” Zoro interrupted, cutting off his ramblings.

Sanji bit his lip as he watched Zoro stand up and take the sword out of the box with an almost religious reverence. He carefully removed the sheath and inspected the blade.

“Do you like it?”

Zoro’s eyes snapped up to him over the edge of the blade. There was a look in his eye Sanji couldn’t quite decipher.

“What is this supposed to be?”

Sanji shrugged lightly.

“An attempt at a romantic gesture. I know you don’t like all of… *this*, but I just wanted to show you that I care. I’m ready to put my all into this. If you want.”

Zoro narrowed his eyes as he sheathed Enma.

“You’re making it really hard to stay mad at you, Curls.”

“That is the idea, yes.”

“I *want* to stay angry at you. If you were anyone else, I wouldn’t even be giving you the time of day anymore. But I can’t walk away. Why?”

“Because… because you love me?”

Sanji meant for the words to come out teasingly, but it was more of a cautious question.

Zoro stared at him for a few seconds, his eyes trailing over Sanji’s face. The blonde’s breath caught a little as he noticed the silver orbs linger on his lips.

“Yeah, I love you.”

Sanji’s breath hitched in his throat before escaping him as a sigh when Zoro closed the distance between them and pulled him into a kiss.

It had been weeks since they last kissed and it felt like coming home. He brought his hands up to grasp the back of Zoro’s neck, his fingers playing with the tufts of hair there as he tilted his head to deepen the kiss. Sanji’s libido had always been overly active and his body had gotten used to Zoro. His pulse quickened as he felt Zoro’s arms loop around his waist, bringing their bodies flush against one another. He couldn’t hold back the soft moan as he felt Zoro’s tongue slipping into his mouth nor could he stop his hips from grinding lightly against Zoro’s. He gasped as he felt his hot groin brushing against the growing hardness of Zoro’s. He wanted to keep going, he had been missing Zoro in more ways than one and he wanted nothing more than to strip their clothes off and reacquaint their bodies completely, but he also knew he needed to clarify things before they went any further.

“Wait,” he breathed out, reluctantly detaching their lips.

“What is it,” Zoro asked as his fingers lingered on the buttons of Sanji’s shirt.

“Does this mean we’re together now? Officially, I mean? I don’t know what you want to label it, boyfriends or partners or lovers or whichever, but we’re exclusively *us* now, yeah?”

“Boyfriends,” Zoro said as if he was testing the word out.

Sanji liked how it sounded.

“Yeah, I like that, Cook.”

Sanji smiled before pulling Zoro in again. He returned the kiss passionately before lifting Sanji off his feet and making his way towards his bedroom.

“We didn’t have dessert yet. I made mochi,” Sanji mentioned offhand as they crossed the threshold and Zoro laid him down on the bed.

“Do you really want to have dessert right now?” He asked as he unbuttoned Sanji’s shirt and began pressing kisses to his chest.

He shivered under the tan hands brushing over his skin.

“I could think of better things we could do.”

~*~*~

Sanji approached Zoro’s apartment door with a smile on his face, a giftbag swinging on his wrist. He and Zoro had been back together officially for two weeks, but Sanji still felt guilty about what had happened. He wasn’t quite sure how long the guilt was going to override the annoyance at Zoro being… well, Zoro, but for now his impulse to repent for his missteps and his romantic instincts were causing him to splurge much more than he usually would. Nami had accused him of love bombing and Zoro rolled his eyes whenever Sanji showed up with a

new gift and told him to stop treating him like he was a woman he was drooling over, but he didn't reject any of it. That being the case, Sanji resolved to continue so long as his bank account allowed him to do so. At least until it annoyed Zoro enough for him to start a fight, and even then Sanji would probably continue for the satisfaction of annoying his boyfriend.

The smile on his face grew wider as he thought of the word. He was such an idiot for not realizing sooner that this was what he wanted. At least things had worked out in the end.

Sanji withdrew the spare key that Zoro had given him just a few days prior and let himself into the apartment. Zoro was going to play pack mule for him at a pop-up farmer's market. He might as well put those muscles to good use anyway.

"Moss! I hope you're ready because I want to get there before all the good produce is tak…"

Sanji trailed off as he stepped around the corner towards the kitchen. The space was occupied but not by Zoro.

He felt his stomach drop as he met the steely eyes of Zoro's sister.

"Oh, uh… hi," he greeted with much less finesse than he usually showed in front of a lady.

Perona looked him up and down with the same air of disdain she had before when they ran into each other on the street.

"Hmm. I was right. Not that cute at all."

"Um…"

"Zoro mentioned you were going to show up soon."

"Oh, well he didn't mention we would have company at the market," Sanji replied nervously before rousing himself and pasting a smile on his lips.

"But I would hardly deny myself the opportunity to be in the presence of a lovely lady such as yourself."

Perona raised an eyebrow at that.

"I'm not coming on your little trip. Zoro didn't know I was stopping by actually. I just popped over to make sure he wasn't letting himself waste away in heartbreak like he was a few weeks ago, thanks to you."

Sanji opened and closed his mouth, unable to find words to respond to that. Just then, Zoro walked out of his bedroom clearly having heard his sister if the glare he cut her way was any indication.

"Rona, stop being such a bitch."

"I can be as big of a bitch as I want to towards the asshole that broke my brother's heart."

“I already told you, we worked it out and we’re back together now, officially.”

“Yes, you mentioned. I’m still mystified as to why. You’re not the second chance type.”

“Curly’s different, so can you just accept it and calm down?”

Sanji felt a warm burst in his heart at Zoro’s words.

“I already know how you feel about him, I’m more concerned with how he feels about you. Zoro’s probably the biggest idiot that ever walked any of the Blues, but he’s my idiot. I don’t appreciate anyone stringing my brother along.”

“It wasn’t my intention to do that. I was an idiot, how things went between us before was largely my fault and I’m doing everything I can to make it up to your brother. I love Zoro, which I know is probably not something you can believe right now and rightfully so, but I do. I won’t let anything like what happened before happen between us again.”

Perona continued to stare him down skeptically.

“I guess we’ll see, won’t we?”

“Can you please leave now,” Zoro asked, stepping between the two of them.

“Fine. But don’t forget about dinner with Dad on Saturday. Maybe you should bring your boytoy along, see what Dad thinks.”

Sanji knew well enough about the kind of man Dracule Mihawk was to see Perona’s words as the threat it was, but he also knew that if he stood any chance of proving himself to not only Zoro but his family, he couldn’t run away. The subject of meeting Zoro’s family had been the catalyst for their previous break up. Zoro had trusted him enough and thought they were in a secure enough place to want to bring him home to his relatives. It was a little late, but Sanji wanted to give him the answer he deserved.

“That’s a wonderful idea,” he said before Zoro could speak.

Both siblings rounded to look at him with disbelief.

“It is,” they both asked at once.

“Well, you wanted me to meet your father before. It’s a little later than planned, but inevitable nonetheless.”

Zoro narrowed his eyes at that, but Perona smiled deviously.

“Perfect. I’ll be sure to let Mihawk know we’ll be having a special guest.”

The pink-haired woman flounced out of the apartment with a pep in her step. Sanji couldn’t help but think he might’ve just signed his own death certificate.

~*~*~

Sanji stared up at the intimidating home that Saturday, wondering if he could make up a believable enough excuse to bail.

“You regretting this yet,” Zoro quipped.

“Oh, I regretted it the moment I suggested it. Nothing for it now.”

Zoro reached out and intertwined his fingers with Sanji’s.

“It’ll be fine, Cook. My father lets me make my own decisions. Besides, it’s not like I ever take his advice anyway. He probably doesn’t even care.”

Sanji could very confidently say that was not the case if the cold, piercing gaze he was receiving across the dinner table was any indication. Perona was sitting beside her father with a satisfied grin while Zoro and Sanji sat across from them. Mihawk had cooked rice, roasted chicken and a vegetable medley along with a garden salad. A simple meal but good. Sanji’s mind couldn’t help making edits on how to improve the dishes, but he wasn’t stupid enough to say so out loud. In fact, no one was speaking. The room was filled with the sounds of utensils scraping and the clock ticking. It was only ratcheting Sanji’s anxiety about it all, so it was no surprise that he was startled when Mihawk finally did speak.

“Perona has indicated that I have good reason to dislike this union.”

“Rona needs to mind her own business,” Zoro snapped.

“You made it my business, little brother.”

“And how long has this *business* been going on?” Mihawk asked cooly.

“Which time,” Perona muttered.

“I’ve mentioned Sanji for ages. He’s part of the old crew from high school and he was my roommate during college. We didn’t start dating until a few months back. We hit a rough patch, but we’ve been back together for two weeks now.”

“Hmm,” Mihawk hummed at this before his eyes turned back to Sanji. He forced himself not to squirm under the force of his gaze.

“You are the chef, I believe?”

It took Sanji a moment to realize he was being spoken to.

“Yes, uh, I work in my father’s restaurant, Baratie.”

Recognition flashed in Mihawk’s eyes.

“I’m familiar.”

“You’re a nepo baby then,” Perona snarked.

“Zeff isn’t the type to hire based on blood ties,” Mihawk said before Sanji or Zoro could respond to that.

“I suppose we’ll have time to sample your skills ourselves,” the pale man continued, nodding his head to the dessert dish Sanji had brought along. He wasn’t about to show up empty-handed. He had also brought flowers for Perona and a bottle of red wine for Mihawk.

“I can dish it out now if you’d like.”

Mihawk made no indication one way or another, so Sanji hopped up and unwrapped the Tupperware where he had baked individual lemon souffles for the four of them. He had been sure to add strawberry to Perona’s to make it pink and had decorated it more elaborately than the others. Mihawk’s had candied lemon peels atop it. Zoro’s was plainer given he didn’t like sweets and Sanji’s was the same.

He waited on bated breath to see what Perona and Mihawk’s response would be. Perona’s face turned sour like she had sucked something sour. Sanji’s stomach dropped but beside him, Zoro let out a huff of amusement.

“Admit it. It’s delicious,” he pressed.

“As I said, if he was not skilled, Zeff wouldn’t have permitted him to work in his restaurant,” Mihawk commented before taking another spoonful of souffle.

“Whatever. He’s still an ass even if he makes cute, delicious desserts,” Perona grumbled.

Sanji sat back with some relief. At least they liked his food. He can build up from there.

“Yeah, he can be an ass sometimes but so can I, as you’re so fond of telling me every damn day. He wasn’t the only one at fault. I shouldn’t have assumed anything or been too chickenshit to push for a conversation to clarify what our relationship was. He apologized and I’ve chosen to forgive him. I want to be with him and he wants to be with me, that’s all I care about right now.”

He sat back silently as Zoro and Perona continued bickering. His eyes couldn’t help but wander over to Mihawk who was quiet as his adopted children continued to argue. Sanji swallowed as he found himself meeting yellow, steely eyes. Mihawk studied him for a moment before he nodded his head towards the kitchen. Sanji glanced over at Zoro, but he seemingly wasn’t paying attention to the other two so Sanji, however reluctantly, got up and followed behind the older man towards the kitchen.

At least if Mihawk tried to murder him, Zoro would be close by to try and save him.

That thought seemed scarily accurate as Mihawk opened a door off to the side of the kitchen leading towards a dark room. Mihawk turned on the lights, revealing a staircase. He followed nervously behind the man down the stairs and blinked once they arrived in a wine cellar.

“I’m on friendly terms with your father. He’s been after my wine for some time now. I make a hobby of collecting choice blends. I suspect you’ll know his taste better than me. You may

select three bottles that you think he would enjoy."

Sanji blinked at that before nodding and making his way towards the racks. Most of the wines were reds rather than whites, but Sanji still took his time examining the labels. Many of them were of the most expensive vintages Sanji knew of. However, given that they were in some sort of gothic mansion, that wasn't a surprise. He couldn't help but glance towards the pale man where he stood sipping his wine leisurely as Sanji perused the aisles.

"You really don't have any issues with Zoro and I being together?"

"I don't recall making that claim at any point tonight."

Sanji's stomach dropped a little at that.

"Oh."

"However, I am also aware that my son's stubbornness will not allow him to take anything I say into much consideration. Beyond that, I am also aware of my son's temperament. Zoro is not the forgiving sort. Mind you, he doesn't waste energy to hold a grudge, but once he is hurt by someone, he is much more likely to cut them out of his life completely than he is to spend time on revenge or give them a second chance. He's chosen to do so with you."

Sanji knew those words were true. He was thankful that Zoro had made an exception for him, all things considered.

"It does not surprise me that that is the case. Although I've not officially met you up until now, I am aware that my son has been in love with someone for quite some time and the difference in his demeanor when the two of you began your liaison was noticeable."

Sanji blushed at that and ducked his head.

"Zoro does not leave his heart unguarded nor has ever given it willingly to anyone besides you. It tells me that, for whatever reason, you are special to him. Despite what my daughter appears to believe, it's not for me to decide who Zoro chooses to fall in love with."

Mihawk's eyes narrowed suddenly, a glint appearing in them which made a shudder go down Sanji's spine.

"However, that does not mean I will stand idly by and let my son's heart be toyed with for a second time. So, if you plan to hurt him in such a way again, I'd suggest you walk away now before things get any deeper than they are now."

Sanji forced himself to meet Mihawk's eyes head on and hold his head up before speaking.

"I won't knowingly hurt Zoro again. If I could change what happened before, I would. I'd make sure that Zoro knew how important he was to me and that I do love him in return. Because I do, Mr. Dracule. I love your son and I am sorry that I didn't appreciate him the first time, but I won't make that mistake again."

Mihawk looked him up and down, his eyes practically dissecting him.

“Very well. I suppose I have no choice but to take you at your word, but should you break it, it will not be my daughter you’ll have to worry about.”

Sanji nodded in understanding.

He glanced up as footsteps sounded on the stairs before Zoro appeared.

“For the record, disappearing into a basement with my boyfriend to give him the shovel talk is not winning you any points with me,” the greenhaired man groused, glaring at his father.

“I wasn’t aware that was something I needed to be doing.”

Zoro’s eyes switched over to Sanji, a silent question in them. Sanji nodded back to indicate he was alright before waving Zoro over.

“I need an extra pair of hands to hold these bottles for Zeff.”

“Sanji’s old man gets his pick of your collection, but your own son doesn’t?”

“You should be drinking much less than you do. Your liver will thank you for it.”

“Wonder where I got a drinking problem from, Mr. Wine O’Clock,” Zoro muttered as he walked to Sanji’s side.

“You may take a bottle for yourself as well, Sanji,” Mihawk said before climbing back up the stairs.

Sanji dragged Zoro around the wine racks, still perusing bottles to choose the best ones for Zeff.

“You sure you’re okay?” Zoro asked from beside him.

Sanji glanced over with a smile.

“Your family loves you. I can’t fault them for not being the most welcoming. I’ll just have to work my way into their good graces.”

“Keep giving Perona sweet treats and she’ll get over it. My father already likes you well enough.”

“He does,” Sanji replied dubiously.

“He’s letting you have a bottle of wine for yourself. He doesn’t even let me do that.”

“Well, he was right. You do drink excessively.”

“And you smoke like a chimney. We all have our vices.”

Sanji rolled his eyes before leaning up and kissing Zoro’s cheek.

“Yeah, well you love me anyway so tough shit.”

Sanji went to turn back to the wine rack, but Zoro looped his arm around his waist and pulled him close before leaning down to kiss him soundly.

“I do love you, Cook.”

Sanji smiled against his lips.

“I love you too, Marimo.”

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