

Chapter 47

2nd of April Alabasta

Nico Robin navigated the hidden corridor beneath the palace, an ancient passageway that allowed discreet access from the city without using the visible entrances. She had entered through a secret door concealed behind bags of flour in a bustling bakery, a location Capone Bege had revealed to her. At one moment, a shadow soldier emerged from the darkness. Recognizing her, it stepped aside, allowing her to pass unchallenged.

Ascending the narrow, twisting passage, she emerged into one of the deserted quadrangles of the palace—the abandoned seraglio. Well, former seraglio - and formerly abandoned, apparently. This space, once a symbol of royal indulgence, had lain dormant for three generations since the reign of Cobra's grandfather. But air was filled with the faint hum of activity. Shadow builders toiled diligently, restoring the grand halls and chambers, while shadow servants flitted about.

Isabella was here, orchestrating the shadow servants with an air of command. Robin's curiosity was piqued—what were Moria's plans for this neglected part of the palace? The seraglio was vast, filled with countless rooms and offices, now being revitalized under Moria's direction. Did he want to make a more permanent base of operation here? Would he leave Thriller Bark.

"Robin," Isabella greeted her with a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "I see you've found the way."

"Yes, thanks to Capone Bege's instructions," Robin replied smoothly. "It's impressive, the way Moria is revitalizing this part of the palace."

As they walked, Robin's attention was drawn to a surprising sight: Caesar Clown in deep conversation with a small, mousy woman who clutched a chisel in her hand. So, she was the artist behind the traditional animal-headed warrior sculptures being installed throughout the palace and the city? Whatever: if the gas-fruit wielding scientist was under Moria's control, it explained the miraculous rain. Robin's mind raced with the implications.

Isabella followed her gaze. "Moria has many allies. Caesar is just one of them."

Isabella led her to a secluded courtyard where Moria awaited at a table, preparing tea with surprising grace and skill. He greeted her with a smile, gesturing for her to sit.

"Welcome, Robin," Moria said warmly. "Please, join me."

Robin took her seat. Isabella remained behind her, clearly intending to stay for the meeting. Moria glanced at Isabella, his expression unreadable.

"Isabella," Moria said calmly, "you may leave us."

Isabella's face tightened, a flicker of irritation crossing her features before she masked it. "But, Lord Moria, I thought—"

"I said, you may leave us," Moria repeated, his voice firm and final.

Isabella hesitated for a moment, her scowl barely concealed as she turned on her heel and left the courtyard. Robin noted the exchange with interest—Isabella's discontent suggested that her position was not as secure and she not as trusted as she had implied when they met with Bege.

"Interesting woman," Robin remarked as she picked up her cup.

Moria's eyes sparkled with amusement. "Isabella is useful, but she must learn her place. She is a favorite of mine - but she must learn that it is not a stable position. She has to keep being useful to keep it."

Robin understood it for what it was - a message for her. Moria leaned back, a satisfied smile playing on his lips. "First, let me congratulate you on your work, Robin. Bege has spoken highly of your contributions and how seamlessly you've helped transition Baroque Works into our new operations. I am...pleased that you joined me."

Robin felt his gaze travel over her, lingering on every curve, just as she had intended. She wore a short, form-fitting skirt that flaunted her long, toned legs with every step. Her cropped jacket clung to her curves, accentuating her hourglass figure and leaving little to the imagination. Beneath the jacket, a fishnet shirt tantalizingly displayed patches of her smooth, flawless skin, hinting at what lay beneath. Her raven hair cascaded in luxurious waves over her shoulders, framing her striking face and enhancing her undeniable allure.

"My apologies for not receiving you sooner," Moria continued, his tone genuinely apologetic. "With my wedding, it has been a hectic and busy time. Of course, with Haki-wielding guests and marines, I could not exactly invite you."

The soothing sound of a small fountain nearby provided a calming backdrop to their conversation. Robin took a sip of her tea.

Moria's expression shifted as he leaned forward. "Now, let's discuss what truly interests you—Poneglyphs."

Robin's heart quickened slightly, though she kept her exterior calm. Had he summoned her to finally see the Poneglyph?

"I have not called you here merely to view the Poneglyph beneath Alabasta. We've also discovered another one on a Sky Island."

Robin's eyes widened, her composed facade slipping for a brief moment. Robin could hardly believe her ears. Two Poneglyphs?

Faster than she could follow, Moria's hand shot out and grabbed her. Shadows enveloped them, wrapping around her like a shroud. The world spun, and in an instant, the courtyard and its soothing fountain vanished. When she reopened her eyes, she found herself in a luxurious room, richly decorated with opulent furnishings and dark, velvety drapes. The air was thick with an aroma of incense, and soft candlelight flickered, casting an ethereal glow over the space. She recognized the gothic architecture and grandiose style—this had to be Moria's palace in Thriller Bark.

Moria released her, stepping back with a triumphant smile. "Welcome to my domain, Robin," he said.

In an instant, his form began to shift. He morphed from his two-meter, human-like appearance into an enormous, seven-meter monstrosity. His face twisted and contorted, becoming grotesque and terrifying. His eyes grew larger and more bulbous, each one not quite aligned with the other. Jagged teeth jutted out from a cavernous mouth, and his skin took on a ghastly pallor. His limbs elongated, ending in clawed hands that looked capable of rending flesh from bone.

Robin, accustomed to the peculiarities of the world she inhabited, watched with a measured calmness. "This way," he rumbled, his voice deeper and more resonant in this form.

He turned and led the way, and Robin followed, her footsteps echoing softly against the stone floors. They descended a coiling staircase, spiraling deeper and deeper until Robin was certain they were far underground. The air grew cooler, and the faint sound of dripping water echoed through the passage.

At the base of the staircase, they entered a vast circular chamber. The room was dimly lit, with shadows dancing across the walls. Six heavy doors lined the perimeter, each one looking impossibly thick and reinforced. As Moria approached one of the doors, it swung open automatically, revealing a corridor beyond. They walked for about thirty seconds, with Moria occasionally having to bend and twist his enormous frame to fit through the narrow passage.

Finally, they emerged into a vast chamber. In the center of the room stood two massive Poneglyphs, their surfaces etched with the ancient script that held the mysteries of the world.

Robin's breath caught in her throat. For the first time in a long while, she felt a rush of genuine excitement. Her eyes widened, and she stepped forward, her composure slipping as a smile spread across her face. Her fingers trembled slightly as she reached out to touch the smooth, cold surface of the nearest Poneglyph.

"Incredible," she whispered, her voice filled with awe.

Robin moved closer to the first Poneglyph, her fingers tracing the ancient script carved into the stone. Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she began deciphering the symbols, her mind fully engrossed in the task. Moria loomed behind her, watching intently, but she paid him no mind. The thrill of discovery consumed her entirely.

She worked methodically, translating the text with practiced ease. "This first Poneglyph," she said, not looking up, "it details an Ancient Weapon. This must be the one Crocodile was searching for, the weapon hidden beneath Alabasta, Pluton."

Moria's eyes gleamed with interest. "And the other?"

Robin moved to the second Poneglyph, her heart racing with anticipation. She read the inscriptions carefully, her expression shifting to one of astonishment. "This one speaks of another Ancient Weapon. If I refer to the myths, it should be about the one called Poseidon," Robin murmured.

Moria leaned closer, his curiosity piqued. "What exactly does it say? Read it aloud."

Robin nodded, tracing the ancient script with her fingers before beginning to read aloud. "The first six lines are identical in both poneglyphs," she explained.

*"Thrice named for gods, these treasures three,
To save the world from dark decree.
Yet whole they be not, but parts to find,
A crown, beast, ship, and source combined.
With wisdom ancient, and strength untold,
These relics' tales through time are scrolled."*

Robin paused for a moment. The Antique weapons...to save the world? Then she continued to read the specific lines of the Poneglyph that had been in Alabasta.

*'Neath yon falls where waters cascade,
In warriors' land, where secrets be laid.
A princess of gold, radiant and bright,
And a princess of sand, mysterious as night.
A prince of olde, with destiny entwined,
An elephant grand, their fates aligned.
The doors open, this vessel of might,
Awaits its call to sail from night."*

Moria nodded, his monstrous form seemingly deep in thought. He murmured to himself, the words barely more than a whisper, yet heavy with realization. "Falls of water, warriors, and an elephant... Fucking Zunesha. Wano's myth. There is an ancient weapon in Wano."

A slow, calculating smile spread across his grotesque features as he connected the pieces. He now understood why Kaido was so determined to occupy Wano and had not left the island for more than a decade. The ancient weapon, Pluton, lay hidden beneath Wano, guarded by the legendary elephant Zunesha and linked to the samurai of the land.

"It all makes sense now," he said, more to himself than to Robin. "Kaido's obsession with Wano, his refusal to leave... It's all for Pluton. That damned dragon has been sitting on this secret for years."

Moria's eyes narrowed in thought, the gleam of realization tempered by a lingering question. "But if Kaido already knew about the weapon, why hasn't he accessed it?"

He shook his head, dismissing the thought. "No, he couldn't know about it already. So why? Why is he there?"

Meanwhile, Robin seamlessly transitioned to the lines about the one found in the Sky Island.

*"In breast of nymph, the power confined,
In land condemned, where fate is twined.
A voice of sea, a heart so pure,
To guide the waves, and tempest endure.
A maiden fair; with destiny grand,
Holds ocean's power within her hand."*

Robin's voice trailed off, the ancient verses hanging in the air. She looked up at Moria.

"These verses are more than mere words," she said quietly. "They are keys to unimaginable power, and the responsibility that comes with it."

She looked back at Moria. He was pensive, his monstrous form casting long shadows in the dim light. A nymph? What did it mean? Or rather... Who did it refer to, if ancient weapons were part ship and part person? The thought gnawed at him. Then, he broke the silence, his voice surprisingly gentle.

"Thank you, Robin. Your skill in deciphering these ancient texts is invaluable."

Robin shook her head, her eyes shining with genuine gratitude. "No, I should be the one thanking you. Two Poneglyphs... This is beyond anything I could have hoped for."

Moria smiled, sensing her sincerity. For once, she seemed truly appreciative, not the detached and calculating woman he had come to know. She had led a difficult life, filled with betrayal and hardship. Her pragmatic nature meant she wouldn't bat an eye at the horrors he might commit, even if she found them repulsive. No, she would make a perfect henchwoman, adding a bit of competition for Isabella and Bege.

He knew none of these two were truly faithful. Isabella and Bege were self-serving and ambitious. Bege, in particular, was far from stupid. It wasn't only about Moria's power; Bege knew he had a Shadow Assassin lurking in his shadows, ready to report any conversation about treason. The silent threat hung over him—a shadowy figure that could strike months or even years after any act of betrayal. It meant he could never have a family, never sleep peacefully if he even made the beginning of a plan against his boss. And Bege enjoyed power. As much as Moria wanted to give him more, he knew he had to balance it with a stick—a bit of competition to remind Bege that he was not truly indispensable, even if his Devil Fruit made him precious. Moria turned his attention back to Robin. "What do you want, Robin?" he asked, his voice curious.

She met his gaze, her expression steady. "I want to discover history. To uncover the truths hidden in the past."

Moria nodded, appreciating her straightforwardness. "As long as you are loyal to me, you will. But I am speaking of other kinds of ambitions." He paused, letting his words sink in. "I am growing a powerful organization, and soon—within a few weeks at most—I will leave the Warlords. Not as a pirate to be hunted, but as a prince protected by countries that are members of the World Government. And then... I will take on Kaido."

Robin's eyes widened slightly, betraying her surprise. She hesitated, the weight of his proposition heavy on her mind. She had been Crocodile's right-hand woman, and she knew the dangers and the stakes of such alliances.

Seeing her hesitation, Moria leaned forward, his gaze intense. "Become a faithful subordinate, Robin, and I will also turn my gaze toward those responsible for the destruction of Ohara."

Robin's heart skipped a beat. She knew she could not trust him? She could not trust anyone, she was alone. But the destruction of Ohara, her home, and the massacre of her people had haunted her for years. The promise of vengeance, coupled with the opportunity to uncover the world's secrets, was a powerful lure.