Baby Steps

by MaiKusakabe

Summary

Getting to know someone can be awkward under the best of circumstances. In their circumstances, indirect methods may be the best option.

Notes

Here is the second part of the story. This one isn’t all that great, just one of those things that have to be explained in a story, but well.

Chronology: starts two weeks after their first meeting, and there will be a second chapter with Law’s side of things at around this time period.
There was an entire building of Marineford devoted to keeping copies of all official documents the World Government had on the inhabitants of the countries that were part of it. These documents were also kept at Mariejois, but their presence here was mostly for the purpose of identifying criminals quicker when they appeared.

Usually, a person's folder was thin and went unnoticed unless a new document had to be added. These folders contained standard documents —birth certificate, marriage certificate if existing, genealogy...— and were destroyed a century after the person's certified death. Once, years ago, they had been destroyed upon certified death, but after a few mistakes and events suspiciously like resurrections, that had changed. Usually, these documents were organized by ocean and country, but there were exceptions. Criminals were classified according to the organization or crew they belonged to, and those files tended to be far thicker than those of average citizens. Notorious in this category were the Whitebeard Pirates, that had a room assigned exclusively for them and their allies, and it threatened to fill completely soon. The other Yonko weren't far behind, and Sengoku refused to think of the now mostly unattended room that contained information on the Roger Pirates.

Aside from people, they kept data from official institutions, such as hospitals or schools, that sometimes was useful to learn more about an individual.

Lastly, its existence even unknown to most, was the room on the farthest end from the stairs in the basement. There was information about islands, away from their respective seas and their neighboring countries. Data that was supposed to disappear from people's minds long before it could be destroyed. Kuzan had once referred to this place as the Government's Hall of Shame. While he hadn't shown any outward signs, Sengoku privately agreed with this definition.

The last substantial addition to this room had been made a little over three years and a half ago, and now Sengoku was here in search of a file that didn't belong in this place, but that he wouldn't remove in the very off-hand case someone noticed.

When he entered, he tried to ignore the first three shelves, but his eyes treacherously wandered to the noticeably thickest file in the third top shelf.

Jaguar D. Saul.

As much as he had tried to, Sengoku had never quite managed to feel comfortable labeling Saul a 'traitor', not as much as others did, because he understood that what had driven Saul's actions had been a strong sense of justice, much similar to someone else's.

He shook his head and moved on.

At the far end of the room, he found what he had been looking for. Five innocuous tall shelves labeled at the top with the same word.

Thousands of lives reduced to a few pieces of paper, no one left to remember them as anything but a number, a note at the bottom of the history books. Almost no one.

The personal archives were classified by year of birth, and then each year was ordered alphabetically. Because most folders were so thin, each letter was inside a larger one to facilitate
locating a name, and the first thing one found upon opening each of the letter folders was a list with all the names contained inside.

Sengoku didn’t know Law’s surname, which was a problem because the classification was made through surnames, and he didn’t know Law’s exact age either. Sengoku guessed Law was either twelve or thirteen, or perhaps a very scrawny fourteen years old. It wasn’t so illogical to think that Law’s growth might have been stumped a little because his body had been fighting the Amber Lead Syndrome, but to be on the safe side Sengoku started looking through the kids that would have been twelve today.

Each name that he read was a nail in the armor he had long since built to be able to live with himself and the horror the mere existence of this room represented.

Three folders in, he sat on the ground and resolved to stay here until he found what he was looking for. He didn’t put it past himself to derail a second visit using work as an excuse. He may be only reading, but he already felt more tired than the time he and Garp had fought Shiki over twelve years ago.

Two hours and countless names later, he stopped halfway down the T list of would-have-been thirteen years old.

Trafalgar Law.

No D, curious. Had they hidden it? If it was truly him, that had been a smart choice. He searched for the folder and opened it.

The picture that greeted him felt like a punch to the stomach. It was unmistakably Law —ten, his brain provided, he had been ten years old when his world was destroyed— younger and looking at the camera with a serious expression.

That seriousness had nothing to do with what Sengoku had seen in him two weeks ago. It was the face of a little kid trying to appear more mature and older than he really was. His eyes were happy, they were barely recognizable.

The features were the same, the hat was the same, but Sengoku knew the boy he was looking at was an entirely different person from the one he had met.

*How did you survive?* Sengoku wondered. *How did you get out?*

He wasn’t sure he would ever ask.

Looking at that picture was enough for Sengoku to know that, despite how much he might have wanted to, Law hadn’t been like Doflamingo. It was a relief, Sengoku thought. He had already seen it with his own eyes, but any further proof of that fact was more than welcome. He didn’t think he could take it, if Rosinante had died to protect someone that would later become just like Doflamingo.

Taking a deep breath—he had come this far, he wasn’t going to stop now—he looked down at the information.

Law had been born on October 6th, that meant there were around two months left before his birthday. His fourteenth birthday. Law really was a little scrawny for his age. And short.

There were his parents’ names, as well as their dates of birth. Sengoku would look them up, too. He wanted to see what he could learn about them. And there, on the sibling box, was a name.
A little sister.

Sengoku closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He had been prepared for the parents, it was a given they had died, and most likely from either the sickness or the attack, but he hadn’t really stopped to think about siblings.

His mind went back, though it really had nothing in common with this situation, to when he first met Rosinante, who had been crying desperately because his brother had shot his father. Even then, Rosinante still loved his brother. He had, until the very end, no matter how much he saw the monster he was. If a child could care so much for a sibling that had betrayed them so grievously, how much worse would it be if that sibling hadn’t?

Did Law carry her death in his conscience like he did Rosinante’s? Yes, of course he did. Sengoku knew enough about siblings to be able to answer that question.

Now that he had names and dates, finding the three files was easy. The date of death was the same for all three of them, a date Sengoku knew he would never forget after this. He wondered if they had shown visible signs of the sickness by then, or if, like Law, they had had years left to live. How had they died? Had the parents died first? Or had they known their daughter had died? Had Law witnessed any of it?

Sengoku shook his head and leaned back against the shelf. He looked up at the ceiling.

“Of all the children…” he said, talking to someone who wasn’t there, “you had to go and grow to love the most complicated one, didn’t you?”

He wasn’t complaining, not really. Law might be damaged—a miracle he wasn’t broken, really—he might be, of everybody who ever joined the Donquixote Family, the person that would be considered most potentially dangerous by the Gorosei if they knew who he was, but he was also someone Rosinante would have wanted to help. And he was someone Rosinante had grown to love. And in the couple of days they had spent together and the few conversations they had had, Sengoku had decided he kind of liked Law. Even if he was a little shit most of the time.

He looked back at the files again, and something caught his attention. Doctors, Law’s parents had been doctors. And not just any doctors, according to the information here, they had directed a hospital. Had they been looking for a cure when Flevance was attacked? Did they know, if there was an afterlife—Sengoku hoped there was, he didn’t like the alternative of Rosinante just ceasing to exist entirely—that their son had found one?

He looked at the pictures. Law bore a resemblance to his father, though Sengoku could already tell he wouldn’t have such a relaxed expression as an adult, while sister and mother were very similar. Sengoku wondered how well Law remembered them. He himself had already started to forget details about Rosinante, as much as he tried not to: his voice was fading, as were some of his mannerisms, as unique as he had thought them at the moment. He wondered if, over three years later, Law had also forgotten details about his family, things he had tried to cling to.

Sengoku couldn’t remove Law’s file from this room, he had no doubt that, targeting Doflamingo as he was and with his refusal to join the government, Law would sooner or later become a wanted man—Sengoku hoped Garp never caught wind of this, or he wouldn’t live it down—and there existed the small possibility that a reasonably smart person, once it became apparent there was no information on Law in any of the still existing countries’ archives, thought he might have survived from a destroyed one, but he thought there would be no problem if he borrowed a few pictures, just for a couple of days at most.
I got the idea for that building from the fact that the marines identified Buggy so quickly after Impel Down. To do that, and get all the data they did, they must have had easy access to a lot of information.
Here is Law’s side of things at around the same time as the previous chapter. There isn’t much plot development in this chapter, but I wanted to show what Law has been doing.

Law would like to say that he hadn't had any intention of keeping his promise when he had agreed to contact Sengoku again, but he didn't like to lie to himself. He had known he would stay in touch with him, for Cora-san, because even hearing only two conversations between them it had been so obvious that they had cared for one another, because he had seen Sengoku's face when they had talked about Cora-san.

That didn't mean, of course, that Law called regularly or anything, he simply answered when Sengoku did. Sengoku usually asked about his whereabouts and what he was doing, and Law kept to mostly truths. He simply omitted certain facts. He said at which island he was at the moment, and in which empty house he was squatting (it was ridiculously easy to learn when a family would be away in vacation, and they always left something inside the house that hinted at or outright stated the return date), he commented on how his self-taught medical studies were going, but omitted mentions of the subjects he sometimes tried a technique on —he was careful, and left the trials for right before moving on to the next island, in case something drew attention to them— and he also asked Sengoku about fighting techniques and training. Sengoku was strong, it would be stupid not to take advantage of that fact.

He also asked about how Sengoku was doing, mostly because he thought he could glean some useful information about the marines. He knew Sengoku wasn't fooled, but answered nonetheless — never with anything confidential, of course. So far, Law knew a few things: Monkey D. Garp, the revered hero of the marines, was a pain in the ass (Sengoku's words), had a total disregard for material property and most rules, and if ever, for any unfortunate circumstance, Law ran into him, he should try to appear as weak and uninteresting as possible and, if that didn't work, run; Tsuru, the marine who pursued the Donquixote Pirates, was Marineford's second in command despite being only a vice admiral; there was something, Law still didn't know what it was, that had Sengoku extremely stressed out. Judging by a few comments, and one fight that had started when Garp had burst into Sengoku's office while he was talking to Law, Garp was somehow related to this problem. There had been a threat of executing Garp that had made Law chuckle despite his best efforts, and when Garp had asked who was on the line Sengoku had kicked him out of the office. Through the window, judging by the sound of glass breaking.

Law had also learned that Sengoku wasn't as serious as he seemed at first glance.

Law could see some resemblance between Cora-san and Sengoku through these conversations, and that made all of this a little easier.
In case anyone is curious, Sengoku is so pissed at Garp because it was at around this time that the Revolutionary Army started to act, at least according to what we know so far in canon. Remember this is between six months and a year before the Gray Terminal incident.

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