

Split soul

Von Gepo

Kapitel 21: Exploring feelings

Ayako greeted him with a hug. It should have been nice or maybe annoying or simply just warm – but it actually hurt. It hurt to know that she was hugging Seijuro's shadow and not him. Why would anyone wish such a curse upon them? Emotions were nothing but trouble.

"How are you?," she asked him.

Fine. Was he fine? It was such a standard answer. He didn't know. Was he normal? He suddenly had feelings, that was disconcerting. It was far from fine. He had just battled Sei and lost. Seijuro was asleep but Akashi had his feelings. All of that was quite confusing. And on top of that he was pregnant.

"I honestly don't know." He looked at Ayako. Did he have feelings for her? He wasn't sure. Just looking at her he did not feel different. Was that normal or not? "I agree that Sei is a vicious bitch."

"Oh. So you ... met her?" Ayako seemed unsure about what to say.

"She tried to take over the body and change my thinking." Could he say more? Should he say more? He did not want to look weak in Ayako's eyes. "She scared me. I had to promise her to keep the child."

The Omega lowered her gaze and took his hand. She held it in both of hers. After a moment she squeezed it and looked up again to say: "No matter it's history, it is your baby. It might not feel like it now but if you can't change anything anyway, please don't grow to hate it. You would only hate a part of yourself."

"The ones I hate are my father and Sei. They are the parents. I can't help but resent this thing." Yes, disgust. He knew that feeling. It was a deeply rooted thing that had always been inside him. Resentment, hate, disgust – those had always been his.

"Sei is a part of your soul. You father is part of your history. This child will be your future. With all of that hate, you'll hate yourself the most." Ayako was pleading, looking at him with eyes full of fear. It was like Seijuro was talking to him, telling him that she must be remembering her own daughter.

He could tell her that her desperate pleas drove her daughter to suicide. That would shut her up.

"I don't feel unsettled by hating others. I lack too much empathy to even apply it to myself as well." He let go of her hands. "I am like a machine, I can't feel pain."

"But Seijuro can." She stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "He feels your pain and hate."

Wrong. This hurt. This hurt a damn lot. Was this jealousy? This white, hot, burning rage, was this envy? She loved Seijuro, she cared for him with every cell of her being. Were did that leave him? He scoffed and said: "I don't care about him either."

"You are scaring her," Kazunari reprimanded him.

"I don't really care about that either. She's Seijuro's girlfriend, not mine."

They all looked at him for a moment, some in surprise, some in shock. Natsue broke into the silence by grabbing his leg and shouting: "Good morning, Mister Akashi!"

He had a sudden urge to kick her but he didn't go through with it. She had nothing to do with all of this. He wasn't a man that looked for easy outlets for his anger. He might scare and shock people but he wasn't known for physical abuse. Except for a few cases that needed rough handling to accept his dominance over them. Oh well, maybe he could be called physically abusive. He didn't need to hurt Natsue though. He answered with a low voice: "Good morning, Natsue."

"Are you still sick?"

He sat on his heels and told her: "Look, it's really easy to see. When I have two red eyes, I am in a good mood and like to play with you. When I have one red and one golden eye, I am in a bad mood and might be dangerous. Can you see the difference?"

"Yeah." She took a step back while looking at him. "Can I make it better?"

"No, it's not your fault, kid. You don't have anything to do with my moods." He remembered a time when he still thought the occasional violence their father put them through was his fault. By now he felt ashamed of himself for ever thinking he might have any power over that monster. "There's nothing you can do to change it. Just keep your distance when I have a golden eye, I don't want to hurt you. You don't deserve that, you haven't done anything wrong."

"Okay." She smiled thinly. "Mama tells me that some people hurt others because they are in a bad mood, not because you have done anything wrong."

"Yes, I might do that. It's a bad thing to do and I know that." He just didn't care most of the time.

"Sometimes I do bad things too. Then mama scolds me," she wisely answered.

"It's so that you grow up to be a good woman who doesn't hurt innocent people in anger." He patted her head and stood. "How about some breakfast?"

She nodded and sat so he could sit beside her. He exchanged a glance with Ayako, so they could change their seating order. She understood immediately and sat down beside her daughter. Such a good woman. Such a shame she loved Seijuro and not him.

They ate mostly in silence. Natsue and Kikyo chattered a bit – of course Natsue told her friend about his moods and eye colors – with an occasional comment from an adult but all in all the atmosphere was heavy. He should not have cared and enjoyed the silence, but he knew it was his fault. Why did he care about that? Why did he suddenly care what others thought of him? If this was how Seijuro felt all the time, he didn't want to be like that.

But he needed Seijuro against Sei. Could he have his powers without having to feel all this? He didn't want to feel. It was like gaining a consciousness all at once. He didn't want to feel bad for doing bad things. How should he lead a company like this? It was his job not to feel bad about all those people he fired or found better substitutes for. He nearly stabbed his eel. It was delicious and at the same time it felt like sand paper on his tongue.

"You are abnormally bad-tempered today," Shintaro dared to say.

"Oh really? Some bi-, I mean, nasty women just tried to take over my mind and erase me. How would you feel about having your personality disintegrate?"

"Is that possible?" The green eyes stared at him. "I thought she would put you to sleep. Can she actually erase you?"

"She is able to manipulate my thoughts and change Seijuro's memories, what do you think?" His whole body felt like a string ready to snap. "Honestly, I don't know if Seijuro is asleep. I can suddenly feel things, I could never do that before. Those are his feelings. What the hell should I think about that? I don't know if your best friend is still alive." He groaned. "I don't want to be afraid of my own head."

"You think she might have forcefully merged you both to make you weaker?" Shintaro seemed to have shut off his emotions again, his voice was simply monotonous.

"Seijuro is easier to manipulate, so yes." It hurt. Why did it hurt so much? It felt like a knife in his heart.

"Mama, why are you crying?" Natsue asked in fright.

"I'm sorry." Ayako stood and turned to leave. Akashi was able to glimpse tears running down her face on both sides. Had it been his fault? Had he made her cry?

He groaned and buried his head in his hands. With a voice filled with exhaustion, he said: "I'm sorry. I don't know what's happening. I've never been so out of control."

"What's going on with mama?" Natsue demanded to know. "Have you made her cry?" Her black eyes turned on him.

"No, little Natsue, both Mister Akashi and your mom are sad about the same thing. But it's hard to understand, even for me. We'll just have to wait and be there for them," Kazunari explained. "Have you finished your breakfast? We can help them by getting you ready, so your mom doesn't have to worry. Kikyo, you too, get your kindergarten bag after doing the dishes."

Well trained both girls began to bring the dishes into the sink. Akashi took up his chopsticks with a sigh and finished his rice. Shintaro served him another cup of tea before Kazunari took the teapot as well. Both men stayed seated in silence.

Their silence was interrupted by an older woman entering the kitchen with a greeting and a bow. Shintaro stood to bow to her as well. Akashi simply was too drained to care about social niceties. He recognized her by her voice as Shintaro's mother who informed them that his butler had arrived with some clothes. Akashi mumbled a tired thanks before rising. Shintaro immediately grabbed his arm to stabilize him and asked: "Are you sure you should go to work in this state?"

"It may distract me a bit." He bowed to Misses Midorima. "I am sorry you have to see me in such a pitiful state."

"You look like you need rest, Mister Akashi." She nodded to acknowledge his belated greeting. "How about a relaxing visit to an Onsen?"

He shook his head and straightened before he said: "Thank you for your concern."

"Were should I sent your butler?" She got his subtle hint.

"Please sent him to the guest room opposite our southern bathroom," Shintaro answered for him. So he didn't want to tell his mother he had locked up their guest. Smart move. Not only would she scold him, she would demand an answer why he did such a thing. "Let us do the dishes, Akashi."

"Of course." He nodded to Misses Midorima and went over to the sink. Doing some dishes was much more favorable than being the focus of her scrutiny. His friend joined him, so they spent their time with silent washing and drying.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to go to work?," the other man asked after some time.

"What else am I supposed to do?" Akashi sent him an annoyed glance. "Rest?"

"Well ... no. Just don't overdo it, okay? Don't stress yourself out."

That wasn't what Shintaro wanted to say. He was right about being a very bad liar. But Akashi knew him enough to know what wasn't said: It's not good for the baby. Even his best friend knew better not to utter that out loud. If it was up to the redhead, he

would overwork himself as much as possible. But he had promised to keep a low profile. He shouldn't endanger that parasite inside him.

He hated it.

He hated all of it.

He didn't want to be forced against his will. This was neither persuasion nor manipulation, this was brute force against his mind, his very being. So this was how it felt to be held down and threatened with death. This was how it felt to be in a forced pregnancy. This was exactly how he never wanted to feel, what he never wanted to experience.

It had felt good to be on the other side of this. It had felt so damn good to force Tetsu down, play with his mind, make him long for his cock while he knew it was all his doing. Tetsu never wanted any of it, so it made it all the sweeter to see him shyly ask to be raped.

It had felt so unbelievably good not to be a victim but the rapist. All that hatred, all that burning longing, his nearly sickening wish for vengeance – it had felt so good to let it all out on Tetsu. And now here he was, a broken thing, beaten down, accepting everything he hated for the sake of survival.

His hands balled into fists. He wanted to beat something, someone down, to cut someone down with his words, to stop to feel so unbelievably helpless. Longingly he looked at the knife he was cleaning. He could stab someone and enjoy their blood on his hands. He could threaten someone and drink their terror.

"Please come find me when you have calmed down," Shintaro said, put down the plate he was drying and retreated from the room. He closed the door behind him.

Akashi's gaze stayed on the knife.

Killing wouldn't help. He might feel mighty for a second, but it wouldn't change anything about the fact that he was helpless. He would not get out of this. He could give up his body to Sei, he could do her bidding or he could kill himself. Those were limited options. He held the knife to his stomach, imaging how it would feel to carve that monstrosity out of his womb. There would be blood, a lot of blood. Was he able to be faster than Sei? She hadn't been able to take him over immediately. Maybe he had enough control to go through with this.

>Don't.<

>Seijuro?< Akashi immediately pulled the knife back.

>Yeah ... I am here.< He sounded weak. He sounded exhausted. But he was alive.

>Do you know where you have been?<

>I saw some of Sei's memories.<

>I am sorry to hear.<

>No ... it's okay. I think I understand her better.<

>I really don't want to understand her.< Akashi knew his voice was full of disgust.

>It's the only way.< Seijuro's voice gained strength and confidence. >She's a part of us, one of us. If we don't talk to her, we'll always be afraid of her.<

>You do that then. You try to gain her confidence. Just get her off my back.< He put the knife down and took up the towel to dry the rest of the dishes.

>I'll try.< Seijuro seemed to be getting weaker again. >Just go along with her a bit, okay? Don't do things to endanger us or her child.<

>I don't want it.<

>I know.< It sounded like his alter ego had a weak smile on his face. There was something like indulgence in his voice. >I don't even know if she really wants it. But it doesn't hurt to do your best until I can clear the situation, right?<

Akashi sighed and nodded, even though his alter ego was in his head, not in the room. >Thank you.< Seijuro's voice was getting farther and farther away. >Give Ayako a kiss, okay?<

>I will,< Akashi promised. He wanted to call after the other but refrained from it. It would do no good, it would only sound pathetic.

Seijuro's presence faded again. So ... he was alive. Maybe. Or maybe it was just a replica that Sei presented him to manipulate him into not aborting this child. Akashi closed his eyes. What should he believe in? Was Sei stronger? Was she able to control their mind? Could she fake a convincing Seijuro? Honestly, he wanted to believe that Seijuro was alright. He wanted him to live. Even if they merged at some point, he wanted to know that his alter ego was a part of him. He wanted to feel him. Had he really missed the guy? And why did he have feelings if Seijuro was still alright? He wanted to understand this.

"Shintaro?" He opened the kitchen door and look down the hallway.

A moment later his friend looked out from a room he recognized as the bathroom and asked: "Have you calmed down?"

"Yes, I am. I am sorry that I made you anxious." He went over.

"Are you really Akashi? It's normally your alter ego that apologizes."

"I know. He just gave me a lecture, I think. I hope it was him and not some fake sent by Sei to keep me in line."

"You are ... a bit paranoid, don't you think?" Shintaro's eyebrow twitched.

"One can never be cautious enough. But I'll feel better if I trust that voice, even if that might be my downfall." He snorted. "I hate to follow such logic but due to my inability to gain more information, I'll work with what I have for now."

"Yes, that sounds more like you." Shintaro came out of the bathroom and walked him to a sliding door down the hallway. "This is the room my mother will direct your butler to. Please stay here."

"Thank you. Could you look for Ayako and tell her I'd like to apologize for my careless words?"

"You ... as you wish." The other man nodded and closed the door behind him. Was it that much of a surprise if he apologized? It was true, he had never done so when he had been out for over two years. He had not known that any of his actions might be worth apologizing for. He hadn't even known what pain felt like. Now he felt like he might be able to understand.

His butler appeared and presented him with three different suits and a collection of shoes. He thanked him and choose a cashmere shawl to go with his suit. It was one of Seijuro's favorite items, but he felt like wearing it for once. He informed his butler of his plans to stay here for a week or two and asked him to organize clothes and other essentials accordingly. When he saw Ayako standing in the doorway, he asked his butler to find Shintaro to inquire about a suitable room to store his clothing. The man left while Ayako stepped in and closed the door behind her.

"Thank you for coming. I have been on edge this morning and wanted to apologize for my callous behavior. I had not thought on how I might hurt you with my words." He looked into her eyes and hoped his new won feelings might come with some facial recognition skills. He could discern that she was nervous. "Seijuro seems to be alive. I had contact for a short moment."

She visibly relaxed and even smiled at him.

At his body. He knew her smile was directed at Seijuro, not at him. It gave him the sudden urge to hurt her again, so he said: "He is gone again. I also seem to have some

of his skills, so maybe we merged in some way. I don't know if he'll be the same. He said he is looking at Sei's memories and tries to talk to her, so ... who knows what will come out of it in the end."

"I see." Ayako hung her head but looked mostly resigned. "Do you think I am guilty this happened? You said I accelerated the process and that Seijuro wasn't ready for that."

Urgh, guilt. That was something he had never understood. Why did people feel guilty? One couldn't change the past, it made no sense at all. He tried not to sound annoyed: "In the end the guilty one is our father. None of this would have happened if not for him. It's him I hate, you are merely ... someone caught in the crossfire." She looked so small and fragile, his heart ached anyway. What should he do about that? "Seijuro asked me to give you a kiss from him before his voice faded again. I don't think he sees you as someone to blame."

"Really?" She smiled in relief. That smile seemed to melt away all of the tension that held her up before. "Thank you so much. I felt so bad, you even warned me-"

"It's not your fault." His heart beat faster, he felt like sweating. "Would you like to have your kiss?"

"Err, well ... how about a date instead?" Ayako's smile turned unsure but she stepped nearer. "I'd like to get to know you as well. In the end, I'll live with all of you if this ever works out."

"You want to get to know me?" Akashi blinked once.

"You are an important personality, aren't you?" She smiled up at him, a bit more honestly this time. "I asked Kazunari if I might sleep here again as well. He said it's okay. So we could have dinner together if you'd like."

"I would like that very much." He tried a smile but feared it might be mangled.

No matter how it looked, her answering smile seemed sincere.