

Blind Spot

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Chapter 6: Someday under the sun.

* * *

I was having a dream. A dream I can't really remember, except for it being quite pleasant. Pleasant until something pulled me out of it.

And that something was the alarm clock I forgot to turn off last night when going to bed.

"Aaaah, mou!"

I was awake now, which was just too bad on such a day. Today was actually one of those rare days I could enjoy all alone in the house. Yes, that's right. No Miyuki around. Gone with her Seiji on a lovey-dovey week-end together. And my parents were invited to a wedding by some old-time friends in Osaka.

It was pretty rare for me to be all alone like this in the house. I sat up in my bed, yawned and stirred a little before getting up. I headed to the bathroom for a cold shower. Summer can be very tough sometimes and it was one of those days I had to put little on or I'd die from the heat soon enough. My parents had ordered a new fan since ours died last week and it was supposed to arrive today.

Come to think of it, it was better this way that I got woken up by my alarm clock instead of by the delivery guy.

I put on a tank top and some shorts, wore my sneakers and headed downstairs to prepare myself a breakfast.

* * *

My knowledge of cooking was very, very, very limited. I know that any normal schoolgirl, according to manga and TV, should be able to prepare a bento(1), but I wasn't among those. It's not that I didn't like cooking. I actually liked it all right, but there was this one thing that prevented me from properly cooking. Namely, not seeing well.

For example, how could I see what's cooking in the pan? I'd have to look closer and possibly get burned from the heat. That's why I always got paired with Karen during cooking classes back in junior high. That at least guaranteed a good grade in the subject.

I was always thankful for technology and it applied as well in the kitchen with the microwave. Ah, such a wonderful invention mankind had there! I was able to warm things up and

use pre-made meals that way. The only thing I knew how to normally cook were omelets even then it was mostly guess work. It's hard to tell when it's finished, ironically it was easy to guess when it was burnt.

Upon entering the kitchen, I could feel the emptiness of the house. When everyone was home There was almost always someone in the kitchen. There was something on the table though, probably waiting for me and a note from my mother on top of it.

'Ayako-chan. I bought some of that melonpan you like for your breakfast from the combini(2). There's money on the table too if you need to buy anything else, like lunch. With love, mom.'

There was an additional note below.

'P.S.: There's only one bottle of orange juice left in the fridge, if you go to the combini, could you go buy two or three more?'

I sighed, dropping the note into the trashcan. Mother, as usual, had gone over board overestimating my needs, the model of the overprotective parent.

Although I didn't mind the melonpan at all, teehee!

I took one and opened it, munching happily on the custard-filled bread. My favorite.

Our kitchen was a pretty neat place, actually, with a warm feeling to it. With a mother like mine, it was to be expected the kitchen would be like a holy ground. We had everything needed for cooking and it was always clean. I'd surely be dead if I left it all dirty by the time my parents come back home. It leads both to the hallway and the living room, with a table in the middle for all of us.

After the melonpan, I decided to have a drink and reached for a glass on the table to drink some milk.

However, my moving hand had miscalculated the exact position of the glass onto the table and knocked it over. I gasped as it slowly rolled towards the edge of the table and before I could see its position and reach for it, I heard it hit the floor in a loud crash.

"OH SHI-!"

Hey, I might be a girl, but I'm alone at home now, so let me swear if I feel like it.

* * *

Since I almost never ever did house chores because they were simply too difficult for me, I wasn't very sure of where to find the dustpan and broom. Don't laugh please, I know that was my house.

So, I took the phone and rang my parents' cell. Needless to say they were quite worried.

"Don't walk barefoot! Don't cut yourself! Don't use your hands to pick it up! Oh dear, Ayako broke a glass in the kitchen!" I heard my mother tell my father who was probably near her. "Do you

hear me?"

"Yes yes, I do. Don't worry mother, I'll be fine, I just need to clean that up."

"Ah, yes, the closet near the entrance! And if you can't get anything, try to push them out of the way under the counter! I will clean it when I get back! And put shoes on!"

"I heard that!" I sighed.

"Okay, you call us if you ever have another problem, alright?"

"Yes yes. See you tomorrow evening."

I hung up and sighed, putting the phone back in place. Talk about a good way to start the day. I was a little irritated and went to the entrance to fetch a broom and a dustpan to clean that up. Kneeling before where the empty glass had fallen, I tried to take a look around and see the glass shards, but this proved to be quite difficult. I could barely see anything on the floor even when kneeling. I decided against using my hands to pick up the glass pieces and used my tools mostly at random, listening to the sounds the broom and pan were making when hitting the glass. I got a whole lot of the pieces in my dustpan and emptied it onto a old newspaper I prepared on the table earlier. I folded it onto itself with all the debris inside, taped it shut, wrote 'Glass' on it and threw it inside the trash nearby, before trying to make sure I got all the tiniest bits. It took me five good minutes, but and I imagine someone with better eyes would have done that much faster.

After a few more strokes of my broom, I think I got it all. However, walking on the area where the glass fell proved me wrong. I could still hear small crackles under my sneakers as I stepped on the remains of the glass.

"Bah, she'll clean that up!"

I gave up after having done most of the work for my mother and grabbed another glass to finally enjoy some milk. I'd have to head to the combini too, so I'd better go change into something I could go outside with. It's not like I'm very decent right now. Besides, I want to go out with Shizuka today.

* * *

I emerged from my room all dressed up. Well, not that much since it was still in August and the sun was shining hot as hell outside. I did put a white sundress on, picked up my sunglasses, my cane and headed out.

The sunglasses, while not entirely blocking the light of the sun from my eyes, were at least a little helpful and kept me from blinking too often. They took away a bit of the discomfort of being outside. It was only until recently that my parents really understood that I didn't like being outside for that reason. Maybe I should become like one of those girls in magazines and dress up like a vampiress, go out only at night and such...

Why take my cane with me even though I knew the district like the back of my hand? Believe it or not, but one year ago, I never thought I'd never go out without my cane in hand. It's like... a part of me now. When I walk outside without it, I do feel awkward and I start walking quite

slowly. The cane feels like an additional layer of protection even though I don't use it like blind people usually do.

The combini in our district wasn't too far away. I said hello to the shopkeepers as I passed by, since most of them knew me. Now that I think about it, I didn't see many blind people walking by. I mean, it's not like someone walking with a white cane was difficult to spot, even for me. They usually came with clicking noises as the tip of the cane hits the ground. It's their way of discovering obstacles while walking. I was always amazed at how really blind people used their canes with such dexterity. Compared to them, I was quite an amateur. On the other hand, it's not like I was using it for the same purpose.

I arrived at the combini and stepped inside.

Even though it was a place I was used to, seeing all those products on display, on all those shelves, made it difficult for me to find one in particular. I had to come very close to see the brand clearly, for example.

"My, if it isn't Ayako-chan!"

Luckily, I had allies on this battlefield!

The cashier on my left noticed me and called for someone else in the backroom, I think. Ever since I was little, Mother often took me there so I could get used to the place. The combini owner and various cashiers knew about me as well by now. Someone came out from the backroom indeed soon after the cashier called for him and it was Aoba-san, an older man working here.

"So what is it the young lady wants today?" he asked me.

"Well, what kind of bento do you have today?"

"Home alone?"

"Yes." I nodded with a little smile.

"We have the usual: pork, rice and sliced carrots. Or I have this bigger one with noodles and a sliced egg."

I listened to what he was offering me and smiled sweetly in return.

"I'll take the one with pork and rice please." I said.

"Okay."

He fetched one pre-made bento from a shelf. I saw him heading towards the cash register and stopped him.

"Wait! I'll need three... no, two bottles of orange juice, please."

"Ah, sure."

He went to another shelf in the back where I could see a lot of different bottles from afar, without being able to tell whatever it was.

I went to the counter with him.

"One pork bento and two orange juice bottles, that'll be 790 yen, Ayako-chan."

"Here."

I handed him a bill, confident he'd give me the exact change back. I didn't bother to verify, I trusted him.

"Thank you for your purchase!"

Now it was weird, because I was the one saying those things at Tamashii Toshokan most of the time and hearing it was making me giggle to myself.

* * *

I made it back home without incident and went in. In a sense it was my home more than usual today, since I was the only one there. In the future, I hope to have a house like that, with someone who could take care of it, may it be a loving husband, or a butler. Oh yes, that'd be nice.

I placed the bento box in the fridge along with the bottles and headed to the living room to turn on the TV. Yes, I do watch TV sometimes, mostly dramas and sometimes anime, despite my handicap. I just needed to get close to the screen to see well. It could be a little problematic when I wasn't alone, since I blocked a part of the screen for the others watching with me. Miyuki liked to say that I made a better door than a window.

The weather was still hot as ever,

I was quietly enjoying the current TV show when the doorbell rang.

'Who could that be?' I thought to myself, not expecting anyone. Then I remembered the fan.

* * *

"Please sign here."

The delivery man handed me a clipboard.

"A...Ah sure. Excuse me, I don't see very well. I will go fetch my stamp(3)."

I was always saying that quite shyly, as if I was apologizing for my handicap. My parents and friends often told me I shouldn't. Call it a reflex.

I turned back and went to my room in a hurry to get my personal stamp before returning to the entrance of the house.

"So hmmm, where do I apply it?"

The guy placed his finger on the paper. He seemed a bit taken by surprise, but who wouldn't be?

"Here."

I signed it by applying the stamp on the paper where he showed me to and he took his clipboard back from my hands. The package was as tall as my knee and not very large.

I watched the delivery man head back into his truck and drive off, before taking the package inside and into the living room. If my guess was right, it was supposed to be a gift of god on this summer day.

I started unwrapping it using scissors to cut off the tape around it and inside, was a brand new electric fan.

I grinned to myself. This nightmare of heat will be over soon.

* * *

"Moo! Where is this damn piece supposed to go!?"

I'm not too good at putting things together. Usually Miyuki or my father do that kind of thing, but I am alone now. I tried to decipher the plans but they were written so small I had to try the other option, the pictures.

Needless to say, they weren't as helpful as I had expected them to be.

I was trying to correctly insert the fan into its base, but there was this little clip I was missing somewhere. I ran my fingers all over the base to try to find it.

"Ah...!"

I felt something under my finger and pressed it, hearing a little 'click' and the fan actually looked like it was solidly anchored into the base.

"Oh my, did I do it, did I do it?"

I was quite excited and made sure I'd used all the parts included in the package. Looks all right. I then plugged it into the outlet and took a deep breath. To be honest, I just spent half a hour trying to build this thing up from the various pieces in the package and I wasn't even sure of the result. For a moment I even thought it'd blow up once I turned it on.

I contemplated the result for a while before reaching for the power on button. Actually it had four positions: off and three levels of power. A bit fearful, I hesitated before pushing the level one button, my whole body trembling in anticipation.

I then felt a gentle breath of air and stepped back in reflex.

"It works."

I grinned to myself.

"IT WORKS!"

I contemplated my doings with awe and pride. Yes, I assembled this electric fan all by myself. I know it might sound silly to anyone normal, but being able to do something complicated by myself was filling me with pride and happiness. It often reminded me of the first time I was able to lace my shoes myself. Using laces and making a knot is quite difficult when you can't see what you're doing.

I sat on the low table next to the fan and let it cool me down a little. The air in the room was still a bit hot, but the feeling of it rushing all around my body made me feel a lot better already. I couldn't use the air conditioning since it was only working in the bedrooms and it wasn't very practical to wait for cool air from them to trickle through the rest of the house. I didn't really like it, to be frank.

Now to resume my activities...

I kept on watching TV for a while, when my stomach started telling me it wanted food. Naturally there was no one to cook something for me. I sat up and prepared the bento I bought earlier. I heated it up in our microwave and started to eat it in front of the TV, when the news report started.

I liked news reports actually. I liked knowing about what was going on in Japan and worldwide too, even if I wasn't interested in digging deeper into the subjects. The way it was treated in the TV news was enough for me. They were actually talking about someone who got killed on her own yacht. I'll pass on the morbid details.

"Hmmm... Nice boat." I commented to myself, finding this the only interesting thing about the news. I knew some friends who loved those murder cases and mysteries, but I just wasn't into that.

After I finished my bento and threw the box in the trashcan, I decided to give Shizuka a call. I knew Karen was away with her family this weekend and I thought I could go out with Shizuka.

However...

* * *

"You're on a date?" I asked again, with a obvious drop of disappointment in my voice.

"Yeah, well, it kinda got decided last evening."

I looked down while still holding the phone close to my ear. I couldn't possibly accompany her while she was with her boyfriend. Besides, it seemed to go pretty well between the two from what I heard recently. It had already been six months the two of them had been going out, a record for Shizuka.

"Ah well, sorry to have bothered you."

"Hey it's okay Ayako-chan. Look, if it doesn't go too well today, I'll give you a call, okay?"

Now I felt embarrassed, I couldn't ask something like that from her. How selfish that would be...!

"No, no, don't worry about me! I'll finish reading the book you offered me for my birthday or something like that." I said over the phone.

"Oh well, if you say so... Have a good day then."

"You too. See you later!"

I hung up the phone and sighed. So it looked like I would be spending the day alone.

I laid down on the couch with the TV volume low in the background and the air of the fan blowing gently towards me. Looking at the ceiling, I started to think about Shizuka and how she's been such a good friend to me over the years, ever since kindergarten.

* * *

"You can read that?"

I was wearing glasses at that time. Without them I could only see a blur. I looked up at the girl interrupting me from my reading. It was a picture book about witches.

I was a little shy at that time. Not seeing well, being different... Even as a child you feel that you don't belong with normal kids.

"Uh... Hello." I simply replied, looking up at her. I couldn't see her face well. I just saw she had black, short hair. She made me think of my cousin Aoi for some reason, who I often played with when I was a kid. "Yes, I like it." I added, talking about the book.

"The teacher said you didn't see good, but you can see the pictures in the book, it's great."

I smiled a little and looked over at the girl shyly with a nod.

"I can see well if I look at it up close."

And that was true, I was often having my nose against the paper in order to read things and see all the details on a picture.

"So you must be a witch!"

"Huh?"

I wondered what she meant, was that an insult? Was she there to mock me?

"I...I'm not a witch!"

"Of course you are! You're looking at a witch book! And you don't see well, that means you must have magic powers!"

"Magic... powers?"

"Yes, like Sailor Moon!"

I didn't really understand her at that time, to be honest, but I listened. It was pretty rare that another kid talked to me at all.

"I mean, it's like you must have a gift in some way! Do you hear better than us? Do you read minds? Do you see spirits?"

"Uh, no I don't..." I replied softly, intrigued by this girl. She was so into her own world, a bit like me in some way. She really believed I was kind of a special girl, but it made me feel warm inside. I wanted to believe her, because I had never been treated that way before.

"I'm sure you have, but you don't know it yet. Or you're hiding it from me, but I'll discover your secret!"

I was getting a bit intimidated by her.

"What's your name?" I finally asked, out of courage. I was quite shy at that time.

"Shizuka! You?"

"Ayako." I replied softly.

"Ayako-chan, heh? Call me Shizuka-chan then!"

She held my hands within hers and shook them.

"Let's be friends!" she said with quite some enthusiasm.

I wasn't sure if it was a good idea or not at first, but Shizuka quickly started asking me lots of questions and tested my eyesight while we played in a sandbox. I didn't show quite the same amount of enthusiasm as she was, but I did answer her questions and played her game. The truth was, she was the very first to come to me like this and talk with me, even play with me. Her lively attitude was in contrast with mine at that time, but it eventually rubbed off on me in the end. In the family, the only one who played with me and was about my age was Aoi and even then, I didn't see her that often. I really needed a friend and Shizuka did a wonderful job at that. She was interested in me, in how I felt, how I saw things.

Even a few years later, we managed to keep going to the same schools and classes. She was my protector until Karen arrived and she was also a good friend I could confide in. I still remember that time when we looked at each others' family photos and told each other stories about our different family members when we were bored, or when she used to describe to me the things I couldn't see.

"There's a plane in the sky, Ayako-chan!"

I looked up, but all I could see was whiteness in the blue sky, with a few hints of clouds here and there. The sun was blinding me.

"I can't see it..."

My eyesight had improved a little when I entered grade school. I didn't need glasses anymore as I was seeing more clearly already. Everything wasn't a total blur anymore.

And yet, I couldn't see the airplanes in the sky.

"Well, it's a big white one, with two long wings and it has two engines on each wing! And they're leaving a trail behind them."

"A trail? Is the engine leaving tire marks in the sky?"

I tried to imagine it.

"The trail is white and planes have no tires!" she argued.

"Of course they do! I know it!"

"How do you know?"

"I saw one with wheels on TV! When they are not flying, they use wheels." I explained, or at least tried to. At that age, my understanding of how things really worked was quite limited.

"Then how come we don't see any in the city on the road?" she asked back "If they use wheels, they should be on the road."

"But they're too big!"

"The wheels?"

"No, the planes!" I said, gesturing with my hands.

That's the kind of conversation we had, spurred on by what I couldn't see and how Shizuka was my eyes during my early years...

* * *

I was still laying down on the couch as I replayed all those good memories of the two of us in my mind. Shizuka was a little independent and liked going towards others. She liked being the center of attention without pushing it and she always did her best to follow her ideas, which of course led us to a few arguments once in a while, worse than that plane thingy when we were in grade school. She could be very narrow-minded sometimes and I often had to calmly show her where she was wrong. But her determination was something I often admired about her. This strength to follow her dreams... It was something that I was definitely lacking.

I kept on watching TV for a bit. There was a foreign series being broadcasted. I watched a

bit idly while thinking aloud to myself.

"This girl has an annoying voice."

There was this blonde actress speaking in Japanese. The show was dubbed with the help of Japanese voice actors, actually. You could easily tell it wasn't their natural voices, but something struck me just at that moment. I came to realize that these weren't the real actors' voices and it made me picture what I once read in a magazine about voice actors reading lines of text and trying to make their voices sound okay with the personality of the character they were supposed to dub. Come to think of it, it didn't seem too hard...

I started recording a few minutes of the show. While I wasn't really interested in its story, I wanted to try a little experience. I stopped the recording and replayed it a few times to memorize the lines of the characters. I then muted the TV and played it once again.

I tried to make the best adult female voice I could just then.

"Is it Lupus?"

And I started reciting the lines with a voice that wasn't really mine. I guess any professional voice actor would have laughed at that, but I found it funny to try this out. It wasn't too difficult, really. The hardest part was actually to remember all of the lines and I started to forget halfway through the few minutes I had recorded.

After about three tries, I gave up and turned off recorder and TV.

"Not so hard compared to singing." I said to myself with a little shrug. Maybe I should take some acting lessons? Each time I decided to do something, I was hit by a lot of different technical difficulties, like how to get to the place where the lessons were given, how to come back home... I had to depend on others and I really hated asking for help and become a bother.

Oh well, I guess I'll go play a little in my room.

* * *

I brought the fan with me up to my room. I have air conditioning there, but I don't like it much honestly.

My room... could be labeled as a typical girl's room I guess. When I visit Karen's or Shizuka's, I don't feel like mine is that much out of the ordinary. There is my desk with my laptop on it, a set of shelves with books and CDs, a small TV set with a PS2 attached to it. I've asked help from my father to put some posters on the walls. One is of Ayumi Hamasaki and the other one is of Takuya Kimura. Takuya is such a cutie, I remember listening to his songs when he was a member of SMAP when I was little. His career as an actor was also successful and I watched a lot of his dramas(4).

I turned on the TV set and my game system before sitting down and searching for a game to play.

I spent something like two hours on Lumines, but some stages were a bit difficult for me to

see the blocks because the colors used blend really well together, which makes the game even more difficult for me. But it being more difficult just makes it even better when I win or make a good score, because I know I did it in spite of my handicap.

Getting tired of the game, I turned off the console and TV and went to my desk to start up my computer. I was about to go surf the Web a little, but thought I might as well write a little on my different story ideas.

I just opened the word processor when all of a sudden, the doorbell rang downstairs.

"Uh?"

Even when my parents were around, we didn't have that many visits in a single day...

I went downstairs.

"Yes, yes, I'm coming!"

As I opened the door I was quite surprised to see who it was.

"Osu."

He lifted his left hand in greeting. It was Ogata-kun, at my door.

"H... Hello, Ogata-kun."

He was dressed quite casually, in a red t-shirt with the words 'I AM COOL GUY' in bold and white letters and some blue jeans. I was a bit surprised to see him here.

"What are you doing around here?" I asked, trying to sound as unsurprised and as polite as possible.

"I was passing by, really."

Liar.

He chuckled when I stared at him intently.

"Okay okay, I'll tell you. You remember you lent me a CD a month ago, right?"

"Ah, yes. Are you returning it to me?" I asked back, now guessing his intentions.

"Yep. May I come in? Are your parents home?"

I blinked.

"No, they are away for the weekend, my sister is away too, I'm all alone." I explained. It might not be the brightest thing to say to a guy coming over to your house. He might get the wrong idea, but I trusted him.

"It's a shame. I wanted to come here and hear them say something like 'Oh my god a boy is coming to see our daughter!'"

I went silent and stared even more. The kind of death glare Karen gives sometimes.

"I was kidding Suzumiya, please don't get mad."

"Okay, come in, I'll get some drinks."

I let a boy in my house. Alone with him, on a hot summer day. What was I thinking, seriously?

* * *

"Thanks for the tea, Suzumiya."

I decided to let him sit on the couch of our living room. He thanked me for the tea, but he ended up doing everything to prepare it. I am deeply ashamed of not being able to do such simple things sometimes. Placing him next to me on the couch had another advantage: I didn't have to look directly at him when speaking to him, something I was pretty uncomfortable with.

"You did prepare it yourself, no need to thank me." I replied.

"Maybe, but you offered me some, at least. I'm sure Sakazaki would have thrown me out already." he chuckled. True, Karen might even have let the dogs out in addition.

"Thanks for returning this CD. I wasn't expecting it until school started again, honestly."

He hummed a little while sipping on his tea.

"You seem a bit tense, is there something wrong?" he asked. Did he read minds or something?

"I'm not... really tense."

"Could it be your first time having a guy over at your place?" he teased me now. It kind of got on my nerves sometimes.

"I'm sorry if I don't have any experience with boys!" I let out. Now that I think about it, it was maybe the most embarrassing thing I have ever said, if you don't count that time when I made a joke about our teacher with Karen and Shizuka without realizing he was nearby. One of the joys of not seeing well.

There was a silence that lasted a few uncomfortable minutes. I thought he was going to laugh any time now.

"That's a shame." I then felt his hand on my right shoulder. Before I could say anything, he continued.

"You are a cute girl, you have assets." That made me blush. "And you're not uninteresting to be with, do you know why?"

"Uh, no, I don't?" I honestly replied, looking over at him, but I couldn't stand it and ended up looking down at his lap.

"Because you see life differently as I do, or as normal people do, I think. It makes you special."

"S...Special?" I blushed even more. He was scoring points with me and it was pretty dangerous for me right now. I was feeling my heart beating a little faster and his warm hand was still on the exposed part of my shoulder's skin.

"Yeah. I have read somewhere that we, humans, collect about 70% of our information through sight. If you're partly disabled in this area, that means you collect much less information than we do on everything, or you do it in some other ways. That means you see things differently."

I listened, quite impressed on his opinion actually, before he corrected himself.

"I mean, not 'see' of course. But that's an image."

It was cute, really.

"...Ah! Not an 'image'! More like a way of sensing things..."

I laughed a little. It was so cute listening to him trying not to make any references to the imagery context, thinking it would hurt me, but I was far above that now. It is still funny seeing people fidget with their words while trying not to hurt me with them.

"It's okay, Ogata-kun, don't worry, I see what you mean."

And I laughed a little when I used the word 'see', to show him I wasn't bothered by it at all.

"Good."

That's when his hand left my shoulder. I was actually starting to get used to it...

"Ne, I have a question, though." I asked, a little shyly. It was something that bothered me for a while and I wanted an answer. Besides, we were alone, there was a good mood for it, too. These occasions were quite rare when I thought about it, back then. Karen was always with me, not giving me the independence I needed to communicate with others on my own.

"Yeah?"

"Why did you go out with me in the first place? You probably had and still have many girls going after you, right? So why choose me? And for just one date?"

He hummed a little and seemed to spend a little time considering his reply.

"Well, first, I believe you're an interesting girl and cute. But I said that already, didn't I?"

I nodded.

"You probably won't like what I'm going to tell you, but as you said yourself, there are girls going after me. And you know a very bad one at that."

"Ura Miho-san, right?"

"Yeah. But don't say her name too loud, who knows what it could summon..."

I laughed at that, honestly.

"Actually, she's practically the only one going after me. I am not THAT popular with girls." he chuckled. "But she's been spreading all those rumors to make sure she'd be the only one after me."

I couldn't believe that, there was something doubtful about this.

"But... That's terrible of her!"

"You know how she is, right? You're sitting next to her in class. You can't believe how sorry I was when I heard what she was doing to you and when she managed to get a seat next to yours."

"Uh huh." He had a point and sounded sincere. I couldn't see the look on his face, but honestly, you can tell when people are lying like that just by the sound of their voice. No need to look at their faces.

But something was definitely not right.

"What about your cell... ah!"

I placed a hand over my lips to cover my mouth. I was starting to tell him about the address book of his cellphone that Karen saw. I'm so stupid!

"Ah, that. Looks like Sakazaki told you. It's kind of weird. I did buy a cellphone a few weeks before this happened, but I only realized much later that Ura bought the same. And there's this function enabled by default that adds any e-mail's sender to your address book. She did send me a lot of e-mails with her own phone and those of her friends so it would appear like I had many girlfriends on my address book. And I didn't realize that before it was too late."

I was perplexed. His explanation was so far-fetched I could probably go to China with it.

"And you expect me to believe something like that? Why would Ura do such a thing?"

Actually, I wasn't precise enough. I knew Miho was perfectly capable of doing such a thing for her own interests, but the real question was, what was her interest in this?

"Well, believe what you want, but I don't have anything to gain by lying to you. Why did she do this? It was obvious: I was going to have a date with Sakazaki and she knew about it and wanted her to get the wrong idea about me, which is just what happened. And just when I had the courage to ask her out..."

The courage?

"Wait a second, you weren't this scared when you asked me for a date... In the cafeteria too of all places! It wasn't very romantic." I complained a little to him cutely.

"You know, these kind of things are much harder when it's with someone you truly love."

That hit me, hard.

I was shocked about two things. First was that it meant he didn't love me or anything. Not that I loved him back, really! But a girl has her pride and mine just got hit by a truck. Second, there was this implication that...

"You mean... Karen...?"

"Uh, yeah."

I tried to look at his face, but couldn't see a blush or anything. He just had his face lowered a little.

I was quite confused. And sad too. I had no reason to be disappointed, but the first guy who ever went on a date with me didn't love me.

He was in love with my best friend.

"I uh..."

The best course of action would have been to throw him out of the house, but I didn't have the energy for that anymore.

"Suzumiya, you're a great girl, but I'm sorry, I can't return your feelings."

"I don't have any feelings for you to return!" I raised my voice before realizing it. My eyes felt a bit watery too and I was trembling. Ah, the embarrassment!

"F...Forget it, it's nothing..." I searched for a handkerchief with my hand nearby, but then I felt his on mine, placing a handkerchief in it.

"Dry your tears, I know I did something bad, but I wanted Sakazaki to think I wasn't that bad, that I could give you a good time because I knew she cares a lot about you."

He was right, but then again, what he did was horrible to me! I was torn between slapping him and just bursting into tears. Or both.

"Can I..."

"Yes?" he interrupted, seeing I was searching for my words.

"Can I slap you?"

I felt stupid, but I looked up at his face.

"Heh, yeah, I guess I deserve it." He chuckled a little.

I made a grimace and drew back my hand.

"I'm going to make this sting a lot, I promise." I said with a shy little grin.

Then, aiming right, my hand made contact with his face and the slap echoed in the empty house.

I looked at him, his head turned away, his cheek a little red. He then raised his hand to rub it a little.

"Ow. I'm sure you can beat Sakazaki at that."

I blinked a little, letting out a small giggle.

"Did she slap you back during that date?"

"Yeah, but it was nothing compared to yours."

I smiled a little.

"Idiot."

I did give him a little punch in the arm, but it was more playful now.

How could I get mad at him now? He looked quite sorry and he had been honest with me. If there was something I couldn't be mad against, it was honesty, even if it hurt... I know how telling about your true feelings can be difficult and I felt like it needed to be rewarded with compassion.

"I'm sorry, really." he said while shrugging his shoulders.

"It's okay, I'll get over it. It's just that you were my first date and all and I feel a bit sad about it. But the first date and love is never going right, isn't it?"

"I guess so. I still think you're an extraordinary girl, for being able to go this far despite your handicap. I'm sure many boys are just too scared of that. They don't know how to be around you, if they should be overprotective, or if you're big enough to move by yourself. They don't know when you need help, they don't know how to react or what you're thinking about. It's a complex situation."

I nodded. I guess that would explain a lot of things. It was interesting to hear a guy's opinion about my condition, actually.

"Since I didn't know how to react at first, the beginning of our date was a little awkward, but I quickly realized you were autonomous enough to follow me around. But there were so many questions. I wanted to have a walk with you through the park but then realized it wouldn't be of any help. I thought the movie would be okay from what you told me about, but... well, I always admired Sakazaki about this because she knew exactly how to behave around you."

"That is because we've known each other for a few years already."

"I guessed so and that's why I wanted to know more about you, to experience what Sakazaki experiences every day, to get closer to her."

Even though he used me in that way, I felt like giving him credit for his thoughts.

"So I'm sort of a go-between, heh?"

"You could say something like that. If you'd allow it, of course. I know you don't like Ura much either."

"You couldn't be more right. Okay then, I will help you. To the best of my abilities."

I was feeling better already now. I had a mission, I had to open Karen's eyes! Ogata-kun was definitely trying to win her heart. A part of me was screaming though, telling my other side I was too naive for believing everything he said. Then again, it's not like he did abuse me, stole my first kiss, or worse...

"I admit I'm a little upset by how you kind of... used me. But our date was very educational for me as well, since it was my first and all..." I said. I wasn't sure if I was reacting correctly to this. A normal girl would have surely cried all day and night about this. But somehow...

There was a slight silence as both of us collected our thoughts.

"So ummm... do you think we can do something about Ura? Can't you just reject her feelings or something?"

He shook his head, much to my dismay.

"Sadly I did that already months ago, but she is quite... attached to me, you see."

I nodded a little. I could very well imagine that.

"I guess it'll settle by itself as time'll pass." he continued. "I guess that once I get accepted by Sakazaki, Ura will let go of me already."

Isn't that a bit cruel?

"You know, the shock will probably be quite unbearable for her, if she sees all her plans have failed."

He shrugged.

"Honestly, she'll get what she deserves."

It was true in a sense, but I couldn't help but feel bad for her, maybe because I was a girl too.

"I'd better get going and leave you to your occupations." he stood up. "Need some help for washing those?" he pointed at the teacups we both used on the table.

"N-No, it's okay, I'll manage." I offered him the best smile I could muster at the moment and took the tray back to the kitchen. I'd clean them when he was gone.

I led him back to the entrance, where he sat down and laced his shoes.

"Okay, I'm all set."

He looked my way as he opened the door.

"Thanks for understanding, Suzumiya. You're a wonderful girl."

I waved him off and closed the door and strangely stood there in the entrance, contemplating my thoughts.

I was a bit down actually. Disappointed might be the most accurate description for what I was feeling at the moment. I wanted to honestly believe him, even if any girl would have kicked him where it hurts already.

Don't disappoint me, Ogata-kun. I'll be watching you, nyehehe.

That said, let's finish this day by some creative work! I still had that little story of mine to work on...

* * *

To be continued!

Next time!

Shizuka: "We're already at the end of the first half of our highschool years and I think I found my real boyfriend this time! What about you, Karen-chan?"

Karen: "Oh please! You know how I am with these things."

Shizuka: "Teehee! But our little Ayako is still as innocent as ever. Do you think she'll be alright?"

Karen: "As long as I'm here..."

Shizuka: "You're saying it as if you want to marry her!"

Karen: "..."

Shizuka: "Next time, in Blind Spot chapter 219!"

Karen: "All wrong! Seven!"

Shizuka: "The final answer."

Karen: "What, it's the last chapter already!?"

Shizuka: "No way, we didn't get to see Ayako's wedding yet!"

Karen: "Phew!"

Author's notes:

(1) Bento : Japanese lunch box, where every ingredient is separated from the other and you just pick

them one after the other yourself. Mothers, wives or schoolgirls usually prepare bentos for the men/boys they like (or in case of mothers, for their children). If a girl offers to make a boy's bento, you can be sure he is quite special for her.

(2) Comбини : Short for 'convenience store', these stores are open 24/7 in Japan and are offering a whole bunch of products, ranging from food to drinks, magazines, common medical and hygiene products and the like. You can even use a microwave there to heat the food you're buying. The good thing is that you find a lot of combinis all over Japan.

(3) Stamps : Japanese people tend to use stamps instead of pencils to sign stuff. The stamp writes their name on the paper. There are personal stamps but also family ones.

(4) Drama : A more or less 50-minutes TV show in Japan. Usually a short series with up to ten episodes.

Okay, this chapter is finished, but it was quite difficult to write. At first, I had many plans for this particular chapter focused on Ayako alone, but I quickly realized it didn't have enough content to be labelled a chapter. Instead of just adding various bits here and there to fill up the emptiness, I thought about the rest of the story and moved some elements from one chapter to another.

I hope I'll do it much faster next time, yes, much faster.

Don't hesitate to mail me if you have anything to say about the story. Comments are much welcome.