

Wounds

A perpetrator's perspective

Von Gepo

Kapitel 11: Changing perspective

"Momoi tells me you are exhausted these days" Kuroko said right after greeting him without even asking how he was.

"Therapy is fucking exhausting." He groaned and laid back on his bed. This would most likely be a longer conversation. "Last week I visited one grave after the next, this week I have a list of things to write down. Like who I am talking with, how long and if I offend that person. I even have to ask if I offended the person. So if I offend you, tell me right away."

"And who have you been talking to this week?"

"Satsuki, you and a conbini worker. Asking him if I had offended him was damn embarrassing. I'll never go there again. I hope that coach doesn't call, I really don't want to ask him if I offended him. He'll never stop his rant."

Kuroko laughed and asked: "How often have you offended Satsuki?"

"Err ... wait, I wrote it down." He grabbed the paper he had used for this exercise. "Twenty-seven times since Tuesday."

"That ... is a lot." Kuroko sounded a bit put out. "I don't think you offend me that often."

"Well, I think you are just used to me being an asshole." He flopped down again. "I wasn't even aware how wrong people can take what I say. Satsuki isn't exactly a delicate flower, I know she only calls me out on real shit."

"I think I would really like to see how your conversations work that way."

"That's the worst, you know? I thought I said offensive things but eighteen times she found my body language rude, not what I said. I never thought sitting could be offensive, you know?"

"You know ... she is right, your body language is often offensive. Mostly that you look like you don't care when someone is telling you something important or you get into people's space or how you steal things without caring or just shrug your shoulders when your input is needed. Actually, yes, you are very rude most of the time."

Great. There went his hope that Kuroko might say that Satsuki was too sensitive. So she really called him out correctly. He found everything Kuroko had just said on his list. He asked: "So why are you my friend again?"

"I learned not to care about your body language and your tone when speaking. Which – by the way – is inappropriate as well. If one only listens to your words, it doesn't sound too bad most of the time."

"Great ... so, give me some pointers what I need to change?" He got a pen to write

down what Kuroko told him.

A few minutes later, he needed a second page. Urgh. Kuroko only told him about their last three meetings and that was enough to fill all these? Shit. He really needed to change. He hated the fact that he had some kind of homework this time but damn, he never knew how much of an asshole he was in daily life. Those were his friends for fuck's sake – how horrible must he be to strangers?

"I feel like shit right now" Aomine admitted.

"I feel better." There was a smile in Kuroko's voice. "You know, before you went into therapy, I was never able to even hint at those things, you got either angry or laughed things off or simply shrugged it off as if you didn't care. When someone said things about you that might be a critic, you always let them feel like shit for it. It's really nice to be able to talk with you without being afraid to be hurt for it."

Yeah ... he wanted to lash out. He wanted to rage, to scream, to laugh at the other. He wanted to undo this words so damn much but that said a whole damn lot more about him than about Kuroko. He was the one who could not take these words, who did not want to face the shame they brought upon him. How could he call people his friends when they were afraid to speak their mind around him?

"I'll get better, I promise" He said in a small voice, hoping the other wouldn't hear while knowing he would.

"I am really, really proud of you." Kuroko sounded completely sincere.

"Say, Tetsu ... what about some therapy for yourself?" He tried.

"Me?" The other sounded surprised. "I don't know ... I am not exactly sure what for. I don't think back often and if I do, it doesn't pain me too much. It is just something that happened. I even told my mother about it eventually, that had been ... I had been afraid of her reaction for years. I talked with Akashi and Midorima and you and I talked it through with Taiga more times than I can count. When I had Shiro, I had some counseling with a specialist but after that, I was all good. I don't think I need any more therapy."

"I didn't know you got counseling." He hadn't been told, even though they already were friends again at that point in time.

"Well ... you would have asked what for. Remember my dog Nigou?"

"Uh-hum." A small, fluffy thing with big blue eyes that accompanied Seirin to matches, even though dogs weren't allowed in the buildings. He remembered the uproar.

"When I found him, I always saw Aoki when I looked into his eyes." Aomine's stomach dropped at those words. "I felt guilty and ashamed and longing and sad and ... a great many things. Sometimes I cuddled him, sometimes I shunned him, sometimes I couldn't look at him. I liked the dog but my memories-" His voice broke off. Kuroko took a deep breath. "Anyway, I was only one of many who cared for him, so it wasn't too bad. But I knew if I cared for him by myself, my behavior would have hurt the dog. I only took him in after my feelings had settled. But I was afraid the same would happen when I had Shiro. What if I subconsciously shunned or hurt him because things overlapped in my head?"

Overlap. Oh god. Aomine said: "That's what happened."

"What do you mean?" Kuroko heard that his tone was off.

"An overlap. That's why I hit you." He stared at the wall, seeing something completely different in front of him. Kuroko's smile, his reddened cheeks, that sparkle in his eyes.

"My father used to hit my mother, sometimes she asked him to. When she was pregnant, she wanted the kid gone, so she asked him to hit her to abort the child. I don't know why they decided to have my brother but I knew about the abortions.

When I understood what happened, it made me terribly sad. But after losing my brother, when I saw my father punch her again, I only thought "It's better that way". I never wanted to hurt that much again, so ... in that moment, I thought it's better to have never met than losing someone later."

There was a long silence on the other end before Kuroko said: "I guess you only knew she was pregnant because she asked for the violence?"

"Yeah" His own voice sounded rough.

"I see." Another bout of silence. "Well, I knew about Aoki for three months. He wasn't some unknown possibility, he was real to me. After he was gone, I ... every child I saw, a blue-eyed, blue-haired kid was staring back at me. Right up to that day we met in front of Aoki's graveyard, I was haunted by accusing baby eyes."

"I am so sorry." He felt tears run down his cheeks. Gods, he wanted to undo this. He wanted to turn back time and hold himself back from doing the worst mistake of his life. He wanted to explain what happened, how unbelievably sorry he was but no words were coming out of his mouth.

He could hear Kuroko crying at the other end of the line. After a few moments, he whispered "Thank you" and the line went dead.

Aomine grabbed a pillow, buried his face in it and screamed.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Satsuki asked at dinner, sending him worried looks. He shook his head.

"Well ... should I tell you about the TV show I watched this afternoon?"

Yeah, mindless chatter wasn't too bad. He could drown himself in her voice. He nodded.

She began to ramble about this and that, TV, shows, stars, movies, music. He began to warm up to it, even throwing in responses and questions at some point. Satsuki liked to push sometimes but she also knew when to hold back. Sometimes it made him feel like he didn't deserve her, sometimes it made him curse her for not pushing harder. Then he had to remind himself that he wasn't her responsibility, no matter how much she liked to take it on. He wished he understood why people like to give away their freedom so easily. Could he ask that? It most likely sounded stupid. But she had never laughed at him, so why not?

"Oi, Satsuki." She stopped mid-sentence, going from sugar-high to serious in a millisecond. "That stuff with marriage and kids and that ... aren't you afraid of that?"

"Eh?" She blinked. "Why should I be afraid of that?"

"I don't know, I just ... well, I am. Husband or father, those are difficult roles, you know? They come with expectations and stuff. I would have to give up so much for that. I don't wanna talk about me right now but you – why would you want those roles?"

"Why?" She shook her head for a moment. "I don't think I really understand your question. What would I have to give up for marriage?"

"Well ... sleeping with other guys, living independently, maybe even your job and future. Women aren't exactly encouraged to work once they are married. I don't know, I don't live in your head. Aren't there any dreams or habits you would have to give up?"

"I don't think so." She tilted her head. "I live with you, I go out with you, your friends are my friends, my job is related to your job." She counted that with her finger. "The only independent thing is that I sometimes go out with my female friends and do some hobbies on my own. But I don't think you would want me to give those up, do

you?" Negative. "So there is not a single thing I would do differently than I do them now. I would sleep in your bed but that is not negative."

That sure made it easy.

"Rather than asking myself what I need to give up is what I gain. Even if I liked sleeping around, I would gladly give that up for you. Knowing you would faithfully stay with me, why would I want anyone else?"

"Because the same person all the time is boring?" Shit. While he said that, he already knew he had done that to hurt her. He had slept with Kuroko for one and a half years and he had not grown tired of that. He had slept with Kise for nearly three years and not grown tired of that. When you slept with someone often enough, you learned their likes and dislikes. New partners were the boring thing, they always did annoying stuff, touching in ways he didn't like. Sex with one partner wasn't boring, it got better the more you had sex with them. He knew that, he had had enough sex to know. So why was he saying this shit to hurt her? The only thing that was lost was the thrill of having someone new – a thrill that wore off once you had enough of them.

"I wouldn't know." She had lowered her eyes. "For me, there has only ever been you." She stood to put away the dishes.

Why the fuck had he agreed to therapy? Actually noticing how much he hurt others and allowing himself to feel their pain really brought home how much of an asshole he was. It had been easier to not let himself feel their pain. Gods, did he really want this? It was so much easier not to have empathy. If you did not have it, you did not fret or worry or feel fucking guilty like that all the time.

He should say sorry. She had put up with his shit for over a decade, faithfully waiting by his side. He should have the guts to say yes or tell her to go live her own life. He had tried that, damn it. But they both knew he didn't mean it. Couldn't he just take a leap for once and apologize for hurting her at least?

But no. He stayed silent. He stood, took his jacket and went out. He knew the only reason she did not cry was because it would hurt him more than he had already hurt himself with this. Not showing how much he got to her was her way of being considerate.

Or protecting herself. If she cried, he would only hurt her more.

"I don't think I like having empathy" Aomine said right after greeting doctor Enjoji.

"Oh? How come?" She sat and made herself comfortable.

"It sucks." He took the bouncy ball she had taken at the first session and began to roll for- and backward. "I'm actually noticing how much I hurt people now. I mean, I knew before but then I didn't have to feel it."

"It's good to hear, you seem to have empathy as well. How long have you denied yourself the ability to feel what others feel?"

"Can't remember. Too long." He sighed and buried his face in his hands. "But it fucking hurts. I don't wanna feel all this negative shit."

"Then the next step would be to change how you act towards other people."

"Somehow I knew you would say that." He rolled his eyes. "You know, by now I can already guess what my next appointment will be. Stop myself when I notice I hurt others. Apologize when I hurt people. Try my best to hurt people less. All in all, be a lot less of an asshole."

"That pretty much sums it up, yes." She smiled. "I'm proud you got to this point by yourself."

"I talked with Tetsu." He tried to lean back before he remembered he was sitting on

the bouncy ball. He looked around for something like a cushy chair or maybe even a couch. His eyes fell on the chair that nearly embraced you which Satsuki had tried out while they waited for the doctor in here. He got up and changed into it. "He told me what he suffered after losing our kid. Like how he saw baby eyes everywhere following him and how he couldn't look at his dog whose eyes looked like his own. I never tried to imagine what losing the kid must have done to him. I always thought about my own pain and fear, I never acknowledged his. I told him about what I was thinking at the time and apologized."

"That is huge." Doctor Enjoji blinked in surprise. "What did you tell him?"

"How my father always punched kids out of my mom and how I stopped caring after losing my brother, wanting them gone as well because I could not imagine hurting like that again. I was afraid what losing our kid would do to me ... so I ended it before I had the chance to get attached."

"That sounds like you did a lot of self-reflecting."

"It's what this therapy is for, right? Getting me to stop running from my own mistakes and face them instead. Taking responsibility and such ... things."

"Did you just stop yourself from swearing?"

"I guess that's not very mature as well, huh?" He crossed his arms.

"It is. Well done." She praised him.

Somehow he felt petted on the head, even though she sat more than two meters away from him. Her voice had a lot more modulation now than when he started therapy. Maybe he had been dangerous for her too. Seems like now he wasn't anymore. Next he should stop being an emotional danger to Satsuki. Maybe he should even pay his teammates a visit, go out with them or something. Might make his coach a lot less angry at him which was good in the long run.

No other way than simply meeting challenges head on instead of ducking away. Really, when had he started being such a chicken? He was a popular guy in elementary school. At least until he stopped caring about anything than basketball and Satsuki ... which was pretty much in elementary school. Oh well. After his brother was born, he became defensive, reclusive and stopped caring about himself. Until his death, his brother got a central position in his life. After he was gone ... Aomine drew in on himself, lashing out at others, so people would not hurt him again.

He had made Kuroko his punching bag to let out his anger, frustration and fear.

"Hey, doc. How does one get happy? What does a human need to be happy?"

"His basic needs need to be satisfied, I can explain that to you with a diagram made by Maslow." She mustered him while she spoke. "But more than that, one needs to want to be happy."

"Who wouldn't want to be happy?"

"People that are afraid of changing. Getting happy often implies a lot of changes and not all will be positive. Sometimes you run into the wrong direction. Sometimes you hurt. A lot of people like their own personal hell more than a paradise they do not know yet. Nearly everyone wants to be happy but only a few decide to go look for happiness instead of sitting around and waiting for happiness to come knock on their door and say "Here I am, will you let me in?". Getting happy doesn't work like that."

"So I need this empathy thing and changing my behavior because otherwise I don't have a chance to get happy?"

"That sums it up, yes." She smiled.

"Yeah, okay." He sighed deeply. "Let's do this." He grabbed some papers from his jacket. "Here. I wrote down what I did wrong the last week. Tetsu gave me some

pointers what I did wrong when we met. It's a damn long list. Shit, I just swore. Sh- ... man, this will be hard."

"Yes, it will." She took the list and skimmed it. "So, do you see any patterns in this? Like always reacting negatively when someone brings up a certain topic or says something in a way that rubs you wrongly? Or maybe that you lash out when you feel certain feelings?"

"I have no fuc- err, clue."

"Tell me, in what context did you lash out?" She gave the list back.

He took it and tried to remember. In what situations did those happen? Most of them weren't him lashing out but seeming disinterested. He finally concluded: "Talking. When someone talks to me, I look bored. When someone asks me something I don't want to answer, I ridicule them. When people have expectations, I disappoint some of them."

"What good does it do?"

"Good?" He raised a blue eyebrow. "Well ... then they don't talk to me and don't want me to do things."

"It keeps them distant."

"Yeah." He hung his head. "People aren't my thing."

"But you want more contact?"

"Yeah, I think so." He looked up. "But what do I do if they begin to expect things I can't do?"

"Like what?" She wrote something down.

"Like ... I don't know. Marriage. Kids. Being nice. I don't know. Normal people stuff."

"Then you either say no or you learn it." She smiled. "If you can learn to be less of an asshole, you can learn to be a decent human being too. It's actually the same thing."

"Not really. One is stopping to say shit, the other is saying nice things. The second is a lot harder."

"Do you know any mute persons?"

"No." He crunched his eyebrows. "Yeah, actually, I do. I knew one. He played on another team the last three years. I don't exactly know him but we met a few times."

"Was he a nice person?"

"I guess so. His teammates seemed to like him." Actually, how did that work? Did he give them anything for it?

"Do you think you could contact him and learn to be nice from him? Because one can be nice without saying anything. That's a question of body language."

"You want me to learn body language from a mute man I never talked to?" He crossed his arms. "How do I even contact him? It's not like I could phone him. I guess I could find out his number and write him ... well, it's possible."

"The question is: Do you want to learn?"

Yeah. Yes, damn it, he did. He wanted to know what it was like to ... just be a part of a group. It was better than facing his teammates without any kind of training. But asking a mute man was kinda strange. Though it was easier than trying to come up with something nice to say, that sounded impossible.

"I want you to try and write down what you learned. That will be very difficult but it will make you more conscious of what you do." One of her fingers pointed at the list in his hand. "And if you need a reminder of why you are doing all that, pin that in front of your face."

He sighed and looked at the thing himself. How about burning it and forgetting all about changing himself? Tempting. Oh so tempting. The list went to the inner pocket

of his jacket, safe against his breast. Temptation seemed to be his eternal vice. Alcohol, women, running – temptation was strong. But he was also proud. He would not run from a challenge. Never.