

## Feminine Grace

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8470777) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/8470777>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">Other</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Steins;Gate</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Okabe Rintarou   Hououin Kyouma/Makise Kurisu</a> , <a href="#">Okabe Rintarou   Hououin Kyouma/Urushibara Ruka</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Okabe Rintarou</a> , <a href="#">Hououin Kyouma</a> , <a href="#">Makise Kurisu</a> , <a href="#">Urushibara Ruka</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Love Triangles</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Angst</a> , <a href="#">Trans Female Character</a> , <a href="#">how am i supposed to tag fics i'm so bad at this</a> , <a href="#">this is self indulgent as hell but i swear it's good</a> , <a href="#">Developing Relationship</a> , <a href="#">First Dates</a> , <a href="#">Jealousy</a> , <a href="#">Cat Cafés</a> , <a href="#">Abusive Parents</a> , <a href="#">Homophobia</a> , <a href="#">Homophobic Language</a> , <a href="#">Transphobia</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2016-11-04 Updated: 2021-05-13 Words: 5,419 Chapters: 9/?

# Feminine Grace

by [transparentTemptation](#)

## Summary

“I was hoping you would go on a date with me!” With head bowed and eyes squeezed shut, Ruka revealed a brilliant bouquet.

Okabe recoiled away in shock. *What worldline am I in?* “I- But I’m- And you’re-”

- - -

Okabe can't help but remember.

## Notes

In an older version of this work, I used she/her pronouns for Ruka. For myriad reasons, I have now decided that was the wrong decision, and have revised the pronouns used to describe Ruka in the narration to they/them. Characters will still (mostly) use he/him in dialogue as in canon, since this takes place in the Steins;Gate worldline.

# "Kurusu, I-"

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Kurusu, I-"

A knock at the door interrupted the tender moment, drawing their gazes. The two exchanged a look as Okabe went to open it, the metal of the knob cold compared to Makise's flushed cheek.

Ruka was standing in the hall outside the lab, hands clutched behind their back, holding something. What, he couldn't quite tell.

"Ruka! What a- pleasant surprise."

"Hi Okabe." Their eyelashes fluttered as they tried not to look him in the eyes. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

He shot Makise a glance and she nodded. "No, of course not. Come on in."

"Thank you." They entered deftly, spinning to hide their back from Okabe's view. A single flower bud fell to the floor. "Oh, hi Makise, I didn't know you were here."

"Good to see you, Ruka."

"So," Okabe began, "what brings you to our humble laboratory?"

"Well, um," their eyes turned to the floor. "I wanted to ask you something."

"Hm? What's that?"

"I- well- I- I was..."

"Out with it now, we can't afford to have lab members keeping things from each other."

"I was hoping you would go on a date with me!" With head bowed and eyes squeezed shut, they revealed a brilliant bouquet.

Okabe recoiled away in shock. *What worldline am I in?* "I- But I'm- And you're-"

The flowers fell to their side and tears welled in their eyes. "I know. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked. I'll just go now."

*Remember how different things might have been.*

He again looked to Makise, who responded with another, smaller nod.

“Wait!” He put his hand on Ruka’s shoulder as they turned to the door. “You know, I didn’t decline.”

They met his gaze, mouth agape.

“I have been... busy at the lab lately, but I suppose I could find time for a date.”

“Really!? Oh, Okabe, thank you!” they wrapped their arms around him, pressing themselves tightly into his chest.

*Delicate as an orchid, fair as a cherry blossom...*

## Chapter End Notes

First semester of school just ended so I'm hoping to have more time to work on this fic. Look forward to an update! Thanks for the support :D

# "Where were we?"

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The door closed with a click following the acceptance of flowers and a brief promise to send a text later to work out the details. Okabe exhaled deeply as he turned back to Kurisu.

“So, where...”

“... were we?” finished Makise. “I think that went out the window when you accepted a date with another girl.”

“Another girl? Clearly you're mistaken. Ruka is of...”

“... the masculine variety?” She mimed in Okabe’s voice.

“I’m fully capable of finishing my own sentences, you know. Assistant or not, I can manage that.”

“First of all, not your assistant. Second, I don't understand how a supposed scientist could be so far from such a simple hypothesis.”

“I’m not sure I follow.”

“You know what, never mind. Point is, you accepted a date while we were...”

“While we were...?”

“Nothing. While we were nothing.”

“Well, what else did you want me to do? *You’re* the one who nodded when I looked at you.”

Makise’s cheeks went red, with anger rather than flusterment. “I- I don’t know! Tell her- *him* - no?”

Okabe sighed and stared across the room at nothing in particular. “It’s more complicated than that.”

She looked into his eyes, but he didn’t meet her gaze. “More complicated? More complicated *how?* “

“Complicated in the same way everything else right now is complicated.”

“What? You mean worldlines, time travel?”

“Yes ‘worldlines, time travel.’ You could at least act like you don’t think it’s ridiculous.”

It was Kurisu’s turn to sigh. “Look, you know it’s hard for me to believe.”

No response.

“I’m sorry, alright? It just... doesn’t feel any more real than a dream.”

“I almost wish it had been.”

“Almost?”

“Yes, almost.” He placed his hands on Makise’s shoulders and looked around the lab before locking eyes with her. “But not quite.”

“I- uh- how about we go grab dinner and you can tell me what happened with Ruka.”

## Chapter End Notes

Don't mind me, just blowing the dust off this old fanfic now that S;G 0 is here.

# "So..." "Ruka."

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Their usual cafe (that is, slightly less usual than May Queen Nyan-nyan) was as quaint and greasy as ever, but the significance of the conversation he was imminently expected to have weighed heavy on Okabe. It was the kind of conversation he'd already had in one form or another in more worldlines than he could count, but now he found himself past the divergence barrier, where that conversation was harder than ever.

They each ordered their usuals. God, everything was so usual that it hurt.

Well, almost everything.

"So..." Kurisu prompted.

"So..."

"Ruka."

"Yes, he is indeed the topic at hand." Okabe was playing coy and he knew it. Truthfully, he had no idea where to even start describing everything that had happened. Without much of a thought, what seemed like the most relevant detail came tumbling out of his mouth. "We went on a date."

Kurisu nearly spit out the sip of water she was taking. "You did!?"

"In a worldline where he was female, yes."

"How did that happen?"

"It was his condition for allowing me to change him back."

"Change him back?"

"Yes, change him back. We allowed him to send a D-Mail back to before his birth telling his mother to eat more vegetables while pregnant."

"Surely you don't mean to tell me that old wives' tale is true?"

"True enough that it made Ruka a full-fledged girl, yes."

"I see..."

Okabe was leaving out details. He knew that, and he feared Kurisu knew there was a reason. Memories of his past blunders ran through his mind: a hand groping across Ruka's body, a

less-than calculated attempt at telling Ruka they really had been a dude, and, more than anything, a seemingly endless cascade of tears streaming down Ruka's face.

More than Kurisu knowing, he feared that Ruka still knew. That memories of his assault on their body and their sense of self were still flitting about at the edges of Ruka's consciousness, at random moments when they looked at Okabe and in dreams.

*In nightmares.*

## Chapter End Notes

I'm just on a roll, really liking the short chapter style for this fic and I hope y'all do too!



# A Spark

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They were so nervous they were so happy they were so nervous they were so happy they were so nervous they were so-

*Okay, calm down, calm down, calm down, calm down.*

Ruka felt as though they may faint.

They had only barely made it down the stairs from Okabe's apartm- the Future Gadgets Laboratory when they had to sit down on the steps, their legs threatening to give out underneath them.

Their thoughts were a blur, a chaotic mess of exuberance and anxiety. *He said yes he said yes he said yes.* They felt as though they needed to jump for joy, and also slightly like they needed to throw up.

The girl working at the CRT shop downstairs - Moeka was her name, right? - was outside, having stopped sweeping up to stare at the seemingly-crazy seemingly-girl alternating between bouncing their legs up and down while smiling giddily and hyperventilating with their face buried in their hands. Ruka accidentally made eye contact and CRT girl immediately dropped her gaze to the ground and resumed her repetitive motion with the broom.

A brief flicker of self-consciousness brought Ruka back to their feet and walking to the shrine, but any stress caused by embarrassing themselves in front of a near-stranger was quickly snuffed out by the even more overwhelming thought that they had *not* embarrassed themselves in front of Okabe. It took all their self-control to prevent their jubilation from allowing them to skip all the way back home.

Sure, some people Ruka walked past looked on in confusion as they smiled quietly and occasionally giggled to themselves, but for once in their life, they didn't care.

They didn't care.

They didn't care what everyone else thought, because they had a date with *Okabe Rintarou*. The mere thought was thrilling, in that it was both terrifying and exciting, as it had been ever since it first occurred to them soon after Okabe had rescued them from those creeps taking pictures.

It was when Ruka walked in front of the cool breeze of a fan back in their room at the shrine that they realized they had been sweating a bit more than was reasonable for the weather.

They'd have to take a shower.

They'd have to take *another* shower, despite already forcing themselves through one that morning.

But it would be fine. A small price to pay for a date with Okabe Rintarou.

## Chapter End Notes

I am being so productive at writing lately oh my god.

# The Key to a Purrfect First Date

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“‘The key to making your first date the first of many is to put your best foot forward.’ Ugh, this book is just as useless as last time.”

“What, you’ve read it before? I didn’t think you’d have any reason to.”

“You’re one to talk.”

“Hey!” Kurisu *hmph* ed.

“And no, I haven’t, you have. Last time I went through this ordeal, you read it to me.”

“You mean to tell me you’re so hopeless at dating you’ve used the same advice book in multiple worldlines?”

“I’m not sure why, considering how things went last time.”

She laughed. “Well, at least you didn’t let her get hit by a car.”

Okabe looked up at Kurisu, who was absentmindedly browsing @chan. “What did you just say?”

She turned from her seat at the computer. “At least you didn’t let her get hit by a car?”

“Seems you remember more from other worldlines than you let on, assistant.”

“Wait, how do I remember something that happened on *your* date?”

“You and Daru trailed us the entire time.”

“Why on earth did we do that?”

“Apparently to text me when I was about to screw up. It was your idea. You practically dragged Daru along.”

“Well, now that you mention it, that doesn’t sound like a half bad idea.”

“You’re only saying that because now you know it’s your idea.”

“Am not!”

“Are too. Besides, I’m not going to try to stop you if you want to do it again. I’m confident that would be a futile effort.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, nothing.”

“Oh yeah? Well, just for that comment, you’re on your own.”

“Oh, is that really-”

The sound of the door opening and a high-pitched “Tu-tu-ruuuu” interrupted Okabe’s retort.

*-the only reason?*

Mayuri practically danced into the room. “I heard Okarin has a daaaate.”

“Wha-? Who told you?” Okabe stammered.

“Ruka did! He’s really excited!”

“You don’t find it... strange... at all?”

Mayuri seemed confused. “Strange?” She smiled in that way of hers. “No way, I think it’s super cute! What are you two gonna do?”

“To be honest, I haven’t the faintest clue.”

“Ooh, I met this really sweet cat that was lost and helped him find his way home. He lives at a cafe called Ulala, you should go there!”

“A cat cafe? Why-”

“You know, that’s actually a really good idea,” Kurisu interjected, fruitlessly trying to stop the impending rant.

“And spend the afternoon surrounded by felines!? They’re nothing more than furry spies for the Organization! We might as well hand all of our secrets directly to them!”

“Secrets like the fact that you somehow have a date?”

“Precisely! They can’t know I’m distracted even for a moment or they will take their chance to strike!”

“Ah, yes, that would explain why they raided the lab the other day while you and Daru were busy playing *eroge* .”

“We were not simply playing, we were ‘let’s playing’ to raise research funds for our experiments! Had you not interrupted, we would have cornered the entire online video market using my sharp wit alone.”

“Okarin, if you don’t like cats, you could go somewhere else. What about a shrine?” questioned Mayuri, not concerned with whatever inappropriate game Kurisu was referring to.

“No, no, we’ll go. Ruka spends enough time at a shrine as it is, and it could be a chance to do some valuable counterintelligence work.” He paused, dropping the mad scientist persona.

“Besides, it’s not like I have a better idea.”

## Chapter End Notes

Okabe and Daru playing eroge is a reference to my friend's fanfic that isn't yet on AO3, I'll link it here when he posts it.

EDIT: As promised, my friend's fic: [Lets;Play](#)

# Mother

## Chapter Notes

CW for parental abuse and homophobic language

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ruka lay on the floor, defeated, the cool evening breeze coming through their window gently ruffling their hair. They had heard their phone go off while they were in the shower, and instantly their heart was aflutter with the chance it was Okabe. Entirely sure he had already arranged a wonderful date, they abandoned their plans to remove the chipping nail polish on their toes and hastily got out of the shower. Still dripping wet and with only a towel around their waist, they bounded down the hall to their room and flipped open the phone.

*I'm going to the store, do you need anything?*

It was a text from their mother.

They kicked the door shut, locked it, and collapsed onto the floor. The only sign of time passing as they lay effectively motionless, lost in scattered thought, was the waning sunlight.

Finally, they checked the time. 19:42 - a number which would be slightly more useful if Ruka had any clue when they had first laid down. It was just occurring to them that maybe they should eat something when they heard their father's footsteps approaching.

He jostled the knob, then knocked. "Ruka, are you alright?"

"Fine," they answered in monotone.

"Why is your door locked?"

"I just finished showering."

"Your mother says you've been in there for hours."

"Oh."

He sighed, "Come on, I brought home dinner."

"I'll be right there."

Somehow, miraculously, Ruka worked up the resolve to get off the floor. They absentmindedly put on some pajamas (it wasn't as if they were going to accomplish anything else that day) and trudged their way to the dinner table, where a bowl of ramen awaited them.

Their dad smiled weakly. “I know *shoyu* isn’t your favorite, but I couldn’t remember which you like more.”

“It’s alright, really. Thank you.”

“Ruka?”

They visibly tensed up. “Yes, mother?”

“What is that on your toes?”

“Uh...” Ruka realized they had completely forgotten to put socks on, as they usually did to hide the color adorning their toenails.

“Well!?”

“It’s...”

Ruka’s dad attempted to diffuse the situation. “Dear, it’s okay, let’s calm down.”

“I am calm.” Her words were pointed.

“It’s nail polish,” Ruka answered quietly, staring down at the floor.

“It’s what?”

“Nail polish, ma’am.”

“Better. Now, take it off.”

Something stirred inside them - a new sense of resolve, perhaps, or simply years of pent up frustration. “No.”

“What did you say to me!?”

“I said *no!*” There was a fire in Ruka’s eyes now, one unfamiliar to even themselves.

Their mother only scoffed. “Fine, suit yourself. If you’re going to be a faggot like your dad wants, go ahead.” With that, she left, abandoning her dinner at the table as she retreated into the back of the house.

The fire in Ruka’s eyes was gone. Their father sat next to them in stunned silence as they broke down into tears.

Y'all probably thought you were gonna get a silly date chapter but nope, this shit is getting real. Writing this made me feel very, very weird.



## "You're on your own."

The door of the Future Gadget Lab burst open. "Hell yes!"

"Are you trying to get me kicked out of this place, Daru? Quiet down."

"Dude, I won! I have a date with Faris!"

"You what? How did you pull that off?"

"That Rai-Net tournament I went to? It was the top prize. I told you this, like, just this morning."

"Aw, now you both have a date!" Mayuri exclaimed, getting a laugh from Kurisu.

"Hell must have frozen over."

Daru looked confused. "Wait, you have a date?"

"Abject treason, double-oh-two! You can't go divulging my secrets like that!"

"I'm sorry, I thought you were going to tell Daru, too."

"Yeah, man, you can't keep all the juicy details from me. Who with?"

"Rukako."

"Ruka!? Damn, bonus trap points and everything!"

"Fan of traps, are we, Daru?" Kurisu mocked.

He smirked. "You know it."

"Ugh, I wish I hadn't asked."

Okabe sighed. "Can we perhaps not refer to Rukako using your *ero*ge tropes, Daru?"

"Sorry, man, didn't mean to insult your *boyfriend*."

"He-"

"Just going on a date doesn't mean they're a couple!" Kurisu shouted.

"Whoa, alright, I'll back off. I didn't know you cared so much, Makise."

She froze. "Wha- care? I don't care! I'm just tired of you being an idiot."

"If you say so. Anyways, Okabe, you need some hot tips for your date?"

“Considering they probably come from a hentai game, no thanks. I think I can handle this on my own.”

“Don’t you want to know exactly how often to scoot closer? Or the best way to stretch so that your hand ‘accidentally’ grazes some boobage?”

“This is Ruka we’re talking about here.”

“Oh, right, that trick is kinda pointless.”

“Get your mind out of the gutter, that’s not what I meant. It’s just that Ruka... he deserves better than being treated like that.”

“Oh come on, you choose now to pull out this nice guy shtick? You’re right on the cusp of some sweet trap-”

“Daru...” Okabe warned.

“Sorry, sweet yaoi-”

“Not much better.”

“If you don’t want my help, just say so.”

“If my memory serves, I already did.”

“Alright, you’re on your own for this one, dude.”

“Believe me, I’m well aware.”

“Nuh uh!” Mayuri interrupted. “I’ll help you, Okarin!”

“I think I can manage-” he began, useless against her enthusiasm.

“Ooh, do you know what you’re going to wear?”

He looked down at his attire: the usual grey shirt, brown pants, and lab coat. “Uh, this? Sans lab coat. Wouldn’t want to ruin its pristine cleanliness with cat fur.”

“You can’t wear that on a *date*! This has to be special for Ruka, you know!”

“And I have to dress up to make it special?”

“Hm, no, I guess not. It’ll be special enough to Ruka just because it’s you.”

# Click

## Chapter Notes

Went in and retconned the date this is all happening to make it more consistent with the canon timeline.

Also, I'M BACK BABEYYY! -2018-10-17

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*Click click click click. Click. Click click click.*

Okabe was typing a text to Ruka, trying to determine how to invite them on a date to a cat cafe without sounding foolish.

*“Mayuri recommended-” no, he doesn’t need to know I needed help planning this date.*

*“I was wondering if-” obviously he wants to, what do I have to wonder?*

Eventually, he gave up, settling on a simple, *“Meet at the park near the lab, tomorrow at noon?”*

*Send.*

It sometimes felt odd to send a text without leaping across worldlines.

\*\*\*

*Click.*

*Click.*

*Click.*

The mechanism on Ruka’s floor fan was broken, clicking loudly with every rotation. The dull monotony of the repeated sound drilled into their head, but there was something comforting about its predictability.

Precise.

*Click.*

Unvarying.

*Click.*

Monotony.

*Ding!*

Ruka's eyes bolted open. *Okabe.*

They grabbed their phone from the nightstand, read the text, and giggled - no, laughed - from the glee.

*2010-10-01, 21:04 - Kyouma: Meet at the park near the lab, tomorrow at noon?*

*Click. Click click click click click.*

*I'll be there! ^^*

*Click.*

*Message sent.*

\*\*\*

Okabe woke to a pounding on his door.

*The hell?* "I'll be right there!"

Rolling over in bed, the red numbers of his alarm clock caught his attention.

11:42.

*When meeting your date, time is of the essence. Be sure to arrive at least fifteen minutes early.*

"Wha-? Damn it all!" Nearly falling over in his rush, he put on a pair of pants - the same he'd worn yesterday - as he ranted to himself. "Hououin Kyouma, who leapt through time itself, bested by an improperly set alarm clock!"

Now clothed, he opened the front door, allowing Mayuri to burst in.

"Okarin! Did you just wake up?"

"How did you know?"

"I've been waiting outside for like fifteen minutes *and* your hair is all messy!"

Okabe patted the top of his head. His hair was all over the place, more so than usual. “I suppose that would give it away... wait, what are you doing here anyways?”

She held up the bag in her hand. “I’m bringing you your clothes. Remember I offered to wash them for you? I thought you could use some clean clothes for your date.”

“Oh, thanks, Mayuri. That’s quite helpful of you.”

Shoving the bag, and him with it, she shouted, “Hurry, get ready! You can’t be late to your date with Ruka!”

He still had ten minutes until noon once he had finished changing clothes, brushing his teeth, and taming his mess of hair.

“You see, dear Mayuri, a mad scientist awakes precisely when he means to.”

“Hey, you only got up because I knocked on your door!”

“Simply the will of Steins;Gate at work. Fate has ordained that this date will go flawlessly.”

## Chapter End Notes

The date is finally coming!

And I have no idea what I'm gonna write for it.

I was not, in fact, back, but I'm reading this again and I REALLY want to continue it.

Writer's block is a bitch. -2019-07-17

Chapter 9 is in progress, sitting at nearly 1200 words so far and consistent work is getting done. Portions of chapter 10 are done as well. -2020-01-06

Okay, so it is probably literally a crime that I kept making announcements that I was back - as if anyone saw them :) - but chapter 9 is just over 2,000 words and only needs a quick touch-up in the light of morning before it gets posted. Three years later... By the way, I'm retconning Ruka's pronouns once I post the update! Gonna go back and edit the old chapters, but there's no need to reread them. Except for the fact that it has been, you know, three years... -2021-05-12

# The Date

## Chapter Notes

It's finally here, the *date* you've all been waiting for, and it only took me three years! This is the longest chapter *by far*. Still not a long chapter by most standards, but long for my short, snappy chapter style. You may want to read the new note at the beginning of the world, but long story short, I have revised Ruka's pronouns to they/them. I also made very minor tweaks throughout the work, but nothing significant.

Ruka was already waiting when Okabe arrived, but it wasn't their promptness that surprised him. That he expected; he knew how excited they must be for this date (which may sound vain were it not for his interworldline knowledge.) No, instead it was their attire that was shocking. Aside from their usual hairpin and black ribbon around their neck, they were wearing a white dress with blue trim and v-shaped collar. A pink handbag hung from their shoulder, which they gripped the strap of tightly.

It was the exact same outfit they had worn for their date in the other worldline.

For one thing, they had dressed up: strike one against Okabe, he was in his usual outfit. And for another, well, they were in a *dress*. Okabe hadn't seen Ruka wear a dress outside of their date and that one time Mayuri forced them into a cosplay outfit, and they seemed pretty uncomfortable in that situation.

But now they were standing in the middle of the park, looking no less comfortable than usual. Well, the cosplay incident was a different worldline, after all.

"Rukako!" Okabe called out to them as he approached.

Their dress fluttered as they half-walked half-jogged to meet him.

"Okabe! I'm so glad you came!"

"Of course, I wouldn't just stand you up like that."

Ruka smiled. "I really appreciate it."

"You know, I didn't know you owned a dress, but it suits you."

"Oh, um, thanks. I don't really wear them, I just thought maybe..." Their face went red. "Never mind. You look good too."

"Uh, thanks." Okabe had a feeling he shouldn't have drawn attention to it.

Strike two.

“Well, shall we be off?”

Ruka nodded. “I don’t actually know where we’re going, though.”

“Ah, yes, um, all part of the plan! Surprise is of the essence for avoiding the Organization - and for a successful date.”

“Oh, is it that serious?”

“The Organization’s evil machinations never cease. But rest assured, Rukako, your safety is guaranteed so long as you stand by my side.”

They knew he meant it in his mad scientist persona way, yet their heart skipped a beat regardless. To Okabe, it was likely only a quip, but they believed it in earnest.

Maintaining composure externally far better than internally, they simply smiled lightly and said, “Let’s go, then.”

Okabe rambled as they walked side-by-side. “It’s not far - best not to stray too far from familiar territory. Though I admit, I am not well-acquainted with our particular destination. No matter, I only hope you will find it to your liking.”

“I’m sure it will be great.”

They soon arrived at a small cafe just around the corner from the park. Tucked away at the bottom of an apartment block, it was distinguished from the rest of the street by its sliding wooden door adorned with a cat-shaped sign reading “Ulala.”

Ruka’s eyes lit up. “A cat cafe!?”

“Indeed. I take it you’re partial to felines?”

“Yes, oh my gosh! I’ve always wanted a cat.”

Okabe peaked through the window. “They certainly seem to have plenty here. After you,” he said as he slid open the door.

They were greeted inside by a peppy employee who quickly gave them the *oh-you-haven’t-been-here-before* explanation: *usually we take reservations but we’re not very busy... here’s our menu... these are our prices* (seven hundred yen just to sit with cats for half an hour!?) ... *please don’t feed the cats... take a seat wherever* .

Settling in at one of the tables, it became clear the room was designed for cats more than humans. Places for cats to sit outnumbered those for people, which made sense given that humans were a definite minority. Even the people seats were cat-friendly, being small cube-shaped chairs barely off the floor. Ruka had no issue getting comfortable in one and giggled as Okabe struggled to arrange his lanky limbs. Just as soon as he had attained a somewhat-

bearable position, a large white cat jumped up in his lap. Ruka laughed again at Okabe's sigh of resignation, trapped by the purring mass of fluff.

"I think he likes you."

"He made a rather quick character judgement, then."

"Maybe your lap is just comfortable." *Wait, does that sound weird?*

A waitress swooping in saved Ruka from finding out.

"Welcome to Ulala! Can I get you anything? Tea, coffee, juice?"

"Just a Dk Pepper," Okabe answered.

"Got it. And for you, ma'am?"

Ruka sat silent for a moment before realizing. "Oh, uh, me?"

The server nodded.

"Oolong tea, please."

"Coming right up!"

As the waitress walked away, Okabe noticed Ruka's cheeks were flushed red.

Wanting to distract Ruka from their embarrassment, Okabe tried to recall a fitting conversation starter, but both the dating guide and his memory failed him. Instead, he only asked, "So, how have you been lately?"

Their eyes met his for a moment before they glanced to the side. God, to think of all the times he'd seen tears flowing from their eyes. *Dammit, not now.*

But they weren't crying now. Instead, a small smile danced at their lips. They thought of how to answer, perhaps more deeply than the question required - of their argument with their mother, of their current attire, of *what would mother think of this?* Mostly, though, they thought of the fact that they were on a date.

And that it was Okabe who sat across from them.

"I'm doing pretty well. How about you?"

"Not bad, all things considered." His hand unconsciously wandered to his recently-gouged abdomen and he winced a bit - it was still sensitive to the touch.

"Oh, yeah... Are you-" They paused, worried they were about to ask a dumb question, but continued, "Are you better now?"

"Nearly as best I'll get. The scar is permanent, of course."



“That’s a relief. I’m really glad you’re okay.” *I don’t know what I’d do if you weren’t.*

“As am I.”

“I never actually found out what happened. I mean, you don’t have to talk about it, if you don’t want to!”

“There was an... incident with one of the Future Gadgets. Details are confidential - I’m sure you understand - but that project has been permanently shelved, so there’s no need to worry.”

“Thank goodness.”

“I hope you have fewer major traumas to report than me,” Okabe joked.

*If you’re going to be a fag-*

“Oh, uh, no- I mean, yeah! I don’t. I’m alright,” Ruka said, trying to convince herself more than Okabe.

“Glad to hear it. The wellbeing of my lab members is of utmost priority, after all.”

“I really appreciate that.” Their eyes drifted shyly. “Even if I’m not sure what being a lab member means... or why I am one.”

“Being a lab member is a sacred bond of loyalty between all who hold that pin. It means you are always welcome within the Future Gadget Lab, and as such you may come and go at your leisure. Provided there’s someone to let you in... maybe I should have made keys as well,” he trailed off.

“Wow, that sounds kinda intense.”

“That might be so. Still, I have every reason to believe you are prepared.”

“That’s sweet, but what makes you say that?”

“I’m sure it will make sense with time.” Okabe wished he had his drink to take a dramatic sip from.

As if intentionally a moment too late, the waitress returned with their drinks - a Dk Pepper in an ordinary glass and an oolong tea in a cutesy mug covered in cats and pawprints.

She set the cups down. “Here you are.”

“Oh, thank you!” Ruka said.

“You two enjoy!” The waitress smiled before walking off to take another order.

Ruka took a sip from their tea - it was a bit hot for their liking, and they set the mug back down gently. Okabe, meanwhile, was taking a gulp of soda that was definitely far longer than his dating etiquette book would recommend. Just as he returned the cup to the table,

internally debating whether a quip about the benefits of his favorite elixir was fitting, his moment was stolen.

An orange-and-grey striped cat nudged Ruka's leg with its incredibly flat face and *mrrrp* 'ed for attention. Its big green eyes made it look more like a stuffed animal than a real cat. Okabe had no hope of competing with that level of cuteness.

"Oh my goodness! You are just the cutest thing I've ever seen," Ruka said in a mock baby voice, lifting the tabby up by its chest. Reading the tag that dangled from its collar, they added, "Hello Tangy!" and placed the cat in their lap. Tangy nuzzled against their thigh, wiggled slightly to get comfortable, and began contentedly purring.

"She definitely likes you," Okabe commented, "with good reason, of course."

The warmth in Ruka's cheeks was not just from the tea.

"Oh, um, thanks. I feel like I'm pretty good with cats. They're such sweethearts." Ruka gently scratched the underside of Tangy's chin.

"I must admit, I haven't always been a fan, but these two make a compelling case."

"Really? Well, some of them can be standoffish, but they'll come around if you take the time to get to know them."

"I see. That's good to know." Okabe felt something akin to comradery. He made a mental note to reconsider cats' position as Organization agents.

"Mhmm." Ruka lifted their tea with their free hand, slightly blowing to cool it off. They continued after taking a sip, "Have you ever considered getting a pet, Okabe?"

"Hm, not really, if I'm being honest. Not that Mr. Braun would allow it anyways. We never had any when I was growing up, though Mayuri's family did have a dog."

"Oh yeah! She's mentioned that before. What was his name again?"

"Juju."

"Like the manga?"

"Like the manga. Her dad was a fan, apparently."

"Really? Mr. Shiina? He doesn't seem like the type."

"It's true. Stuffy businessman as he may be now."

Okabe took a drink from his soda to disguise the fact that he was at a loss as to how to continue the conversation, and Ruka did the same.

They both sat there, petting their respective cats, watching the rest of the cats in the cafe. Occasionally, their gazes would meet while glancing at each other. The first time, they both

looked away quickly. The next, Ruka softly smiled, and Okabe returned the expression. At one point, Ruka closed their eyes, focusing on the feeling of Tangy purring in their lap and the swirl of excitement in their head. Okabe, admittedly, found this very endearing.

Eventually, a crinkling noise from a cat across the cafe playing with a toy caught Tangy's attention. Her eyes bolted open, and she followed the toy with her head as it bounced across the cafe. Hardly bothering to stand first, Tangy bolted from Ruka's lap, skittering across the cafe to steal the toy.

"Aww, bye Tangy!"

"Well, it was nice while it lasted," Okabe opined.

"That's the way cats are, y'know? I just wish my parents would let us get one. They're worried about it getting out and causing trouble at the shrine."

"Perhaps they'll come around. How are things at the shrine, anyways?"

"Oh, nothing out of the ordinary. My father is glad that we haven't been too busy and he's been able to relax."

"And your mother?"

Ruka went quiet, their gaze turning down. "She's alright."

Strike three.

"That's- erm... that's good."

"Yeah."

Several seconds passed before either of them spoke another word.

"Okabe?"

"Yeah?"

"Can we leave?"

Okabe paused for a beat before responding, "Of course."

He quickly flagged down a waitress and paid for both of them. Ruka grabbed their bag from where it hung on their chair as Okabe gently nudged the cat curled up in his lap.

"Alright now, go on, your cute charade has gone on long enough."

Ruka looked up at him. "Huh?"

"What? Oh, I'm just trying to get-" He grabbed the cat's collar to read the tag, "... Mr. Snowflake to get up." As if to prove his point, the cat glared at him and jumped from his lap onto the floor, trotting off to another table. "Alright then. Rukako, are you ready?"

“Yeah, let’s go.”

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!