

Chapter 2

The dawn of a new day

Saturday, December 1st

"BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ"

Keitaro stirred in his sleep.

"BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ"

Keitaro groaned and stuck out a hand from under his futon, slapping the 'OFF' button on his alarm.

"BUZZ BU..."

Keitaro peeked out from under his warm covers and looked at his alarm clock.

5:00AM

Suppressing a yawn, he slowly removed himself from the futon, extracting Suu-chan's legs from his waist and her hands from around his head. The first night that Motoko left, Suu-chan almost killed Keitaro with the force she exerted upon him, but he managed to breathe, so he just let her sleep like that. The next day, Naru said that she trusted him to sleep with Suu-chan alone, without the need for her presence. He felt that her decision was influenced by the fact that she got virtually no sleep from his wheezing and coughing, and that Suu-chan wanted to sleep with Naru the next night. Smiling, he told Suu-chan that he would stay with her for the next two nights, and she was pleased with this. He even put up with her hyperactiveness throughout the day, when she disrupted his studying. Naru was annoyed at first, but then remarked that he seemed to be coping well with Suu-chan. They stuck with each other everywhere they went, eating Shinobu-chan's cooking side-by-side, he even took her around the town for a short while, showing her Toudai in the process. Keitaro convinced Mitsune to let Suu-chan go in the hot springs with her for a short while, since he didn't want to enter the women's area, Kami knows that he had some bad experiences each time he went in there. Both of the nights, Keitaro had some tissue paper nearby to wipe away Suu-chan's tears, and some painkillers as well in case she got a bit too keen and crushed him further. Although they had to lie on their sides, and stayed close together the whole night Keitaro didn't complain. He slept on his right side, his right hand on her head, wiping away tears when need be, his left hand on her leg wrapped around him.

As quietly as he could he sneaked around his room until he could hide behind a partition and get dressed into his warm clothes, a green sweater and an ordinary nameless pair of blue jeans, and a pair of indoor slippers.

He looked over to the futon, and saw Suu-chan stirring and sniffing. He found that it was only soon after she fell asleep that she started to experience her dreams, and also in mornings before she woke up, he never left her at these stages, the rest of the night was usually dreamless and therefore free from interruptions. He then picked up a red sweater that was too small for him and carefully put it on Suu-chan, over her pyjamas. He then picked her up on his back and she instinctively locked her legs around his waist, and her

arms tightly around his neck. His eyes bulging out and he rapidly set about loosening her grip and letting her arms hang in front of him where he can hold them securely. The sweater was too long; her hands were not to be seen, but that made it easier for Keitaro to hold onto to her. He opened one of his cupboards and picked out a large blanket. He took a handful of tissues from the dispenser and left the room, silently closing his door partition.

He made his way to the main entrance of Hinata-sou, and sat under the canopy. It was a chilly wintry morning, as expected, so Keitaro covered him and Suu-chan in the blanket. He was waiting for Motoko; he couldn't understand why. She phoned the house to let them know that she would be back at Hinata at around 5:30 in the morning, that was the only time the train would arrive in the area. He checked his watch, 5:23, there was still time. He went back inside, and made himself a hot chocolate, he was going to wait, but he wasn't willing to freeze to death in that time. All the while he kept the sleeping Suu-chan on his back, not making any sudden movements. He returned outside, and sipped his hot chocolate.

Time passed, the mug was empty, Keitaro was slumped forward, asleep, Suu-chan still on his back. Motoko walked up to this curious scene upon reaching the top of the stairs with an inquisitive look on her face. She considered drawing her katana, but put it away upon seeing Suu-chan. She stooped down to his level and spoke softly.

"What are you doing Urashima?" she asked, with one eyebrow raised.

Keitaro jolted awake and was about to shout out when Motoko put a finger to her lips.

"Shh, be silent, Suu-chan is asleep."

"Oh right. I almost forgot." He glanced at the sleeping girl to see that she wasn't stirring. He stood up, "Let's go inside." He picked up the mug and walked inside into the kitchen, and placed it in the sink. While he was there he asked Motoko,

"Would you like anything to drink? Something to warm you up maybe?" He started to wash up as he awaited her to say no. *She never liked me from the beginning it seemed. Why would she accept something now?*

"What was in that mug you put in the sink? It smelled nice..." She was thirsty from her trip, and a little cold due to the early hours.

"Oh!" He was shocked. "T... That was hot chocolate, would you like one?"

"Very well then." She allowed him this moment to do something nice for her.

Keitaro put a few teaspoons of chocolate powder in another mug, it said 'Hello Kitty' and had a picture of a very cute rabbit on the front, poured the hot water that was left in the kettle and stirred it slowly, without making any loud sounds.

"Here you go." he said, whilst handing the mug over to her. "Be careful, because it's very hot!"

"Arigatou (Thank you)."

She sipped it gently and closed her eyes, letting the warmth spread throughout her body as she drank the chocolate. Keitaro sat down in a chair on an adjacent side of the table to her, sitting at an angle to not crush Suu-chan. Motoko looked up to see Keitaro dry Suu-chan's face, it appeared that she was crying again. She returned to her beverage.

"I assume you've been taking of her during these past few nights." She said in between sips.

"It was hard on me the first night but I got used to it and stayed with her for the next two days and nights." He sighed, "I didn't like it when she cried, but I made sure that she was never alone whenever she cried for her brother, each time she fell asleep into a dream and in the mornings as well."

"I see that you've done well Urashima, you have my respect for that. I had that same problem myself, but I too did the same as you." *I did not believe that he was like this, maybe he's not a complete pervert...*

"Well if I didn't look after her you would've killed me!" he joked.

Motoko had no words for him but stared at his face with a sinister gleam in her eyes. Keitaro was laughing uncertainly; a sweatdrop appeared on the side of his head. Eager to clear the tension in the air he tried to think of something to say.

"Err... well... How did your kendo training go then?"

"It was adequate, it was worth the effort." Keitaro silently breathed a sigh of relief that the air was cleared.

"Why did you arrive late?" He looked at his watch, "You said you would arrive around half past five. It's almost quarter past six now."

"The train was delayed near the training camp, and so our journey was made even longer." She recalled the group being exhausted for having being woken up so early, as a final test for them, only to find that the train was stuck in between stations for a while.

"Oh I see, that makes..."

"Urashima," Motoko interrupted him in mid-sentence, "what are you doing? Why are you up so early?"

"Well, I..." stammered Keitaro, "I... I wanted to speak with you alone before everyone else got up." He lowered his face, blushing slightly.

Hmm, this is interesting... but what could he say to me that would be of value?

"I love you Motoko-chan."

"Huh!" Motoko couldn't believe that he said that and flushed red, reeling back from the shock. No sooner than she finished saying that, he leaned over and kissed her on her lips. She suddenly felt weak and to stop her from falling Keitaro looped his arm around her back to move her closer, pulling her in towards him. He pulled back from the kiss and held her head next to his, saying her name over and over again...

"...toko? Are you ok?" She was jerked out of her daydream to see Keitaro waving his hand in front of her face.

Almost immediately she stood up and was about to unsheathe her katana before Keitaro, who knew usually what that meant for him, told her to hit him later because of Suu-chan. Motoko backed down and sat down again slowly.

"Are you alright Motoko-chan? You seemed to phase out for a moment."

"Yes, I... I was just distracted, that's all." Her face seemed to be flushed as she spoke, "What did you want to speak to me about Urashima?" Remembering her conversation with him.

"Well, I wanted to apologise to you," said a blushing Keitaro, his hand scratching the back of his head and a small sweatdrop appearing on his forehead, "for all the trouble I caused when you had your cold, and for seeing you..."

Keitaro couldn't bring himself to finish his sentence, his mind wandered back to that time when he opened the hot springs to see Motoko there. Suddenly he sensed capillaries bursting and realised with horror that it about to happen again. He held his hands to his nose and a small trickle of blood appeared between his fingers, but it was no use. With a force that had the power of a fire hose behind it, blood burst out from his nose.

"WAAAH!" cried Keitaro and Motoko at the same time. Motoko got up and picked up some tissue paper that he dropped and rolled them up, and gave them to Keitaro, he immediately placed them in both nostrils. After a few minutes he checked but he was still bleeding. Motoko got up and carefully removed Suu-chan, and attached her to a chair, still in the same position. She pulled Keitaro up by his hand and moved him over the sink. He removed the tissues, mostly red now, and threw them in the bin.

"Keep your head tilted downwards and breathe outwards through your nose. It is better to let the blood flow than to keep it inside. Wash your face as well. That should teach you to wait outside in the cold for too long"

Keitaro did as he was told and the nosebleed stopped soon afterwards, he wiped his face with some tissues and dried it with a towel.

"Arigatou Motoko."

"I accept."

"Eh?" Keitaro was puzzled, "Accept what?"

"Your apology, it was a misunderstanding between us, and it could've happened to anyone."

Keitaro smiled, and noticed a faint trace of a smile on Motoko's face. At that moment the sun appeared over the horizon. Dawn.

"Well, I'd better take Suu-chan to my room now," Keitaro stated, "she'll be waking up soon, and I'd rather her wake up in my bed, or else she might get upset."

"A good idea," replied Motoko, "I will retire to my room for now, in the hope of getting some sleep. Keitaro, please knock on my door before lunchtime, I do not want to be disturbed until then"

"Will do Motoko-chan, Good night!"

They parted their ways, Motoko went upstairs to her room and Keitaro walked quietly to his room. Slowly he placed Suu-chan in the futon and lay down beside her. Once again she automatically clamped herself onto his back, not as forcefully as last time, and he set his alarm to go off at around seven. Facing away from Suu-chan, he was unable to see her open one eye, look at him, smile, and close her eye again.