

Chapter 4

The final light before death?

7:38pm

Sunday, December 20th

Motoko walked up to room 204, Kanrinrin's (Caretaker's) Room and knocked on the door partition.

"Naru! Is that you?" Keitaro exclaimed as he opened the door, catching Motoko about to knock again.

"Oh, hello Motoko-chan, what can I do for you?" he said, looking a tad disappointed.

"I would like to talk to you. Is that possible, or are you studying?" she said, looking at him intently.

"No, it's okay, I'm just waiting for the test result to come out, so I'm not doing anything interesting, please come in." Keitaro moved out of the doorway to allow her in, and she walked in gracefully. He slid the door shut behind her.

They sat down at the low table. A TV was on with a low volume, a vintage episode of Doraemon playing. Motoko thought she should start the talking and get straight to the point.

"I've noticed that something has happened between you and Naru." She noticed his shoulders slump but continued. "It seemed to happen the night before the test." She said this matter-of-factly, wanting a quick response.

"Is it that obvious?" He asked, sounding shocked, "I've been trying to apologise for what I did, but she won't listen to me." He looked down, as if ashamed.

"What exactly *did* you do that night?" asked Motoko.

Keitaro looked up, his eyes weary, drifted to the TV. The little blue space cat had pulled out of his front pocket a device to change time for his friend, Nobita, just so that Nobita could sleep in a little longer. Keitaro wished that he could do that, change time.

"I invaded her privacy," he sighed, "I went into her room when she wasn't there to repair the hole." Motoko waited for him to continue, "I dropped some books from her bookshelf, and one thing led to another and I read her diary."

There was a sharp intake of breath as Motoko took this in. She had left her katana in her room since she felt she didn't need it, but she would have used it on him now. There was a tense silence for a few moments as this sunk in.

"I assume that Naru saw you reading her diary then?" Motoko deduced.

"Yes, she did." he admitted, "She got upset at me, different to the other times, this was deeply hurtful to her. She pushed me down the hole afterwards."

"How much did you read? Not that it matters much in the end..."

"Only one line!" he interrupted, "Nothing more. I only looked at it because something caught my eye..."

"Nevertheless," she interrupted again, "you read it, and that is one of the most damaging things that you can do to a woman. A diary is her personal space, straight from the heart, a way to put feelings down without others seeing, and you broke that trust. No wonder she is so unhappy with you."

"I've lost all hope of speaking to her now, every time I try she disregards what I say. I need to find a way to explain." Keitaro mumbled the last part as if it was seemingly hopeless.

"I have heard that on Christmas Day, gifts are handed out to one another as a tradition that dates back around 2000 years. Why not buy her a present, not too expensive or cheap, but something to say that you're sorry? I'm sure that she will understand and find it in her heart to forgive you."

"That's a good idea!" Keitaro cried, "I've got a few days before then, so I can find a suitable present for her."

"Don't forget that you must apologise as well." Motoko reminded him "By the way, when does your test result come out?"

"The 24th, four days from now." he replied.

"I hope that you do well in it Keitaro," She smiled, "I must leave now."

With that she got up and walked to the door, but before she opened it, Keitaro spoke.

"Arigatou Motoko-chan."

Motoko blushed bright red. To avoid herself from doing anything embarrassing, she left his room quietly and closed his door partition.

Christmas Eve

Release date of the Toudai test results

From Motoko's eyes

This is the important day, when we find out if Naru and Keitaro passed their tests. Hinata-sou is quiet, everyone here is holding their breath in anticipation. Naru left at around midday to receive her results, Keitaro later in the afternoon, she arrived not soon after he left, with a good pass rate. We started to celebrate a little, by opening a bottle of wine, and some sake to drink, putting on red hats with a white furry bobble on the tip of it and white fur on the edge of it as well. As we were drinking, I realised that time had passed by quickly, and that it was a few hours since Keitaro left for his results. Shinobu-chan came into the dining room to bring in the cake that she baked and she placed it on the table.

As she did so, she noticed that it had started to snow outside, and she seemed to be very happy at the sight of it. I too said that it was lovely, but also mentioned that Keitaro had still

not returned. Mitsune was worried as well, but Naru was still angry with him and said he probably fell down a sewer again. Angered, I brought her aside slyly and then told her that I knew what had transpired between the two that night before the test. She seemed shocked that I knew, but stood firm and didn't care what happened to him. For one of the few times in my life, I lost my temper. I told her that he obviously cared about her given the number of times he tried to apologise to her, and that for once she should give him a chance for forgiveness. She didn't reply to that. I gave up on her and told the others that I was going out to look for Keitaro. They were surprised at how concerned I was, and they wanted to help me find him as well. Naru seemed apprehensive, as if she wanted to help, but didn't want to seem too helpful. I graciously declined their requests, and told them that I would return with Keitaro in time for the party. I then left Hinata-sou and started walking to the place where I knew I would find Keitaro.

Outside Tokyo University

Motoko walked briskly in the snow towards the destination where she knew she would find Keitaro. Eventually she reached the place, Tokyo University, Toudai, where she saw Keitaro staring up at the clock-tower with his umbrella down. He turned around to leave.

"Where do you think you're going?"

He froze, and turned around slowly to see Motoko staring silently at him, holding her katana in its sheath at her side, her hair billowing in wind and snow.

"Well?" Motoko said impatiently, she seemed to be getting agitated.

"I am leaving Hinata-sou," Keitaro said, with a twinge of sadness in his voice, "I have failed my test..."

He held out the results slip to her, and Motoko glanced over it, taking note of the figures. She did not flinch, or make any other outward reaction to his results.

"I realised that after that incident with Naru, my mind was not focussed on the exam, and so I failed." Keitaro sighed, "When I went to pick up my results I brought my important documents with me, in case I failed, so that I can go home to my parents straightaway, without having to return to the dorm."

"Does this test result mean you cannot enter Toudai then?" Motoko asked, remembering the 0 probability of him getting into Toudai,

"No, no it doesn't..."

"Then why are you giving up now?" Motoko interrupted, "This does not remind me of the Keitaro who stayed through the most gruelling of labours that we had you perform when you were made kanrinrin. When you tried to and eventually succeeded in making Shinobu-chan happy, surviving three nights with Suu-chan, and..." she paused slightly, "my unpleasantness."

"Well, that's true I guess..." Keitaro drifted off.

"You must continue to try for Toudai, it is your dream after all. You cannot leave Hinata-sou without saying sayonara (goodbye), especially since you would be leaving things

unsettled between you and Naru. I spoke to her about you," Keitaro looked at Motoko in mild surprise, "and she is still angry at you."

As if expecting this, he looked downwards and moved off away from Motoko. Before he could get far she caught him by his hand and was about to twist his arm to face her, until she realised that gentle encouragement was what he needed, not unnecessary pain.

"Keitaro..."

He turned his head towards her, then appeared shocked, looking down at his hand, where he saw Motoko's hand stroking his hand slowly. She couldn't understand why she was doing this, showing such an outward display of emotion, especially since this one looked very much like... affection... love even?

"Keitaro," Motoko continued, "you cannot leave us, not now. Everyone would miss you too much. Naru would not be able to study without thinking about what you are doing. You would be breaking your promise to Shinobu-chan and your leaving might affect her grades in middle school. Suu-chan would miss you, since she enjoys you a lot, and your sleeping with her makes her feel secure. Even Mitsune would miss you, since you make Hinata-sou more fun."

Keitaro thought over each of these girls, and what he was in their lives; a fellow examinee to Naru, sempai (teacher) to Shinobu-chan, playmate or victim for Suu-chan and an affinity for Mitsune, being of the same age. He then realised that he missed out someone...

"What about you, Motoko-chan?" he asked, "What am I to you?"

She looked shocked, and though she tried to stop it, she could feel her face becoming warmer as she blushed bright red.

"I... you..." Motoko coughed to get herself on track, "to me, I feel that you are a friend that I can rely on." The last comment remained in the air, as she was unsure as to how to continue.

"Really!" Keitaro was very surprised. He turned his face and Motoko swore that she saw tears streaming down his face. She was about to attack him as to why he was crying when he looked at her again, this time looking happier.

"Is everyone waiting for me at Hinata-sou then?" He inquired.

"Yes they are," Motoko confirmed, "they are about to begin the Christmas party. Have you bought a present for Naru?"

"Yes I have, I think it is a suitable present for the occasion."

"Good, she will like that." Motoko replied, "Hopefully you will get a chance to explain to her why you read her diary."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "before I forget, here's a little something for you too." He held out a rectangular shaped present to her, wrapped in a pattern of a man in a red suit and reindeer on it, with two ribbons meeting in the middle in a little bow. A card was nestled under one of the ribbons. Motoko gingerly opened the card to see an old anime character,

a Moomin with a pink bow on her head, speaking into a speech bubble with the words "Arigatou Motoko-chan" in it. Motoko looked at the gift, not knowing what to make of it. A gift was a very personal thing from one person to another. *Does it mean that he has feelings for me?* She began to shake it lightly to hear any distinguishing sounds, but couldn't hear any moving within it. It was fairly heavy as well, and being overcome with curiosity she was about to rip open the wrapping paper when Keitaro put his hand on hers.

"Wait until we get back to Hinata-sou, you can open your present there on Christmas day. Shall we go then?"

With that last comment he bowed slightly with his hand outstretched, as if to say 'ladies first', towards the direction of Hinata-sou. Motoko smiled at this and was about to walk by him when she thought of something mischievous to do. She pulled him up by his hair until he was standing tall up fully.

"Itee! (Ouch!)" Keitaro cried, "Why did you do that!"

"There is no need to bow down to me. I am not superior to you, we are both equal in this world, so let us walk side by side."

Keitaro thought this over this. "Okay then, if you want to Motoko-chan."