

## Chapter 6

### The New Year

#### **From Motoko's eyes**

**January 1st 1999**

After the short holiday that was Christmas, Hinata-sou has returned to its usual state, in which Keitaro appears to do many a perverted act towards one of the residents here. I myself still feel awkward around him; he makes me feel uneasy. Not in an unpleasant way mind, though his pervertedness still annoys me to no end. Yet he is also a remarkable person, he is able to smile even when under scrutiny from everyone. He also possesses qualities that are quite rare amongst the male population, which would make him even more attractive. Attractive... did I just say that? Perhaps this is the cause of my uneasiness that I may soon fall in love with him, if I haven't already done so. I've been brought up to fear all men, due their nature of being naturally arrogant beings who feel that they can just order everyone around. However, since meeting Keitaro, I have questioned that logic, since he shows that he too can care for others, and that he does not fight back when we hit him almost daily.

The dagger that he gave me for Christmas still remains close to me, though I haven't used it in training yet. I have it in its container on a solitary shelf in my room, angled in such a way that the top could be seen without needing to walk close up to it. One night when Suu-chan stayed with me, being her naturally inquisitive self, she noticed the new item in my room, and promptly asked me what it was doing there, seeing as it had the Urashima name on it. I explained to her about how he thought up his idea to buy Naru a present, skipping out the reason as to why she hated being near him in those two weeks. I told her that he gave me the dagger as a way of thanking me. I then showed her the dagger, and she held it as if it was a precious stone, delicately holding it in her hands and turning it over and over, feeling its surface. She asked me if she could draw the blade, and I replied in the affirmative. She gasped when she saw the inscription on it, looking up at me. I merely nodded at her. She closed it and placed it back in her holder. I told her to promise me that she would not breathe a word of this to anyone else, except maybe Keitaro (since I knew how she was around him), until I felt it was time to release this knowledge.

That was three days ago, it is now New Years Day, the Year of the Rabbit. Suu-chan was about to wear a bunny outfit (I have no idea how or why she happened to have one in her possession) before I reminded her that Haruka-san liked us to wear kimono on such a special day. She grumbled a little until I showed her the kimono that I had picked out for her and she loved it. The flowers looked 'very cute' as she had put it. I helped her to put it on, since this was a rare occasion for her to wear such a relatively heavy garment when compared to her school uniform. I had no such kimono for myself, but I chose to wear a formal version of my Shinmei garment, one that is only used at ceremonies performed at the temple back home, such as the inauguration of a new member into our clan. It still looks similar to my usual clothing, but with subtle differences that make it less useful in a combat situation, such as longer sleeves and thicker material. We were about to go to the kitchen when we heard a shout and the sound of someone falling onto something, we went to investigate and found Keitaro climbing off a tree, having just fallen off the roof. Suu-chan and I wished him a happy New Year. He was surprised to see Suu-chan wearing a kimono and commented on this. I told him that we wore these at a time like this because Haruka-san wanted us to. He also noticed my outfit, with its differences, looking at the changes

closely. I backhanded him away with my katana, telling him not to get too close to me. He skid on the ground for several metres, and when he got up he apologised to me, scratching the back of his head. He actually complimented me, saying that the new outfit was nice, although most people wouldn't notice the difference. Not knowing how to react to this, I thanked him and walked off with Suu-chan towards the kitchen.

Keitaro dusted himself off and walked in slowly following us to the kitchen. Suu-chan and I sat down at the table and ate a little bit of rice that was already laid out for us. I glanced across to Suu-chan, who was enjoying her meal, behind her I saw Keitaro talking to Mistune and Shinobu-chan, the latter being rather red in the face. Suu-chan jumped out of her seat, putting the empty bowl into the sink, and jumped onto Keitaro's back. He was surprised, but not unpleasantly, and continued to talk to Shinobu-chan. I elevated myself and placed the bowl in the sink, cleaning both Suu-chan's and bowl and leaving them out of dry on the side. As I walked back towards the others Suu-chan said good morning to Naru. Keitaro turned towards her and praised her on her choice of kimono, which had a nice picture of flowers growing up from the bottom of it. She replied to that with a punch to the face, telling him not to say such things out loud. Soon after that, we left for the shrine.

### **At the shrine, half an hour later**

The grounds at the shrine were filled with people of all ages. Most appeared to be in groups of their own, chatting to themselves and excited about being there, an elderly couple were walking by slowly towards the area where the talismans were distributed. The residents of Hinata-sou walked in a tight group amazed at the number of people there. Suu-chan looked happy from her vantagepoint of Shinobu-chan's back, whilst Shinobu-chan looked a little shy around so many people. Motoko said that she was going to have a look around, since she knew where she wanted to be at that moment.

She eventually arrived at a quiet place to say her wishes for the upcoming year. She placed her hands together and closed her eyes. Resting her mind and losing its focus from reality, she achieved a state in which her being felt at one with the world. Her senses were sharpened, she could hear the conversations of individuals amongst the crowds, feel the breeze more intensely on her skin, almost atom by atom. *What am I going to wish for?* She was confused, since every year, she wished she would become stronger after training, however, she bored of this time and time again. During those times of her life, she had no other distractions to stop her from wanting to become stronger, except for studying, which became a necessity in the later years of her life. Instead she realised that one thing had to be said.

*I wish for my relationship with Keitaro to grow, or at the very least clarified.* Motoko felt that it needed to be stated, she still wasn't sure whether she truly loved him, or what his feelings were towards her. She was also afraid of what consequences might come out of this, since Naru was obviously growing closely to Keitaro, and she might react severely to me... becoming his girlfriend...

This time, Motoko didn't even shudder at this thought. She had accepted that it was bound to happen one day, that she would fall in love with a boy, a man even, in the case of Keitaro. Yet she felt apprehensive, she was unaware of how to proceed with these... feelings. Her Ane-ue had not taught her the art that many American girls practice, the art of flirting, seduction. She blushed at the thought of it. There were a few sitcoms shown in Japan from America about teenagers going about their daily lives. In almost every one, there was some form of love interest involved with some of the characters. The women

seemed to wear short skirts, blow kisses, and wink suggestively (amongst 'other' things) at the person (or persons) they like the most. Immediately Motoko mentally face-faulted, she realised that she wasn't the type of girl to do that kind of thing, it was beneath her to try those things.

She sighed, seduction wasn't the way she lived through life, and she just used her strength to get where she was now. Her Ane-ue was lucky to have found a husband with her beauty alone, it was he who asked her out on a date. Feeling amused that night her Ane-ue agreed to let this ordinary man take her out. She tried to frighten him away, using her skills against inanimate objects as they were going about town, even him sometimes, to scare him away from her. However, it seemed to have the opposite effect. He seemed to get up after every assault, walking back to her side and continuing to show her the town. Motoko's Ane-ue was impressed to say the least. From then on it became history, they fell in love, and got married, resulting in the passing on of the Shinmei dojo to the next in line.

She slowly raised her awareness level, lowering herself from the spiritual plateau that she had just inhabited to the lower world in which she lived in. As she opened her eyes, she noticed that the others had caught up with her. They walked with each other to where the fortune telling talismans were distributed. Mitsune, Shinobu-chan and Suu-chan immediately went to pick up their talismans, and all got fairly good ones. Motoko turned to Keitaro.

"Are you sure that you want to do this Keitaro?" she gestured to the stand, "The talismans here are renowned for their accuracy in predicting good, or bad, luck. I just need to be certain that you are aware of the consequences."

"Nah!" he waved his hand in a dismissive manner, "Things like this aren't likely to affect me, thanks for the warning Motoko-chan."

Motoko left him to his business as he walked to pick up his talisman. When he read it, his eyes bulged out of their sockets, making his glasses fall to the ground.

Ultra bad luck.

"Th... This cant be true..." He read the rest of it.

'Beware of high altitude, especially the roof of an inn. Beware of animal droppings, like birds and dogs. Beware of water.' At this moment a man throwing water from a bucket hit him with some, he apologised. 'Beware of falling objects.' Once again, as this was said, a flowerpot fell on his head, and the woman who dropped it apologised as well. 'Beware of the blade of a warrior. Continuous disaster with women. At this rate, might fail again.'

He shuddered, *It's accurate, and could 'fail again' meant the Toudai exam?* He read the last line. 'Better to be alone. Stay away from the opposite sex. Might bring misfortune to both.' *How can I? I live in a girls dorm, how will I be able to avoid them?*

"I wonder where sempai is?" Shinobu-chan was walking around the grounds, looking for Keitaro. She didn't have to walk far, since he was still by the counter where he got the talisman. She looked at him, his back facing her, and noticed that even his clothes were drained of colour, and a little of the surrounding area around him, like an aura of depression so to speak. People who walked by him noticed this and had to take another look at him just to see if they weren't daydreaming. She walked up to him, worried.

"Keitaro-sempai," she said, clutching his left shoulder at the same time, "are you okay? What did the talisman say?" She glanced at the talisman, and gasped as she read the last line.

Keitaro jumped out of his skin at Shinobu appearing, however he quickly regained his composure and turned around to face her. "Wh... What? Oh, it's okay Shinobu-chan. The talisman is good." He smiled at her, except he saw a teary Shinobu-chan. "What is it Shinobu-chan? Did I say something to offend you or hurt you?"

"N... No sempai, you didn't." She began to sob uncontrollably, "I can't... stay with you... if I do it'll only... cause problems for you..." She managed to choke out in between sobs, "Gomen sempai!" As she said this she ran away from him in a random direction, still in tears.

"Shinobu-chan!" he cried out reaching out for her as he chased her, tears flying out of the sides of his eyes, "Wait up! What have I done!" Having placed all of his attention on the fleeing middle-schooler, he didn't watch where he was placing his feet, and subsequently fell over into a puddle of water. Tears streaming down his face, he began to get up, puzzling over what had just transpired. *It's true, when I get near women, bad things will happen.* At that moment he was almost bitten in two by a lion's head from a lion dance.

"What! Why is this happening? I haven't got near any girls..."

"Peekaboo!" Suu-chan's head popped out of the lion's mouth, "It's Suu! Did you know that getting bitten by a lion is good luck?" She winked mischievously.

"Err... no..." Keitaro began to feel cornered and worried by the look in her eyes.

"Well, shall we test that?" She edged the lion's head closer to him, "Here's to your good fortune Keitaro!"

"Waaah!" He ran away, very fast indeed, tears flying out of his eyes as he ran. Suu-chan however was very energetic, and had enough stamina to keep up with Keitaro. She jumped up onto his back, about to bite him, when he ran into empty space. He then despairingly realised he was in the air. As they tumbled to the ground, over many steps, they were tangled in the mess of the lion, and crashed into a stall at the base of the stairs.

After checking the Suu-chan was all right, he went around the grounds looking for the only person who could help him. He didn't look far until he found her.

"What?" she questioned, "Is the talisman worrying you? So it was an unlucky one..."

"Yes," he replied, tears streaming down his face, "what can I do to reverse the bad luck?"

"Silly boy, haven't you heard that tying the talisman to a tree will remove the bad luck?" She looked at him condescendingly.

"Well... now that you mention it..." Keitaro held the back of his head, looking sheepish.

"Let's go and tie it up then!" She said, slightly irritated.

He and Naru went to one of the trees in one of the more isolated parts of the shrine, only to be met with branches that were high above their heads.

"Hmm," Keitaro was stumped, how are we going to tie it on one of those branches?"

Naru sighed, "Don't be such an idiot, just stand still, okay?"

"Huh?" Before he knew it Naru was already sitting on top of his shoulders, holding onto a branch.

He sighed dreamily looking at her thighs. *She has really nice legs...* He stopped suddenly, in shock. *The talisman said that to be near girls would only cause trouble...* He started to move around, trying to shake this feeling off of him, but in doing so only making Naru unsteady.

"H... Hey!" she cried, "What are you do-aaaaaagh!" Keitaro fell over, Naru squeezing her legs around his neck as she fell too.

Keitaro was coughing desperately to get some air in his lungs, whereas Naru got up and dusted herself off calmly. "You little weasel, how dare you do this to me, after all the trouble I went through to help you."

"Wha..." He turned around to face her, only to be met with her fist. He flew straight into a tree, his limbs contorted around it in a violent fashion. He peeled himself off, and narrowly missed another attack from Naru. He ran from her, to no particular place, trying to get away from her, occasionally she managed to catch up and hit him in the head. When he reached a clear area he thought he was free until Suu-chan jumped down in front of him.

"Ah-ha!" She cried, "I've found you! Prepare to be bitten."

"Waaaah!" Tears flying out of his eyes, he ran as fast as he could to a safe haven.

Motoko walked over to where she could pick up a talisman, and picked one out. When she opened it, she found that it said "Indeterminable luck". Curious, since she never read one like this before she read on. "A new arrival might cause you to lose your concentration." She immediately placed this on Keitaro. "The coming year will find you tested to your limit, and you may be required to show force at times." *Hmm, well I have been lashing out at Keitaro a few times...* "The following year will test you to your limits on the emotional front." She arched an eyebrow at this comment, but read on. "You might fall in love with someone close to you, and someone's feelings for you grow day by day." Suddenly the world around Motoko seemed to darken, time seemed to slow down, people walking by in shades of grey. *Wh... What is this? This cannot be, who might this person be?* Things returned to normal when she began to read the final line, the solution to her problems. "Later in the flow of time, you will be forced to make a choice between your heart and your mind. Choose wisely, for it may affect the present and the future of both you and everyone around you. Your luck will be based on the results of this choice." This one puzzled her, and she was not able to decipher the hidden meaning of this talisman. Nevertheless, she took it with her. When Motoko placed her talisman into her sleeve she was barged straight onto the ground. Picking herself up, she saw that it was in fact Keitaro, being chased by Naru and what looked like Suu-chan.

"What has he done this time?" She asked no one in particular, rolling her eyes as she spoke. She quickly walked after them not wanting to make another scene by running after them.

Keitaro stumbled on; he had managed to lose the fearsome twosome, and walked along warily, until he saw a kimono-wearing woman lying on the ground. Being concerned with her well being, he did the only thing he could and ask her how she was.

"Hmmm? Good morning Keitaro." It was Mitsune.

"Kitsune, are you okay, are you hurt?" He realised that she was very drunk after smelling the wine on her breath.

"What are you doing?" she asked, "Forcing yourself upon me? You pervert!" She jokingly pushed him away from her.

Keitaro sighed. "How much have you drunk Kitsune?"

"Oh..." she indicated to him on her fingers: three, four, five, then using both hands she held them out twice.

"Twenty glasses!" He was astonished at that, but more surprised at Mitsune caressing his right cheek.

"If you want to do it with a girl, first make sure you have her permission first." She opened her eyes at this point, "So if you want to, you know, do "it" with me, I don't mind at all."

She turned so that her back was facing him, and began to slip her kimono off her shoulders. Before it went down too far, Keitaro caught the edges of it. Mitsune stopped moving suddenly, aware that he might actually take her up on her offer. However she felt the warmth of the kimono being placed back onto her shoulders rather clumsily, and when she looked back she saw Keitaro with his head angled away so that he wasn't peeking at her. When he thought that it was safe to look, he faced her and smiled, helping her up off the ground. Mitsune adjusted herself to make her look decent and proper.

"Kitsune," Keitaro spoke softly, "be more careful about yourself okay? I worry for you when you drink like this. Come, lets go find the others..." He started to walk off but found that Mitsune couldn't walk straight, so he slowed down and hooked his arm around her back. Mitsune did the same, so it appeared as if they were lovers and not one person escorting a drunken person home. However they hadn't walked a few steps when they were confronted with the rest of the girls at Hinata-sou. Naru still looked rather angry, Suu-chan was grinning ear to ear, Shinobu-chan looked a little tearful and Motoko stood there with her katana still in its sheath behind her back, in a non-threatening manner.

"What do you think you're doing to Kitsune?" an irate Naru asked, "Holding her in such a personal way?"

"Err..." he began to panic slightly, "nothing at all, I was just helping her up. She fell over after drinking too much." Mitsune began to hold him closer, leaning into him, the wine taking its full effect on her. "Let's go home now, we all have our talismans, so there is no need for us to stay here any longer."

With that final statement, he turned around, half-dragging Mitsune along with him. Motoko followed him first, looking at Suu-chan, indicating that they should leave. Suu-chan jumped up onto her back, smiling at her. Shinobu-chan began to walk timidly towards Naru.

"Should we go now Naru-sempai?" she asked, "The others are leaving now..."

"Yes," she replied, still dumbfounded at Keitaro's apparent protectiveness towards Mitsune, "let's go now Shinobu-chan." She held her hand out towards her and Shinobu-chan took it, as they walked side-by-side behind the others.

### **Back at Hinata-sou**

Everyone returned home in more or less one piece, Mitsune nearly falling over a couple of times. Keitaro sat her down on a chair giving her a glass of water and a jug of water as before, and made her drink the first glass in front of him. He then got up from the table, turned around and met Suu-chan. It took him a few moments to realise that he was very close to her, and the fact that the lion's head was embedded in his skull.

"Hope you have good luck Keitaro." She said cheerfully.

"ITEEEEEE!" Keitaro screamed out loud, the pain being unlike any other he had previously felt during his stay there. He lifted his head, pulling the covers off Suu-chan, so that he was left with the head still attached to his head. He was running around at random, arms flailing about, crying tears from the distress he was under, whilst Suu-chan laughed at this scene. He then started to pull it off, trying and failing each time. However, at one point it began to give way, so he continued to focus on that point. He succeeded in removing it, the ivory teeth popping out of his skull, from where they were embedded, returning to their former state. He threw it off him, only to lose his balance and fall backwards. As he has the habit of doing, he accidentally knocked Shinobu-chan to the floor, who had walked in to see what all the noise was about. Keitaro's eyes were swirling, dazed as he was by hitting his head on the floor, whilst Shinobu-chan lay there hurt and tearful. His eyes snapped back into their sockets and he came back to reality and sat up, and saw Shinobu-chan behind him. He quickly tried to help her to her feet, but she refused his attentions, and got up herself. She turned away and began to walk away from him.

"Shinobu-chan!" Keitaro exclaimed, grabbing her right hand at the same time, "Wait! Are you hurt?"

"Leave me alone..." she mumbled sadly.

"Gomen Shinobu-chan, what did y..."

"I SAID LEAVE ME ALONE!" She shouted very loudly at him, stopping him mid sentence and shocking him into releasing his grip on her. He stood there dumbfounded, staring at her running away.

"So, what did you do?" came a stern voice from behind him.

"N... Naru!" Keitaro stammered, facing her and now becoming very scared for his wellbeing, "I... I didn't do anything to her..."

"I saw you, " she continued to talk, not giving him a chance, "you forced yourself upon her, making her cry again. You pervert."

"Waah! It wasn't like that!"

Naru was fed up with his excuses, she drew back her hand and punched him square in the face, sending him flying outside through the screen door, making a Keitaro-shaped hole in it. He landed outside in a heap, holding his head in pain, he turned looking through the hole to see Naru walk off in a huff.

"Why it is always like this?" Keitaro was holding his head, which was pounding so much he thought the whole dorm could hear it. He managed to make it back to his room alive, staggering through the corridors back to the Kanrinrin's room. He sat at his heating table, unable to face the world as usual. "I've made Naru angry at me again, and made Shinobu-chan cry, what am I going to do?" He then heard a knocking at the door.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's Motoko," she replied, "may I come in?"

Keitaro lightened up a little. "Of course you can Motoko-chan, please do come in."

The door slid open and she walked in, closing the door behind her. She quickly surveyed the room, noticing again that the TV was on, a documentary of what appeared to be the livelihood of a pride of lions. Keitaro didn't seem to be focussing his attention on the show. Motoko thought back to the last time she saw a scene familiar to this, and how depressed he was then. She sat down opposite him, stretching her feet out under the table to keep her warm. Upon doing so however, she rubbed the underside of her foot against something, her heart skipped a beat. She quickly glanced up at Keitaro, but could not detect any reaction from him. Safe in the knowledge that she wasn't touching him, she began to speak, keeping her foot there.

"How are you feeling Keitaro?" she asked noting his appearance, "You do not seem to be well."

"Well," he admitted, "I do have a headache after today's events." As if on cue his head began to thump again to the beating of his heart, only multiplied tenfold in strength. He winced slightly as it began to affect his senses, his eyesight becoming brighter, his hearing more acute and sensitive. Sensing the change in his demeanour, Motoko reached into her sleeve and pulled out a small carton.

"Here, take these when you're in pain." She said, "They are simple pills, painkillers, using a form of penicillin, but with a few changes on my behalf, since it is a family secret as such." She placed it in the middle of the table. Keitaro picked it up carefully studying it closely.

"Are you sure this is safe Motoko-chan?" He seemed dubious that it would help him.

"Of course it is, I myself have used them a few times." She looked at him with those piercing eyes, staring into his eyes, his soul. "Do you doubt my intentions Keitaro?"

Keitaro noticed her eyes. *I don't think I should provoke her in any way. Besides, she is being kind to me.* He immediately brightened up, "Arigatou Motoko-chan. I'll take these when I feel I need to take them."

Motoko relaxed her eyes, the thin field of vision in which they occupied vanishing at once. "That is good..." She spoke softly, leaving that sentence in the air, until she began to blush at showing a little emotion. She cleared her throat. "Anyway now, we have to deal with your problem."

"Err... Wh... What problem Motoko-chan?" He began to panic slightly, looking around nervously.

"Come with me Keitaro." She stood up suddenly, "We have to go quickly." She walked over to his side and held out her hand for him. He looked perplexed, both at what she was talking about, and as to why she was offering him help. He accepted her hand, and she clutched it tightly, pulling him up with ease.

"B... But, where are we going Motoko-chan?" He was apprehensive.

"We must not waste any more time, Keitaro." She stepped closer to him, "This has to be done soon, or all will be lost." She bent down to pick up something, and placed it in his hand, "Take this with you."

Keitaro was too stunned to even move, he felt his heart beat becoming louder as it slowed down. *Is Motoko-chan suggesting that we do "that"? I'm four years her senior, she can't be thinking of that...did she give me "that" as well?* He felt the item that she gave him and noticed that it wasn't as small or soft as he expected. Confused he looked down only to see that it was his talisman. He looked up at her, realisation dawning on his face. His eyes met Motoko's and they were held there for a few moments that seemed to last minutes.

He clenched the talisman tightly within his fist, a look of triumph on his face. "Lets go Motoko-chan." He smiled as he said this, secretly thanking her.

With that last comment, they both left the grounds of Hinata-sou, back to the grounds of the shrine. There were still one or two people milling about the place, but not in the magnitude of the early morning. The two went to the same place that Keitaro and Naru tried and failed to attach it to a tree. Once again they noticed that the branches were too high. Keitaro and Motoko looked at each other.

Motoko sighed. "Very well Keitaro, I will place my trust in you since I will need to use you a boost to place the talisman on the tree."

Keitaro obliged, he gave her the talisman and crouched down near the trunk, Motoko was in two minds after seeing him wait for her. *What if he does something perverted? His head will be in between my thighs...* She inwardly gasped, and then sighed. *We have gone this far, so we might as well finish it.* She gently walked over to him, and sat on his shoulders, bracing herself against the trunk, the lower part of her legs resting on Keitaro's chest.

Keitaro was in two minds too. *What if I drop her? My head will be in between her thighs...* He inwardly gasped, and then sighed. *Well, I hope nothing bad ha...* He couldn't finish that thought since Motoko sat on his shoulders. He dared not look up or move his head for fear of enraging her. When she had settled, he began to push himself up from the floor.

Surprisingly she was much lighter than he had thought, and he didn't have any trouble standing. Once he had reached his full height he held her legs so that she wouldn't fall.

He risked a glance upwards. "Is everything okay up there Motoko-chan?"

"Yes it is, but don't look!" she berated him. She removed Keitaro's talisman from her sleeve and tied it onto the branch with a bit of string. She looked down at him, and saw him looking down and away from her. While he wasn't looking, she removed another talisman from her sleeve and attached it next to Keitaro's talisman. "Okay I'm done now Keitaro, let me down."

He slowly crouched down again, Motoko holding the trunk for support as she descended. Once he had reached the final point. Motoko extracted herself from Keitaro's shoulders and adjusted her garments. Keitaro stood up and faced her, smiling. He opened his mouth to say something but Motoko interrupted him.

"We must go now. It is better to leave as soon as we have tied the talisman up." She warned him, "Do not look up at your talisman, for it will incur ten time the amount of bad luck that your talisman had imposed upon you."

"Really?" Keitaro was confused, "I hadn't heard that before..."

"Nevertheless, it is true." She seemed anxious, "Let us go now before it gets any colder."

"Okay Motoko-chan, whatever you say." He replied a bit bemused.

As they walked off the overwhelming, childish urge came over him to check that she had done what he had asked her to do. He managed to sneak a look at the tree, only to see not one, but two talismans hanging off the same branch, the wind making them move silently in the current, as if both were waving goodbye. He was very confused, but had no time to take another look, as they neared the exit of the shrine. Motoko and Keitaro walked out of the shrine in silence, walking home together slowly. The two talismans were left alone; one of them inscribed with the Kanji for Urashima Keitaro and the all too familiar Ultra Bad Luck written on the top of it. The other talisman, which had the luck part of it concealed, also fluttered in the wind; the only Kanji visible on it were two words.

Narusegawa Naru.

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Author's note: Don't take this personally please

Word count minus author's notes: 5631

Thank you for all your comments, I never expected such praise for this fanfic; I like criticism though, as one of you pointed out. All will be revealed as to why there are two tenses

To be perfectly honest, this started out as a darkfic. I have still kept in a few clues throughout the fanfic, including this chapter, as to how it comes about. The darkfic was planned to be "Book 2", but I might put it on hold for the continuation of the romance fic. It

appears that this will be a complete rewrite of the manga timeline, and you can imagine that it will take a fair amount of time.

I expect this book to have over 40 chapters, with the darkfic having around 10 chapters, and Book 3 (the official continuation of the romance), the alternate reality version of Book 2, around 40 chapters as well. It will take a year to finish Book 1 though I fear... University work is getting harder, and more important since it counts for my degree this year and the next. Chapter updates will be long in between each other, as this one proves, so please bear with me. Christmas and Easter would probably be the best times for me to work on the fanfic, and my weeks off during uni... This is why I made this chapter especially long.

I'm also a fan of Mutsumi, so I could make a short fic about her and Keitaro getting together (mind you, a 'short' fic from me could turn out to be ten or so chapters ). I also have ideas about other characters in Love Hina, not to mention my other fanfic ideas such as the OVA 3 of Tenchi Muyo (although I do realise that it is being produced now) and a continuation of Shin Tenchi (yes I am a fan of that series, so what?).

Anyways, I hope this satisfies you all for the time being, thanks for all your support (and yes, this really is my first attempt at a fanfic in case you were wondering...). Check out my website at <http://majinshinji>. if there are any problem with again, it will be updated accordingly. I have updated some of the earlier chapters to iron out some typos and blindingly stupid mistakes (such as the second chapter, which had my original name of the fanfic, Remembrance, instead of Genesis).

Arigatou,

Majin Shinji (this is my username throughout the www, if you see someone with the same name, it's probably me...)

- AKA Jason