

## **Chapter 7**

### **Mind Games**

**Nine days before the initial exams**

**Thursday morning, 7th of January**

**From Motoko's eyes**

In a week's time Keitaro should be fully prepared for his exams. Since he and I removed the bad luck charm off him, he has seemed much happier. He likes to study in his room alone, although occasionally he dares to ask Naru if she would help him to study, most of the times she said that she would allow him into her room. There are those days however when she point-blank refuses to let him in (although a few of those times he did enter her room when she was in a state of undress. He felt a little down those times, and decided to go up onto the roof of Hinata-sou to study. I only knew of this when practising on the flat roof, spotting Keitaro sitting on the roof. Curious about this behaviour of his I asked him why he did this. He replied that he felt happier sitting there, with a view of the town below. He also mentioned something about a promise to fulfil, although he did not elaborate on that point. I continued with my training nonetheless, keeping a careful eye on him in case he chose to end his life by jumping off the roof, although he didn't even hint towards that. Occasionally when I looked over at him I caught him staring at me, but when my eyes met his he quickly averted his gaze, a slight blush passing by his face. He stayed up there for long whiles, the only times he left from there was when Shinobu-chan called out to him that it was mealtime, when it got too cold (it was January after all), or when the sun began to set.

I saw him early one day in the corridor outside the hot springs dressed in his cleaning gear. One commendable about him was that he even continued to do his work as kanrinrin during breaks as he studied. I insisted (once more) to him that it was not necessary for him to maintain Hinata-sou when his exams were so near, and I tried to convince him to study at that time. He thanked me for my concern, nevertheless he said that he still owes us for allowing him to stay there. He then went off to clean out the hot springs, walking in there, only to leave it seconds later. He flew through the door hitting the wall opposite headfirst, after what was undoubtedly Naru punching him. He slid down the wall and lay on the ground, a small crack appearing on the wall. His legs were up in the air, twitching sporadically, I sighed to myself and walked over to him.

### **Tension rising**

Keitaro lay there, reeling from Naru's punch, smoke rising from his body as if he was struck by a missile, his glasses reflecting the light, betraying no truths as to what his eyes were saying. Motoko, upon reaching him, looked down at him sadly. She then looked left, into the hot springs to see Naru still with her fist forward, eyes closed, and anger cross on her forehead. She became calm and stood up straight staring at where Keitaro was. Instead she was met with a somewhat indignant Motoko, who stared daggers at Naru, and subsequently shut the partition door between her and the hot springs.

"Wh... What just happened there?"

Naru pondered to herself, she had never received such a look from Motoko before, and she knew that, at least when Motoko looked at Keitaro like that sometimes, it would usually result in him being attacked. Naru shuddered at the thought, Keitaro may be immortal, but she was not, so she would be unlikely to survive anything that Motoko were to throw at her. Reluctant to think about it any further, she sat down back, the warm water relaxing her suddenly tense muscles, she promptly drifted off into that region between dreams and reality.

Motoko was angry, angry with Naru. It was true that Keitaro saw her naked. *Well not quite, she still had her towel on...* She shook her head, berating herself. *Why does she persist in tormenting him?* Motoko gasped, realising that she too had been doing the same thing to him all this while. She looked at the now still Keitaro, his leg had stopped twitching. Alarmed she crouched down and placed two fingers on his neck, feeling for a pulse. Sighing softly, having found a strong pulse, she removed his glasses, and found his eyes swirling around; he was out cold. *Resilient as ever, but how much of this kind of treatment can he receive before he finally breaks?* She gently picked him up and hefted him over her shoulder, turning to return him to his room.

What she didn't notice was that Suu-chan was watching her, and saw the entire event unfold before her, from when Motoko tried to convince Keitaro not to waste time on "such tasks" as she put it, until she picked him up. This prompted Suu-chan to think about things for a bit. Clicking her fingers, having obviously thought of something, she ran upstairs, jumping over several flights of stairs due to her hyperactiveness, and ran slipping and sliding on the newly polished floors that Keitaro had worked on in the morning. Reaching her room, she opened the door to her home away from homes, her own personal jungle which contained the latest in technology, a seamless fusion of both past, present and indeed the future of all that humanity had achieved. Walking in smiling, she stretched her muscles and kneaded her fists.

"Now to work" With a devilish grin she walked further in, calling out commands one after another as she did so, causing a stir in her room, trees groaning, bushes rustling, and the very fabric of her room changing. Angling her head slightly to her right, looking very much like Motoko when angry, her right eye acknowledged the fact that the door to her room was still open

"claud ianua." With that command, her door slid shut as the humming and lights began to pulse from within her room, growing steadily.

### **Room 204. Kanrinrin's Room**

Motoko placed Keitaro gently in his futon, removing his slippers, and covered him up. *It won't be long until he wakes up, might as well make him comfortable.* She sat down next to him cross-legged, and began to meditate. *I might as well do it now, since I have nothing better to do at this moment in time.* She began to breathe slowly and more uniformly, allowing her mind to work naturally without any intervention on her part. She felt her body feel lighter and less of a burden. Motoko had reached the state by which she was alone in her mind, free to move about within the confines of her mind.

### **The Spiritual Plane**

Motoko found herself in a white room, with 'windows' in the rest of her mind. She saw times when she was happy, at different times of her life. They were in chronological order,

and the nearer they got to the beginning of her life, the less windows there were, her mind was unable to recall anything before she was two years old. Motoko knew that soon she would be able to access those times, they were stored in her mind, but they were just 'forgotten', and would need stimuli to remember those times. She viewed the confines of her mind, looking through all of the things that made her happy, some of these happy events were able to 'break through' their respective windows and grow around the area that the window was. There was one window however, that was completely black. Motoko knew this window all too well, however this time it seemed different. She cautiously took a few steps closer to peer into the darkness. All of a sudden two red eyes peered back at her. Motoko, startled, fell to the ground in shock, still looking at the eyes. They stared at her, and then scrutinised the window it was contained in. Motoko saw the creature bare its sharp fangs and bite at the window.

"N... No, this can't be!" she stammered, "Th... This has never happened before!"

Motoko scooted backwards as fast as she could without standing up, when the creature burst through the wall of her mind, the window shattering completely. It drew up to its full height, around twelve feet high, and roared, its fins growing claws and spikes extending from other parts of its body. It focused its eyes on its prey, the iris glowing red and the pupil a vertical slit down the middle of each eye. It began to walk towards her.

"K... Kami-sama, help me, I h... have no weapon to fight this monster, not here." She began to cry, the past flooding back to her, the pain, humiliation, suffering and loneliness. Motoko remembered the old saying that if one 'died' in their dreams, they would die in real life, the reason being that a living body cannot exist with a dead mind. Though no one has attempted it, Motoko took this to heart and applied it to her own world of meditation. She stood up, adrenaline flooding her system as her body went through the 'Fight or Flight' syndrome.

### **The Physical Plane**

Meanwhile, a cross-legged Motoko began to show signs of strain, beads of sweat forming on her brow, a frown present on her facial features. Keitaro, stirring in his sleep, turned over, making his hand touch Motoko's knee.

### **The Spiritual Plane**

Motoko knew that without any weapons she was powerless to fight the creature, so she turned to run, keeping an eye on the creature behind her. In doing so she didn't see what lay ahead of her, and she bumped into something. Screaming as she fell, she thought that she was ambushed by two of them, but when she looked up she saw a man. He was silhouetted by a bright light behind him, and staggered towards her, one hand outstretched. Motoko, scared for one of the few times in her life, attempted to shield herself by covering her face with her arms, her spirit too weak to defend herself properly. She yelped when the figure grabbed her arm, gently, which puzzled Motoko, and then he spoke.

"Motoko-chan..."

She gasped. *Wh... What is this? Is my mind playing tricks on me again? This voice is familiar...* She opened her eyes without realising she had closed them in fear, lowering the

other arm that wasn't being held by... *Keitaro*? She blinked twice to clear her vision, but the face in front of her did not change.

"Yes, it is me Motoko-chan," he said as he gently helped her up, "I don't know how I got here..." He kept her by his side, looking down at her tear stricken face, and then looked up at the creature, with a hint of malice and anger in his eyes, "... but it's lucky I did."

Keitaro knew that he could defeat this creature, but not here, he wasn't in a right state of mind, and he didn't want to traumatise Motoko any more. He noticed the stance of the creature had changed and it had begun to lunge at the two.

"This way!" Keitaro lifted up Motoko and ran with her in his arms into the bright light, and Motoko's world became a blinding white

"This is where I came from, we'll be safe in here, that creature can not follow us here." Motoko had closed her eyes and reopened them, growing accustomed to the unnatural light in this new room. There seemed to be no specific point of origin, similar to her room, and was constantly bright throughout the room. Keitaro put her down on the ground, letting her stand on her own two feet for once by herself. He fished out a tissue from his pocket and held it out to her. "Here, take it, wipe your eyes."

"A... Arigatou." As she went to pick up the tissue, her fingers brushed against his, causing her to blush again. She turned around to wipe her eyes and blow her nose. *He is being more decisive than usual, and more kind to me...* Satisfied that she had somewhat removed all traces of her tears except for her red-rimmed eyes, which couldn't be helped, she turned to face Keitaro, who was relaxing on a white armchair apparently that came from nowhere. She walked towards him, puzzled.

"Before you ask," he spoke, "I have the ability to create any object I wish within this space." With a snap of his fingers, he created a small table with a jug of lemonade and two glasses, and an armchair opposite him. Motoko proceeded to sit in the armchair, amused by all this. "Unfortunately the colours are a little lacking, so if you don't like white, then you're stuck." He chuckled. "Lemonade?" he asked her.

"Yes please." Motoko was feeling rather hot and thus thirsty. Keitaro poured a glass of iced lemonade for the both of them, and once finished, Motoko took a sip of hers, making her feel refreshed. Motoko was about to ask him something before Keitaro held up his hand.

"I'm sure that you have a lot of questions, so I'll fill you in on the more important details. Firstly you are in my mind, not yours." Motoko gasped at this statement, "I don't know how, but our minds somehow connected, which was how I managed to enter your mind for a brief while. However don't worry, the connection is still there..." He paused and nodded behind Motoko, who turned and saw a normal partition door with 'Motoko-chan' written on it. She sweatdropped. *I was expecting a somewhat more dramatic entrance to my mind.*

"Since you are in my mind, I also have the ability to sense your thoughts," Motoko felt her heart slow down due to the potential secrets he had access to, "but I would not be a fool enough to actually read them. I can however sense your emotions whether I like it or not, so I do know that you were afraid of whatever resided in your mind Motoko-chan." She inwardly breathed a sigh of relief at hearing this.

"Finally before you worry yourself," he continued, making her turn back to face him, "I'm not what you would consider to be the real Keitaro."

"WH... WHAT!" She jumped out of her seat at this piece of news, reaching for her katana, which wasn't there.

"Calm down Motoko-chan," holding a hand out smiling at her, "this is Keitaro's subconscious mind talking to you. Since Keitaro isn't as advanced as you in your abilities to get in touch with your subconscious mind. He is also, as you have probably noticed, more shy and clumsy in real life than me." Motoko cautiously sat back in her seat, and nodded. "Due to your expert handling of this state, you have merged both your conscious and subconscious minds, thus the reason why you are expressing more emotion in this plane than you would usually do in the physical world." Motoko remained silent as she took this in. "I am held here by a strong boundary unknowingly created by Keitaro, preventing me from being fully integrated into his personality."

Motoko mused over these revelations. "So if you are Keitaro's subconscious mind, where is Keitaro's... erm... conscious mind?" She tried to clarify, "The mind that he shows on the outside."

"Where he always is when knocked out or asleep," Keitaro waved a hand at the wall, 'opening' a window in the room, "he is reliving one of his childhood memories, one that means a lot to him."

Motoko looked at the window and saw a very young looking Keitaro kneeling down in a sandpit. Opposite him was a pretty girl around his age patting a dome shaped sandcastle gently. Motoko continued to watch.

"Do you know? When two people who are in love can both get into Toudai, they'll be living happily forever... When we grow up, let's go to Toudai together." The mysterious girl then gave Keitaro a quick peck on his left cheek, making them both blush for an instant.

Motoko blushed slightly, remembering her fantasy of Keitaro kissing her a few months ago. As she continued to watch she noticed that his dream was getting blurry, fading out and in at random moments it seemed. She only saw glimpses of what he was dreaming, another girl appeared for only a second, an old lady, a glint of a sword, Keitaro crying...

"This is where he forgets what really happened all those years ago." Keitaro stood up and walked towards the window, hands laced together behind his head looking at the window with an unreadable expression on his face. "It's not his fault you know... the human mind takes many a year to evolve into our current form wherein which we can retain thought for longer than a few minutes."

Motoko stood up and began to walk toward Keitaro. He continued, "The memories are there... but it might just take longer for him to remember them..." He turned around only to bump into Motoko. She began to fall backwards, Keitaro reaching out to stop her fall, but only losing more of his balance. He ended up falling on her, his right arm holding her head from hitting the ground too hard. Their faces were but a few inches apart now and Motoko could feel her face heating up, as Keitaro also began to blush. Motoko felt some pressure on her chest, and looked down see Keitaro's other hand resting where her left breast would be. Keitaro looked also, seeing what Motoko what seeing. His eyes grew bigger

than his glasses, and then he looked back up at Motoko's face. Her eyes were clenched tight, as were her teeth as she began to growl.

"G... Gomen!" Keitaro stood up, both hands in the air, pleading his innocence. Motoko brought herself to her feet slowly, and knowledgeable of the fact that her katana is not on her, was about to uncharacteristically strike Keitaro with her fist.

Keitaro, cowering away from her, put his arms around his head. *I'm dead, Motoko's wrath is much more deadly than Naru's.* However, the fatal blow never came, and instead he felt a soft touch on his arm. He looked up to see Motoko smiling a little, holding her hand to help him up. He accepted her help and stood nearly level with her.

"Well, it still looks like you're still a pervert, even in your subconscious mind." She folded her arms and smirked at him, "at least you aren't totally different from the Keitaro I know."

"You are not the Motoko I expected either." Keitaro replied frankly, "Any other time and you would've launched me into space as per usual, but it seems that you have increased your tolerance levels for my mishaps."

Motoko was taken aback by this but hid her emotions. "That may be so, but it still doesn't mean anything Keitaro." She tried to act nonchalantly but Keitaro only smiled at her. He was still able to sense her emotions by the fact that she was unsuccessful in keeping her feelings hidden from him mentally. He could feel her embarrassment over the situation, but also another emotion, warmth... *Could it be love?*

His thoughts were interrupted by the room beginning to shake and the ever-present light starting to flicker less and less bright. Motoko and Keitaro were having trouble standing up straight as the mental earthquake seemed to hit them.

"What is this!" Motoko shouted towards Keitaro, nearly falling over, "Why is this happening?"

"I hate it when this happens." Keitaro stated, "Whenever Keitaro thinks or dreams about sad things, his mind goes into a routine of self-torment and hate."

"Is there nothing you can do to stop this?"

Keitaro could feel Motoko was getting worried, but he wasn't sure what at. "Why are you getting worried Motoko-chan?"

"I'm worried about us Keitaro, in case we get hurt." She replied with a hint of hesitation. Feeling slightly ashamed that she wasn't telling the full truth, she spoke up again, "Okay, for your information I'm worried about the Keitaro outside, what is he feeling?"

At that moment, the room stopped convulsing, the floor becoming flat once again, yet remained a dull grey colour. The two stopped shielding themselves Motoko looking around confused.

"Well I guess the worst is over then," Keitaro said, adjusting his glasses, which were lopsided, "however, he is still depressed, seeing as the room hasn't returned to its usual state."

A window popped up on the wall showing what Keitaro was currently dreaming about. Motoko looked in on it as well. The images were familiar to her though. She saw several people flashing on the screen in quick succession. She immediately recognised them as the residents of Hinata-sou, as if seen from Keitaro's eyes. The faces that appeared all appeared to be angry, sad or disappointed. Shinobu always appeared to be sad or close to tears, Mitsune was shown as disappointed, Suu-chan was making fun of him, Naru was always shown as angry, with or without fist, and she also seemed to like putting him down in their study periods.

Then it came to Motoko. It replayed some of the first moments at Hinata-sou in which Motoko attacked Keitaro, ending with her fighting Keitaro when he was in full battle gear. However at that moment the room seemed to get brighter, as the window began to show Keitaro again, this time with Suu-chan on his back. It was their first conversation together since their 'fight', when she had returned from her kendo training. The room began to consistently get brighter as the moments between Motoko and Keitaro were shown, finding him outside Toudai, when Motoko was asking about her present, the New Year festival... *I... I didn't realise that he is beginning to care for me.* Motoko looked on in shock at the scenes playing out before her, slightly embarrassed since the other Keitaro was watching on with a slight smile on his face.

The window blanked out. "Well, that's enough of that," said Keitaro, having finished waving at the window, "it's time to return you to where you belong." He smiled at Motoko. "Are you ready for this?"

*No I'm not, what do you think?* "Yes I am, let us go."

**"The greatest victory is a victory won without fighting."**

Keitaro walked towards the partition door that separated the two minds, he opened it to see the creature nowhere in sight. Walking through, the twosome were supposedly alone in Motoko's mind. She could now feel Keitaro's emotions, and felt that he was very protective towards her. They both sensed a presence to their left and sure enough the creature was there, albeit in a dormant state. It began to stir and turned around, its red eyes focussing on Motoko, pupils becoming tiny slits.

"Motoko-chan, get to the other side of the room and try to return to consciousness, I will try and hold him off as long as I can." Keitaro stood between her and the creature, one arm held out defiantly across Motoko, as if to say 'I am your opponent' to the creature. "When you get there, do not watch the battle, for it will distract you, face away from us. Do it now!" The creature's eyes narrowed slightly, focussing on Keitaro now.

Motoko could feel Keitaro's confidence, she was unsure as to how he could defeat such a creature. Nevertheless, she took his advice. "I will do as you say."

Keitaro turned his head to his right and smiled at her. "Till we meet again Motoko-chan."

With that Motoko ran to the furthest end of the room, sat down cross-legged, facing away from them and closed her eyes. It took much concentration for her to leave the spiritual plane, as it was to enter it. She tried to put the current battle out of her mind and began the body retrieval process.

Keitaro and the creature stared off at each other. The creature roared, a guttural bellow that seemed to reverberate around the room. Its claws were already at full length, spikes extended on its back, altering its body position preparing to pounce. Keitaro closed his eyes slightly, feeling his ki around him and focussing it for battle readiness, his hands forming a reddish aura around them. He opened his eyes.

There were fifty metres between them. The creature lunged. Keitaro ran forward. Thirty metres, Keitaro had his fists clenched ready to strike. Ten metres, the creature raised both claws above its head. Nine metres, Keitaro tripped over his own feet. He fell over rolling over a few times. In doing this, he managed to avoid the scything claws of the creature, which were aimed for his body were he standing still. Sticking a leg out, Keitaro managed to trip the creature over, making it fall flat on its front. Standing up quickly, Keitaro looked at the creature, which was now still, but slowly picking itself up. Fixating its gaze on Keitaro, it seemed to pant a little. It moved its eyes to the right slightly, a smirk almost visible on its snarling maw. Another deafening roar and it lunged again, but this time at the still form of Motoko, who was unaware of the imminent danger approaching her.

"NO!" Keitaro ran to the creature, tripping it once again. In a feat of strength he picked up the creature by its legs and with an overarm throw, threw it away from Motoko. It landed hard around ten metres away, on its back, its face watching Keitaro. "You would dare attack an incapacitated opponent! You disgust me."

Keitaro walked up to it, preparing to deal its final blow. All of a sudden the creature began to cry, its tears falling to the ground. Its eyes had also turned blue and much rounder than usual. Its fins uselessly flapping about as it tried to self-right. Nevertheless Keitaro walked on. It then began to talk with a high pitch. It sounded... cute... as it repeated the word 'Myu' over and over again. Keitaro stopped, he was unsure as to what to do. *Is this creature really that evil, or is this some sort of ruse?* He began to feel pity for it and gently turned it over onto its front. However, no sooner than he did that, he was rewarded with a backhanded slap from the creature, flying several metres backwards.

*"You are quite an honourable person."* Keitaro blinked and stood up glaring at the creature. *"You would help an enemy even if it would mean your death. I commend you for this."* Keitaro understood now, the creature could communicate telepathically.

"And yet you defy your own honour by attacking someone who is unable to fight back! What kind of logic is that?" Keitaro rebuked to creature, holding his chest as he saw his top shredded in four places, however not deep enough to touch his skin.

*"Battles must be won through ruthlessness, not with human things like honour and emotions, or else you will lose."* The creature blinked, its eyes returning to their usual red state. *"This battle is between that girl and I. Why do you defend that weak girl anyway?"* Its left fin raised and pointed at Motoko, *"What does she mean to you?"*

Keitaro was silent for a moment, "I care for her," he stated finally, "and thus it is one of my duties to protect her in times of need."

Keitaro could hear the mental snort of the creature in front of him. *"You fool, once again you fall for the weakest of human emotions. Love is like a rose. It's all good-smelling, but if you hold it too tight, it can stab you, make you bleed, and scar you for life."* The creature put on an offensive pose, *"I hope you remember this lesson I have taught you, for it will be the last lesson you will ever learn in you pathetic life."*

With that the creature lunged, claws extended for a fatal blow. Keitaro stood there, still clutching his chest. *Act as if you are vulnerable and weak. Now that I know his weak spot I can easily defeat him.* Waiting until the last possible moment he made his move. He jumped just as the claws from both hands would've decapitated him were he staying in the same place or trying to slide under him, now just barely missing his feet. The creature, having put all of his strength into the sweeping arc of his attack, could only watch as Keitaro planted an uppercut on his chin with his right fist, still coated in a red aura. Becoming slightly dazed, he staggered back a few steps, slapping his skull to clear the little Pikachu's that were now walking around in circles around his head. This was Keitaro's chance, he jumped in and punched straight into where he thought the creature's gut resided, causing it to double forward in pain. Crouching, Keitaro swept his leg behind the creature's heels, making it fall on its back once again. He walked up to the head of it and punched it lightly, knocking it out for what will be a while, its eyes becoming swirls and tongue hanging out, once more Pikachu's walking around its head. Keitaro sighed, and, kicking the shell of the creature, made it return to the window from which it emerged, being sucked into it. The window then sealed up and reinforced itself, once again becoming a repressed memory in Motoko's mind.

Keitaro looked over and walked to Motoko and looked at her as he stood in front. *She is almost there; she is also unable to feel anything else from this world.* Keitaro blushed slightly, then looking around, paranoid that somehow someone might see what he was about to, he bent down and kissed her on the cheek. Sensing no reaction from Motoko, he was happy and, fixing her bangs in her hair, he left her to return to his own mind. At the doorway, looking back once more at Motoko, he smiled, and shut the door. Immediately the door vanished from sight and became an ordinary part of the wall, forever sealed until another time.

### **The physical plane**

Motoko opened her eyes slowly, sweat still apparent on her forehead. She looked around, and happy that she had finally returned to her body, calmed down. Motoko glanced at the clock and noticed that barely ten minutes had passed, even though it seemed like much longer. *I forget sometimes... Time in the spiritual plane travels faster than time in the physical plane, since there are no boundaries between most objects there.* She looked down at Keitaro, who was still snoozing away blissfully, and Motoko noticed he was touching her knee. Smiling, she gently picked up his hand, stroking it gently, remembering how he saved her from her nightmare. Being cautious of her surroundings, she lightly kissed his fingers, and placed them carefully back into the futon so that they don't get too cold. Upon tucking him in again and making sure that there were no other problems, she placed a warm damp towel on his head and turned his heating up slightly. Satisfied that he was well onto his way to recovery, she left him and returned to her room.

Feeling tired, she wiped her head with a towel and then decided to go to bathe in the hot springs. *I might as well relax after what has just happened.* She picked up a towel and walked next door to Suu-chan's room, where she heard a lot of noise in. Cautiously she sneaked up to the door and opened it ever so slightly, only to be met with an eye.

"Waaah!" she fell over backwards and the door opened a little more only to reveal a beaming Suu-chan. Suu-chan pressed a button on a control pad she held behind her back and her room reverted to the usual jungle-like state that she shows to everyone who enters her room. Once it had finished, she opened the door to its full state.

She tiptoed to Motoko, and helped her up, looking sad, knowing that Motoko doesn't like to get scared. "I'm sorry to have scared you Motoko." Once Suu-chan brought her to her feet she hugged Motoko, "Please forgive me!"

Motoko hugged her back, and whispered into Suu-chan's ear, "There is no need Suu-chan, I fell over my own feet." She lied, since she didn't like to see Suu-chan sad especially over such a little thing. Suu-chan pulled back from the hug and looked up at Motoko, her eyes still slightly red. Ruffling Suu-chan's hair she asked, "Would you like to bathe with me in the hot springs? We can play your favourites games if you want."

At the sound of 'games', Suu-chan's face lit up and she eagerly nodded. "Well," Motoko said, "go get your towel then!" Motoko smiled as she saw Suu-chan skip happily into her room and jump around on the trees in order to find her towel, which was hanging off a branch. Upon finding it she left her room excitedly, shutting her partition door and happily jumping onto Motoko's back, towel draped over her shoulder. Motoko held onto Suu-chan's arms and walked downstairs to the hot springs level. They went into the changing rooms and undressed, leaving their rooms wearing their towels.

Motoko opened the partition to the hot springs, and was amused to see Naru still there. Motoko purposely tried to avoid talking to her at this time, and so chose somewhere relatively far from her to sit. Naru was bemused at Motoko's behaviour, since she was still acting hostile towards her. Suu-chan noticed this but chose to remain oblivious to it on the outside and happily followed Motoko to the area she walked to. Suu-chan then began to play her games, Motoko joining in on most of them. Naru watched the two, noticing that Motoko was somewhat more upbeat than last time she saw her. After a short while Suu-chan had got rid of her hyperactiveness and began to settle into the water, nestling against Motoko's shoulder, Motoko responded in kind by allowing her to do so.

As the three sat there, there were several thoughts going through their minds. Suu-chan was wondering about the exact relationship between the two people she loved the most, Motoko and Keitaro. *Why are they getting together now? They seem to be much more amicable in each others company more than usual. I hope there is something I can do for them at one point. Nevertheless, what I'm working on should help out...* Narusegawa was thinking about random things in her chaotic mind. *I really need to work hard this year, my studying technique seems to be off recently, and maybe Keitaro is the problem...? What is with Motoko? She seems to be upset with me, over Keitaro? Nah... it couldn't be, she doesn't like men, she told me herself when she first arrived here. I wonder what Shinobu-chan is going to cook for dinner...* Naru's mind began to wonder again... Motoko however, had only one thing on her mind. *Keitaro... was that all real? His subconscious mind said that he would not recall anything that occurred in the spiritual plane. However he also said that he was the 'true' Keitaro. I don't even remember what happened of him during the battle, I lose all my senses when trying to exit that plane. I'm not even sure if he survived... Nonetheless, I would like to meet him again, or get to know Keitaro better.* She blushed again, thinking about him. Another ten minutes passed before she felt that they should leave the hot springs. Tickling Suu-chan gently under her armpits, Motoko woke her up giggling. Suu-chan, noticing that Naru had left, gave Motoko a peck on the cheek, beaming afterwards, looking very content. Smiling Motoko picked up both Suu-chan's towel and her own, passing Suu-chan's on to her. Covering themselves, they left the hot springs, dried off, got dressed and returned to their rooms.