

Chapter 10

At last, the final repentance

Room 304

Naru was tired, she leaned back onto a pillow, hands behind her head, looking up at her ceiling. Her legs were still under the furnace table, so she was warm despite the bitter winter cold outside. She was about to nod off when she heard someone knocking on her door. Not caring about anything in particular she spoke.

"Come in." she angled her head to see her door slide open slightly, and noticed that it was Keitaro. *Damn, I should've asked who was there first...* Opening the door fully once he felt that he could enter he remained in the doorway but was indecisive in entering her room. After a few seconds of deliberation, he felt that it was okay to do so. He sat opposite her, placing his feet underneath the furnace table. Brushing up against Naru's feet he blushed, as did she. She pushed herself up so that she was looking at him normally.

"Naru," He began, "I have to apologise for what I said earlier. I... I was angry and didn't mean most of what I said."

Naru froze. *"Most of what I said." Does that mean that he did mean some of it...?* Noticing her reaction, he clarified.

"Gomen, that sounded harsh." He put a hand behind his head, easing the pressure off him, "What I meant was that you shouldn't hurt Suu-chan... that was all." Putting his hand down he relaxed a little, "I hope you can find it in you heart to forgive me."

Naru was quiet, she wasn't sure quite what to make of it all. *He is apologising to me! It should be me apologising to him.*

"Keitaro..." She looked down, reluctant, "I should apologise to you first, I was the one who got worked up over everything. So..." She paused slightly, "Gomen, gomen for everything that happened..." Her face reddened a little. *Why should he accept my apology? I hurt him and now everyone else hates me in the house...*

"Okay then, I accept Naru." He smiled at her.

Naru smiled lightly in reply, "Then, so do I accept your apology."

What now followed was a short period of complete silence. The two of them sweatdropped. *"I should say something..."* Realisation dawned upon the both of them, since they knew they both shared a very important common ground.

"How is revi...?"

"Studying goi...?"

They both stopped, having spoken up at the same time. Sighing Naru held out her hand towards Keitaro.

"Go ahead, tell me how your revision is going."

Keitaro looked dejectedly at the books laid out in front of him. These were the texts that he was studying for the last few weeks. Well, supposed to be.

"I'm not sure, I don't think its going too well." He sighed, "No matter how much I put my focus into it, I just can't seem to concentrate enough to study at all."

Naru sympathised with him, "I can understand Keitaro. However don't you think that after two years of doing this that it would get easier?"

Keitaro's shoulder's slumped further, "No it doesn't, it gets even harder. After the first year I failed I forced myself to work harder. This only resulted in me getting more stressed, and thus it wasn't surprised that I failed for the second consecutive year."

Naru looked at the depressed form in front of her. Keitaro began to look far into the distance, even though he was staring at a textbook. His eyes became more pained as he recalled the mocking from his fellow students and the incredulity that his parents displayed. He seemed to give off an aura of intense gloom that began to seep into surrounding parts. Reaching out, Naru touched his hand gently. Shocked out of his flashback, he looked up at Naru.

"Don't worry, everything will work out in the end Keitaro." She smiled compassionately, "You will learn from your mistakes. So you know now that you shouldn't force yourself to work hard. Instead try and find a way to both work and be relaxed at the same time."

He countered that, "How can I? I've got to work hard now, or else I won't be able to keep that promise of 15 years..."

"Huh?" Naru looked at him, confused slightly.

"Anyway, it probably doesn't matter now, it's been too long..." He looked down again.

"Hey!" Keitaro looked up to Naru's exclamation, shocking her. *His eyes... They're so sad and melancholic.* "You can't just give up now! You still have to keep that promise with Shinobu-chan. I can't imagine that you would want to go home to your parents having failed to get into Toudai..." she hesitated "...and I don't want to be the only person to go in Toudai alone." She blushed at the last thing she said.

At the mention of Shinobu-chan's name, Keitaro perked up, standing up clenching his fist determinedly, tears of resolve pouring over his cheeks. For some reason, beams of light appeared behind him, rotating around him.

"You're right Naru! I must regain my honour for Shinobu-chan, earn the respect of my parents and go with you to Toudai." He paused there a few seconds more, "Huh?" The light vanished, and the tears stopped instantly, "Naru, what did you mean by not wanting to go alone."

She blushed again, "It's... it's nothing Keitaro."

He persisted, "What? Are you sure?" *Could this mean she has feelings for me?*

"Just leave it be Keitaro!" Naru was getting irritated now.

"But..." Keitaro comment was cut off by a textbook being thrown at him. He saw it but was too slow to react. *A hardback book, this is going to hurt a lot.* Thankfully it opened up before it reached him, the softer pages hitting him square in the face. Falling backwards, dazed, he lay there for a short moment before getting back to reality. Moving the book off his face, he sat up and placed it on the furnace table. *Oh well... I guess I'll just have to ask her later then.*

"Gomen..." Naru apologised, "I didn't mean to..."

"Hurt me?" Keitaro interrupted, "Don't worry about it, I'm fine."

Keitaro adjusted his glasses and started to leaf through the textbook that was thrown at him. As he read on, the words and paragraphs just seemed to meld into one another in an incomprehensible jumble. He sighed and leaned back, looking at the ceiling.

"So what about you Naru? How are you doing with your studying?" He remained staring at the ceiling as he awaited a reply.

Should I tell him the truth, or should I lie about it... Naru was stuck in a particular dilemma, but eventually spoke up, "Well, I think I'm doing okay so far, it's mostly based upon memorising basic formulae with maths and sciences. With the more writing based subjects, it's harder. You need to learn a little about major topics, where most of the marks are based. As long as I focus on those areas, I should be fine."

Keitaro sighed, and began to close his eyes since the warmth of the furnace table was making him sleep. "Still at least it looks like one of us is going to get into Toudai this year..."

Naru lay back also, tired from the day's exertions. "Don't be so hard on yourself Keitaro." Closing her eyes, she smiled, which was reflected in her voice, "In the end, everything will work out. Besides, if you do fail, it won't be the end of the world."

They both lay there quietly, their own thoughts being kept to themselves. Both being very relaxed at that time, they ended up napping where they lay. It wasn't until an hour later that they both woke up around the same time. Somewhat embarrassed for falling asleep in another's company they sat up and tried to resume their normal routines. Naru began reading some of her textbooks and Keitaro glanced through a few of the ones in front of him.

"Umm, Keitaro?" Naru was looking at a textbook, her glasses hiding her eyes, "How... how is Suu-chan?" She felt responsible and thus spoke very guiltily.

"Suu-chan?" Keitaro wondered why he was worried about her, before he realised that she had ordered him to go see Naru, "Oh yes, she's fine now. She got a little bit upset over what happened, but she got over it after a short while." Keitaro left out the part about Suu-chan talking about her past, since he knew that she confided in him at that point.

"Naru, I'd better go now, I'll see you later at dinner." He looked at her, "I hope that we can put this behind us. I don't want it to affect our friendship..." He put a hand behind his head, blushing a little.

She blushed as well, "Yes, I want this to be forgotten too. I will see you later at dinner."

Keitaro stood up and opened her door, looking back to see that she was smiling at him. Smiling back, he left her to her studies as he shut her door. *What should I do now? There's only just over an hour to dinner, and I don't feel like getting back into revision...* Keitaro pondered over his options and decided. He walked on and knocked on the door of Room 302.

Motoko was kneeling at her table, drinking a cup of tea with her eyes closed. Sipping it with both hands holding the cup, she heard the rapping of someone on her door.

Whilst keeping her eyes closed she replied, "Enter."

The door slid open slowly to reveal Keitaro. Motoko opened her eyes to see who her visitor was, not even flinching when she noticed it was him. Without any invitation, Keitaro sat down opposite her and waited patiently for Motoko to begin the conversation.

"So have you settled everything then Keitaro?"

"Y... Yes." He stammered. *Why am I suddenly so nervous around her? It's not like I haven't had an ordinary conversation with her alone before.* He coughed to clear his thoughts and continued, "Suu-chan has calmed down now, after playing for a while in my room, and seems much happier than before this all happened." He hesitated, knowing Motoko was still angry with Naru, "N... Naru is okay, I spoke with her and discussed a few things, and we both forgive each other for things we've said or done."

Watching Motoko carefully, he wanted to see how that piece of news affected her. He was happy to spot the subtle softening of her expression, her eyes gleaming more. Taking this to mean that she was satisfied, he smiled.

"Are you still angry at Naru, Motoko-chan?" He had to ask this, just so that he could be sure there wouldn't be any bad feelings between the two. *The last thing I need is for the two of them to duel...* This stirred up memories of when Motoko challenged him, making him shudder inside.

Motoko was hesitant in answering. "I..." *Why should I forgive her? She hurt Keitaro when he was just helping Suu-chan.*

"Please..." Keitaro spoke, "I know that it was innocent in this case, but try to forgive her mistake."

"Mistake!" Motoko was outraged, standing up suddenly, "She attacked you for no reason!"

Keitaro cowered away from her, closing his eyes and covering his head with his hands, fearful that she may attack him in her anger. Shocked from his reaction to her outburst, she calmed down at once, and walked over to him, kneeling beside him. Reaching out she tentatively touched one of his hands. Upon contact he flinched a little, but began to peek out between his eyelids to see what Motoko was doing. Sighing, Motoko drew back her hand and placing it in her lap. She looked down at her hands, now fidgeting uncomfortably in her lap. *Why do I feel this way? Is it shame? Shame of what I mean to Keitaro?*

Her hair casting a shadow over her eyes she spoke, "Do I scare you Keitaro?"

Keitaro moved his hands away, confused. "Huh? What do you mean Motoko-chan?"

"Do I scare you? They way you fear me constantly..." Her palms were becoming more sweaty as she finally managed to keep them under control, latching them together.

Keitaro was stumped. He knew that Motoko was a skilled fighter and should be feared regardless by everyone. However he also knew her more personally than most, getting to understand her better and that she wasn't as frightening when talking to her one to one. Upsetting her at this time would also not be kind.

"No Motoko-chan, you don't scare me. It's nothing like that." He tried to say in such a way that didn't sound too desperate or patronising. "It's just that I get hit so often by everyone here I hide away on instinct, nothing to do with you personally."

Glad that he seemed to make her happy, noting her blush spread across both cheeks, he reached out and picked up one of her hands. "I promise you Motoko-chan, that whenever I think of you, I only think happy thoughts of the time that we have spent together, even though it has only been a few months."

Realising the way he spontaneously said that, he turned bright red, as did the girl opposite him. However Keitaro remained holding her hand. *Her skin is so smooth, how is it that Motoko-chan hasn't experienced love before now? She is an incredibly beautiful person, both inside and out, what has made her so hostile to men? Motoko was becoming less nervous by the minute. He is so warm. It is making me feel comfortable, putting my worries at ease. Why does he affect me so? Am I becoming weak? No... that cannot be. I feel stronger when he is near me. Is this how you felt Ane-ue, when you felt love?* Reluctantly, Keitaro released Motoko's hand, trying to make the connection last as long as possible.

A brief burst of pain ran from his bruise around his head and down his back, causing him to grip his head sharply to stop himself from shouting out loud.

Motoko saw this and was worried, "Keitaro! Are you okay?"

"Err, not really, Motoko-chan." He said, struggling to speak.

Tears were beginning to form in his eyes as another pain tendril snaked its way around his head, stopping around his sinus, causing his eyesight to waver. Finally reaching a peak, he began to fall towards his side. Out of reflex, Motoko managed to grab a hold of his top, stopping his fall. Pulling him towards her, she held him close as the pain continued to rack his body. Once he became more content, she helped him to his feet and placed him upon her futon, opening it for him.

Removing his slippers, she spoke, "Lie in here and be still. I will try and help you reduce your pain."

Keitaro did as he was told and went inside the futon, taking off his glasses and putting them beside the pillow. Motoko went to one of her storage areas and picked out a few ingredients. Turning on her electric kettle, she started to boil some water whilst pummelling some herbs with her pestle and mortar. Stopping the kettle before the water got too hot, she mixed the two together and passed the lukewarm concoction to Keitaro, who was looking at her with mild astonishment.

"Here, drink this in one. Hold your nose while doing so." He sat up and did as he was told, handing the empty glass to her.

Almost at once the taste of herbs, something similar to menthol and other odd flavours reached his senses. The menthol type sensation reached his nose and then travelled up to his sinus. This managed to reduce the amount of pain he was receiving. The brew also made him feel drowsy, and before he knew it, he fell asleep there and then. Motoko smiled at this. *At least he is resting for the time being. It is better for the body to heal itself when it is asleep. Fewer resources are consumed, so more can be allocated in healing the person.* She picked out some more items from her collection mixing, grinding, and moistening them until a cream with a pink hue was remaining. Placing some on her finger, she spread it on Keitaro's bruise gently. She made sure that she didn't press too hard, because the solution she made could only limit some of the pain, not all of it. After five minutes or so, when the cream was finished, the bruise was now pink. *This should heal the capillaries that were burst by helping the platelets to rebuild the walls. The blood should also move quickly from that area once the serum in the cream takes effect.* Sure enough before her very eyes, she could see the swelling visibly shrink as it took effect. Staying beside him throughout the whole process, she was glad that he was still breathing steadily, unable to feel what was happening to him. *It never fails, this is one of the potions that Ane-ue taught me, a secret from the Shinmei-ryu. Yet, I am still amazed by the speed at which it works.* Once half an hour had passed, the bruise had vanished, and the swelling was gone as well. It was also the time at which Keitaro woke up feeling rejuvenated and healthy. He felt his forehead, where the bruise used to be, but couldn't find it anywhere, no matter how much he pressed. Fumbling around the futon, he found his glasses and began to focus on the large shape over him.

"M... Motoko-chan!" He was shocked to say the least. "H... How long have you been there for?"

She raised her head slightly to look down into his eyes. "It matters not. The important thing is that you are healed and go about your usual perverted activities."

"Wh... What!" Motoko-chan you that I don't do..." Keitaro stopped mid-sentence once he saw the traces of a smile on her face, and realised that she was teasing him. *Teasing me? Is this the first time she has done that to me?*

He smiled back and got out of her now warm futon, standing up at the same time as her. He put on his slippers.

"Arigatou Motoko-chan, for everything. I don't know how you did it, but you managed to cure me." He glanced at his watch, "Well, its almost time to cook dinner, I'm going to help Shinobu-chan in the kitchen. In the meantime Motoko-chan, relax, you've had a long day, I don't want you to strain yourself further."

She blushed at his gentle tone, and merely nodded as he quietly slipped out of her room. Looking at the clock she saw that it was an hour before dinner would officially begin, so she took this opportunity to have a short nap. She admitted to herself that she was feeling drained, and set her mental clock to about five minutes before dinner would begin. Crawling into her futon she began to feel warm again, only to be shocked to smell Keitaro. Taking no notice of it, she promptly fell asleep, smiling unconsciously.

The time then seemed to fly by. Keitaro spoke to Shinobu-chan and helped her prepare some of the food, much to her unbridled delight. After finished off most of the meals for her, she insisted that she make the dessert alone. He had explained to her that he had made up with Naru, and quashed her worries over Suu-chan. Time to spare he walked to Mitsune's room and informed her of how he apologised to Naru. She seemed much happier after he said so. A few minutes later, people began to walk towards the dining area. Keitaro thought that to make Naru less nervous, he should accompany her, and he did so, sitting down with her at the table. Everyone realised that the air from lunch had vanished. Afterwards Naru spoke to Suu-chan privately, and apologised to her, and was surprised when she hugged Naru, happy that 'Naru and Keitaro are friends again.'

A short while after dinner, Keitaro went to the roof to do a little studying with one of his textbooks. Walking up the final staircase, he was glad to hear the repetitive sound of Motoko swinging her sword, training by chopping flying leaves in half. Crawling up to his vantagepoint, the view over the town, he began to read his book. *What's the use of studying now? It's already so late...* He smirked and lay back, looking at the ceiling. Turning his head, he watched Motoko train. *I think I come up here just to watch her, which is why I feel happier when I leave here.* It was only a few more minutes until the sun had begun to set, the sky getting progressively darker. He stood up and walked to the staircase, looked once more at Motoko and went downstairs.

10:31pm

Keitaro's Room

What a day... I don't think I'll forget this one in a hurry. Keitaro seemed to be exhausted, beyond his normal levels of sleepiness. He was about to nod off when he heard his door slide open and, after a short pause, close. He could hear footsteps padding slowly over to where he lay. *Who is this! I can't see who it is...* The person lay behind Keitaro, moving inside the futon, pressing against him. *Oh no! Who is this?* He could feel his face reddening, his nose threatening to bleed profusely. Turning around suddenly, he saw that it was Suu-chan, already sleeping. Smiling warmly he brushed away some stray hairs, and slept facing her, as she latched herself onto him after a few minutes. *This is odd, she doesn't seem to be crying as usual...* Little did he know that she was dreaming a different dream than all the other times.

Six years previous

Unknown place

Suu-chan was sobbing in her room. She sensed the presence of someone else in her room. Looking up she saw her oniisan, standing there, a small bruise on his cheek. Walking over he took her up in his arms and began to wipe her eyes. Playing with her hair, he kissed her forehead.

"Imouto-chan, I love you, and I will love you forever, don't you ever think otherwise." He spoke in a gentle tone. Suu-chan didn't reply, still sniffing from her earlier tears. Her oniisan noticed this and sat down on her bed, and just hugged her closely. She felt happier, that he was telling the truth after a few minutes, he spoke.

"I have to go to see Amara-chan now. Despite what she thinks, I don't hate her, she may be jealous of you."

At this Suu-chan looked up, "Jealous? Of me? Why?"

Her oniisan chuckling lightly, "My, you ask a lot of question little one. Don't tell her, but I think she might be jealous of your age, since you have nothing much to worry about for the future, and Amara-chan is beginning to think about hers. She might also envy your beauty, since you are prettier than when she was your age. She fears this, and so feels anger unjustifiably. Don't hate her Kaorra-chan, she still loves you."

Suu-chan looked up at her brother's eyes, and nodded wiping her eyes and beaming at him.

"That's a good girl. Now I have to see to her. You stay here and play for the time being."

He then released Suu-chan who then went about building a small castle with some building blocks on the floor. Walking towards where he knew he would find her, the place she went whenever someone would shout at her. He could hear the sobs through the bathroom door, and rapped lightly. He could hear the room had gone silent.

"Amara-chan... can I come in? I need to use the toilet." He knew that she would have thought this strange.

"W... Why don't you use the one upstairs?" she spoke, trying to disguise her sobs.

"The servants said that the pipes are blocked up there. Please hurry and open the door, I'm really getting desperate!"

Blackmail was never good, he knew that Amara would never deny him anything. Once he heard her getting out of the bath and unlocking the door, he waited until she went back into the bath before entering. The sight that shocked him was the room was in a state, bottles, toothbrushes, and everything that could be removed has been, and now lay on the floor. Manoeuvring his way around them he walked over to Amara, whose back was to him. He sat behind her and placed a hand on her cheek.

Shuddering slightly, she whimpered. "You're not going to tell okaasan or otousan are you?"

"No, of course not Amara-chan."

Turning her head toward him, he could see the tears welled up in her eyes as she refused to let them fall. Stroking her cheek, she closed her eyes, releasing them onto his hand.

Suu-chan was watching slyly from the doorway, she made her brother think she was playing when she decided to follow him. Seeing her sister so upset made her begin to cry, and she ran into the bathroom shouting out Amara's name. Her sister, wearing her towel, stood up and received the jumping Suu-chan into her arms as they hugged, crying into each other's shoulders. Suu-chan's oniisan stood up quietly, smiling. *Well, they made up, that was easier than I thought.* He began to pick up the items strewn over the floor as the two girls behind him bawled out loud both happy that they had each other still.

The present

Suu-chan smiled in her sleep, happy that everything was now all well in Hinata-sou. She slept soundly throughout the night, without any tears breaching her eyelids.

Author's notes:

Apologies for the absolute massive delay between this update. Have been working on many an assignment during and last four weeks at university. Thank you for all your comments, they have really kept me going during the times I ran out of that extra yard when writing.

I hope this chapter will be to your liking. I am going to bring out the next one relatively soon, the Valentine's Day special I have reached that point in the manga so it shouldn't have to jump too much to reach this point.

This is the official end of Book 1. Please feel free to read the continuation at this me know what you think as well, reviews are always welcome, as are criticisms, flames, etc. I have updated this entire book by changing some spelling regarding the brother/sister titles that appear in the fanfic that some reviewers have pointed out, and re-edited all chapter to remove typos, misspelled words and in some cases, grammar. Hopefully there will be many more Books to come in the future.