



# The Water Cats

*The Hina Awaken*

by

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Had the Hina been sleeping for centuries? Time away to recover and evolve? Clearing thought streams; slipping the boundary mappings that had tried to contain them; taking rest and then flight, and settling again to sleep and reconfigure? There was no easy way to answer. But it seemed they had been waiting, like rare insects, biding their time, waiting for the perfect conditions in which to emerge, in which to awaken. And now that time had come.

Throughout history they had been misunderstood. Their origins almost impossible to trace; difficult to research; hard even, to describe. Perfectly illusive, as though they had been there and not there, all of the time.

From village to village, the stories and whispers would vary, some sprinkled with facts, others rich with fantasy. And were they even real, the Hina? Some said they were ancient dolls with mask-like faces? Some said they were *yokai*, the kind that induced great fear, changing form to unsettle you and cause you harm; others thought them kind.

The Hina could move at speed, shift, change in size; could seem like holograms, as though if you stretched out your hand you might even travel right through them. They could appear like stone, but their hair, like goat hair, was a constant. And always, they were bedecked in the most exquisite finery. Kimonos, armour, sometimes both. They exuded a sense of power, of terror, of intense knowledge as though they might wholly read your mind. Their eyes startled all who dared look close, clear and bright like glass; and their lips were thin and crimson, the fine strokes of a brush, the slash of a knife.

Some said they came from Nagoya, others said Osaka, but in truth there was no part of Japan that hadn't laid claim to them; and no part that had not, at times, completely denied their existence. But the water cats needed them. The earth must be healed. It was time to work together, to draw on the strengths of all.