

早瀬未沙

AM
JuJu

白い追憶

構成／河森正治
文／大野木寛
絵／美樹本晴彦



Misa Hayase

**WHITE
REMINI-
SCENCES**

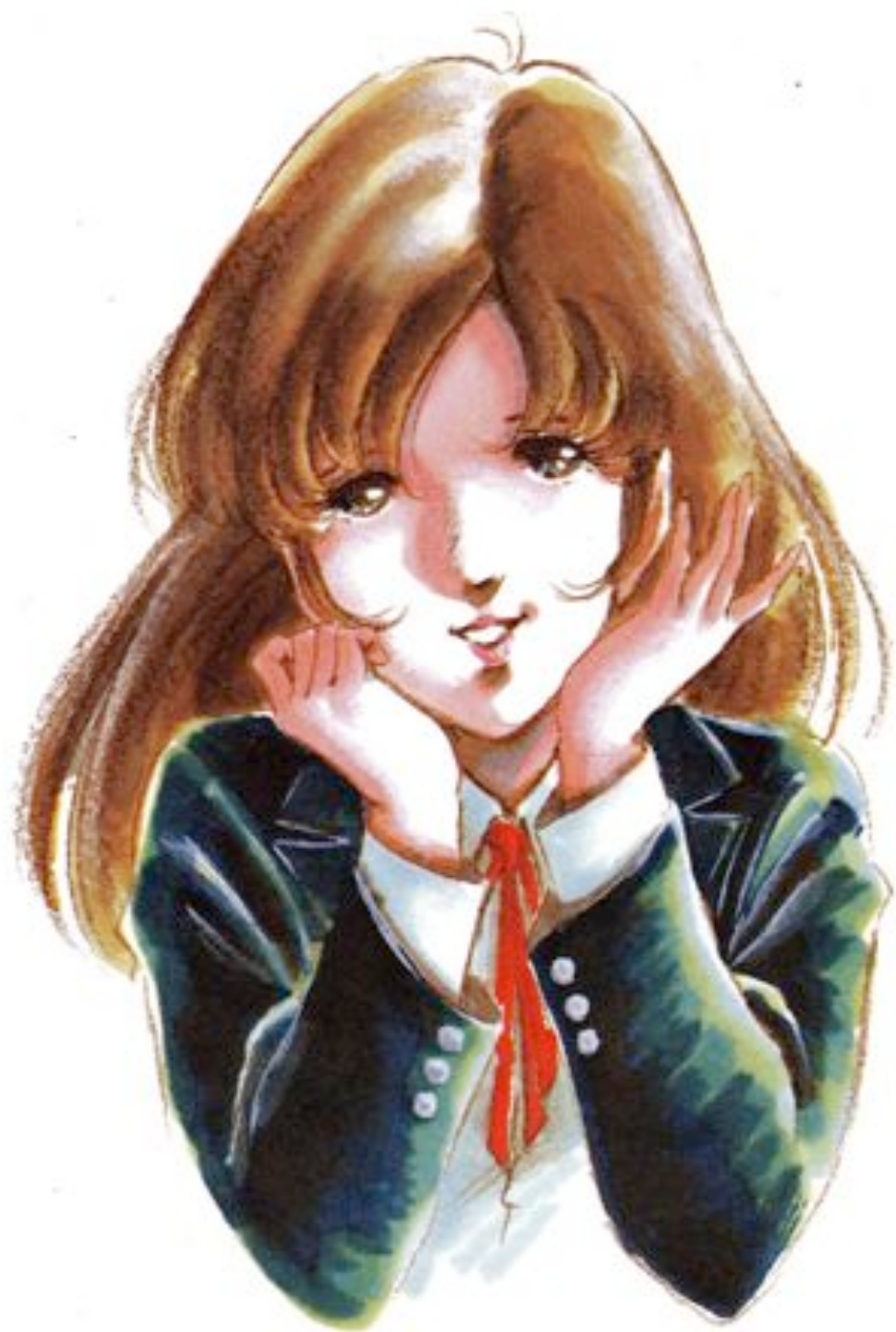


In her twelfth

spring...

To her eternal love,

Riber...



Misa Hayase: White Reminiscences

By Hiroshi Ohnogi

Illustrations: Haruhiko Mikimoto

Planning: Shoji Kawamori

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Translation by Gubaba

Prologue



The irritated footsteps inside of the room came and went. Takashi Hayase looked at the clock once again. The appointed time has already passed. Hayase held the pipe in his mouth again, even though it had gone out some time before. The meal on the table had gotten cold.

This person was not just an Admiral in the UN Forces, he was also the father of a solitary daughter.

“I apologize for taking so long.”

Misa had arrived at last.

“You’re late.”

..but it's all right, he started to say, but the words stuck in the back of his throat.

Misa stood at the doorway wearing a long-sleeved kimono, which had been ordered specially for this day. Her long hair was arranged carefully, and her cheeks even showed a faint hint of red.

“Please don’t look at me like that, Father.”

She hid her embarrassed face with the kimono, and the collar dropped, exposing the nape of her white neck.

“Please don’t be embarrassed. I’m just surprised at how lovely you look.”

After he said that, the Admiral gestured for Misa to take a chair, and then he sat down opposite her. Although it was the first meal the two of them had had together in a long time, neither of them touched their chopsticks.

Time passed silently. In the space between them, there was only the feeling between parent and child. How long had it been since they had sat face to face, speaking earnestly to each other?

“You’ve gotten bigger, too.” Her father said, then opened his mouth.

“I wish you could show your mother how beautiful her daughter has become.”

A tiny surge of anger began to well up in Misa’s heart.

His eyes felt hot with approaching tears, but he shook his head ward them off. “Well,” he said, “the food will get cold if we don’t eat it, so we should start, don’t you think?”

“I would hate,” she said, “to get food on this precious kimono...” She started to stand up, but her father stopped her.

“It doesn’t matter. If it gets dirty, we can always wash it. Please sit down.”

Saying nothing to her father, she sat down again.

“This was all set up specially for today.”

Her father yanked the cork out of the wine bottle, and poured some first into Misa’s glass, and then into his own.

“Happy birthday Misa. You’re an adult now.”

“Thank you, Father.”

Their glasses made a clear ringing as they clinked them together.

Her father downed his glass in one swallow. Misa also drank hers in one gulp. Wine’s characteristic perfume struck her nose, and the sour taste filled her mouth.

“It’s delicious.”

A smile of satisfaction spread across her face.

“You look like you also know the taste of wine very well.”

“A little. But it’s been so long that I didn’t think it would taste this good.”

The two of them smiled slightly.

Then they began to eat. There was no enthusiasm, they just silently put the food into their mouths. But even though they didn’t speak, there was a warmth to the scene. And that was enough.

Besides, there was nothing to talk about. Now as before, their conversation revolved solely around military matters, and so any talk now could only be about the war against the Zentradi, and their views on that subject were violently opposed to each other.

Because of that, the atmosphere slowly became strained. Misa’s hand reached for her wine glass involuntarily. Her earlobes and the space under her eyes were turning faintly reddish.

She felt a tap on her shoulder, and swiveled around to see Claudia standing beside her.

“Claudia,” she gasped, “what are you doing here?”

“What a thing to say! This *is* your birthday party, isn’t it?”

Misa nodded with a baffled look, and Claudia handed her a large bouquet of flowers.

“Happy birthday,” Claudia said with a laugh, flashing her white teeth. “You’re twenty years old. Now you really *are* an old lady!”

“Happy birthday, Hayase.”

“Captain Global! And everyone!”

All of the principal crewmembers of the Macross were gathered there: Captain Global, the three bridge operators, even Max and Milia, all together.

“Captain, this is my wife, Milia,” said Max, introducing her.

Misa said, “Thanks to the two of you, we know that humans and Zentradi can become allies.. You are the mediators.”

“Captain Hayase!”

Upon hearing her name called, she turned; and *he* was standing there. His cheeks were a little flushed, his breath ragged. He must have run here. Memories welled up inside Misa.

“Sorry I’m late,” said Hikaru, bowing his head.

“It’s just like you not to show up on time,” she said, but was merely poking fun. Her true thoughts were different: *Ah, I don’t want to say this, but if you hadn’t shown up, I wouldn’t have been able to enjoy myself...*

“That kimono looks wonderful on you.”

Does it really suit me? Even if you don’t mean it, it makes me happy. But those words were only spoken in her heart. They didn’t come out of her mouth or show up on her face.

“Really, it does,” he continued. “Oh! Um...here.” Hikaru pulled a small box tied with a ribbon out of his pocket. “I’m sorry. It’s a pretty dull present.”

“Huh. I wonder what it could be?” She put out her hand and took the gift. And then...

“Misa, are you all right?” She felt someone shaking her shoulder and she came to, to see her father’s worried face peering at her.

“Where am I?” She looked around, confused. Everyone was gone; not even Claudia’s bouquet was here. And Hikaru was gone, too. It had all been a dream. An empty daydream. And it merely crumbled away.

“Are you all right? Your face is rather pale.”

“I’m fine. I just had a little too much wine, most likely.”

“It’s all because I pushed you to have more. Would you like to go to the doctor’s office?”

“No thanks. I’m fine, really.”

“If you say so.” Misa’s father gave a slight nod, but he still looked concerned. Little by little, Misa extracted herself from the afterglow of her dream. Suddenly, she noticed a small box behind her wine glass, and it looked exactly like the one Hikaru had given her in her dream. Misa picked it up.

“This was the best I could find at UN High Command. They don’t have much there.”

“Oh, it’s all right. Anyway, it feels like it’s been ages since I’ve gotten a present from you, sir. Is it okay if I open it?”

“Be my guest.”

Inside the box was a tube of lipstick. It seemed a little too feminine, but it must at least be expressing one of her father’s wishes. She held the lipstick in her palm and closed her hand around it. She felt her father’s hopes being conveyed to her through the feeling of the cold metal.

“Thank you, sir,” she said. “I’ll be sure to wear it tomorrow.”

“Well, I’ll be. Does this mean you’ll be seeing someone special?”

For a moment, she had difficulty grasping what he meant. It seemed like a simple question between father and daughter. But before long, it sunk in.

The problem was that, as far as Misa was concerned, it was unanswerable. Her emotions were still wavering. A gap between the man in the sky and the man beyond the sky... She didn’t know her own feelings yet.

“There’s no one like that.” The words popped spontaneously out of her mouth, surprising even her.

“I see.”

The Admiral’s shoulders drooped in disappointment. “The sooner you find someone, the sooner I can rest easy,” he said.

“Of course. But I’ve got pretty high standards.” Thoughts whirled about in her head endlessly, and nothing but meaningless words dropped from her mouth. Her mind was preoccupied with the question. She wanted to flee, but it was inescapable. The dead and the living. Her heart was torn between a man who was dead and a man who was alive. And she had no mercy for herself.

Who wilt thou show thy blackened teeth to,

*Who wilt thou show thy blackened teeth to...?**

At the same time Misa was worrying about this, another being was worried about his resolution, decided upon in the darkness.

Darkness. Bodolzaa stood in his black robe. After long consideration, he had finally decided to completely destroy the Protoculture, going against their directive not to interfere with them. However, even in compliance with the command, all the soldiers had come into contact with the Protoculture, and had thus been contaminated by it. With a look of great suffering on his face, he gave his orders. Immediately, all the troops under his command started to mass their fleets, numbering more than 5.1 million ships. It was

* A line from the Kabuki play *Musume Dojoji*. Prior to the 19th century, Japanese aristocratic women and daughters of military officers dyed their teeth black when they got married. [Translator’s note]

certainly more than enough to destroy a single, small world, and yet Bodolzaa remained uneasy.

He had decided on an unfathomable course: the doom of mankind.

And, AD 2009. That fateful February Twenty-First.*

That day, the weather around UN High Command in Alaska was tranquil. The weak sunlight shone brilliantly off the permafrost. There was no wind, and as the afternoon crept closer, the temperature rose. The people who had been underground emerged onto the surface, and felt the long-absent rays of the sun shower their bodies, and warm their pale skin.

Snow fell softly from the blue sky. Then, suddenly, even though it was midday, stars began shining. Not just one, but hundreds, even thousands. The people gaped, wide-eyed, at them.

The star clusters that afternoon were the ships that would administer death. They had crossed thousands of light years of emptiness and void for this sole purpose: the destruction of earth.

That, and that alone, was their, the Zentradi's, only goal.

The lights in the sky momentarily flashed more brightly; the people who had been looking at the sky squinted up, and were gone. Even people who didn't know about the afternoon stars, each in their rooms, each in the midst of their day, were turned to dust.

Destruction.

* The date given doesn't correspond to the timeline of the TV series. It should be late February, 2010. [Translator's note]

Annihilation. Decimation. Ruin. Slaughter... Whatever one called it, it was merely a word.

Involuntarily, these same words fell from Misa's lips, but she couldn't grasp the reality of the situation. Monitors set up in every major city showed what was happening, and it was the same everywhere. Tokyo, New York, Beijing, Moscow... Nothing but desolation. What had just a moment before been individual cities teeming with millions of people became uniform, blasted plains. As Misa watched, she imagined the destruction spreading across the entire surface of the planet. And although the image was vague, she sat petrified.

"It can't be!" she cried out, trembling as her mind filled with visions. And crying out, she came back to herself. Her words echoed off the walls of the empty operation room, and stood out against the stillness.

Admiral Hayase, meanwhile, had no time for shock. "Is the Grand Cannon secure?" he demanded.

"We're having some difficulties with the power generator, but we should be able to fire it."

"Very good. Recommence count down at once."

"Roger."

Everyone at UN Forces High Command jumped at the noise of the power generator working. The enormous power grew to a roar. Inside the Grand Cannon, 800 meters in diameter, five kilometers in height, innumerable particles of light started whirling and dancing madly. Then the light fused, and one kilometer of bedrock spread upwards, swelling and being carried by the light.

“Grand Cannon energy level has reached critical mass!” an aide reported.

“Very good. Continue the count,” commanded Admiral Hayase, closing his eyes. A scant few seconds, and everything would be decided. The earth had just been destroyed, completely ruined, and yet there was still a slim chance of hope. A few seconds more. Would he ever see his beloved daughter Misa again? A few seconds more. Would he himself even survive? And more seconds.

My daughter was right, he thought, but then hurriedly pushed the idea away.

“Three, two, one, zero!” The aide completed the countdown. That instant, the energy accumulated six kilometers underground gathered in a huge bundle of light, and then erupted. It reached the ozone layer, then punched through it, cutting the air, carrying all the wishes of the few survivors on the planet into space.

It reached the Zentradi fleet. Even the stars paled before the intense light, Earth’s final retaliation. After the light faded, nothing was left. In an instant, tens of thousands of ships, and millions of lives, had been vaporized. A five-second massacre. And that five-second counterattack had been all that humanity was capable of. Despite more than two million years of progress and history, this was the best they could do. At once, the remaining Zentradi ships brought their cannons to bear on Alaska.

UN High Command fired another blast of light from the Grand Cannon. The beam volleyed into the sky and the barrel of the Cannon was enveloped in an opaque white. The six-kilometer barrel stood briefly against the pressure, then collapsed.

“Area A-4, please respond,” Misa cried, her voice echoing uselessly through the half-destroyed operation room. She was all alone. Just a moment before, there had been at

least a dozen operators hailing from each area, but after the dull thud of the impact, everything was blanketed in silence.

Miraculously, Misa alone had survived, although her shoulder was injured from some rubble falling on it. She looked around, but couldn't see any of her colleagues. She felt like she shouldn't look, like some thing's glistening fangs were slaving eagerly for her. And as soon as she met the thing's eyes, it would lunge at her and rip out her throat. She couldn't see it, but the stink of blood dripping from the thing's fangs drifted to her nostrils. She could hear it licking its lips and growling with a low rumble.

"Area A-4, please respond! Area A-4!" she continued to call. Even as she did so, she began to feel a chill up her spine. There was no response from Area A-4. The other areas were likewise silent. She felt the uneasiness of a child playing hide-and-seek, who counts to a hundred and uncovers his eyes to find everyone gone. And finding herself suddenly alone, her shoulders sagged with loneliness. And then, through the static of the headphones, she thought she heard a voice. In her solitude, she dismissed it as a hallucination...but then, the hallucination called her name.

"Misa."

It was her father's familiar voice. And it wasn't just an auditory hallucination, his image was there as well. Even though she couldn't catch much clearly through all the static and noise, it was undoubtedly her father. Was this also just an illusion?

"Misa! You're still there?" spoke the illusion. No...not an illusion, it was her father's real voice. She was amazed that her father was still alive.

"What about you, Admiral?" Despite the happiness she felt, she couldn't bring herself to call him "Father." *What, she thought, even at a time like this, I'm holding back?*

“It’s a lost cause here,” the Admiral said. “Get out of here and save yourself!” Then all the background faded until she could no longer hear it. “What?” she cried out, leaning forward. “Father!” Any antipathy she had felt towards him evaporated, and at long last she was truly speaking to him. Then her father’s image reappeared on the monitor, clearer than before. Misa could see that the Admiral’s room had sustained critical damage. “Maybe,” he said, “you were right after all.”

Those were to be his final words. There was a sudden explosion, and the screen went white. His form vanished.

“Father!” Misa called out, again and again. Her voice became a croaking sob, and she sank into misery. Hopeless loneliness shrouded her, and her tears streamed down her cheeks. She leaned against the wall and licked her lips.

The tears flooded into her heart, swelling into a sea of sorrow. The sea was roiling and storm-tossed, and the crystallized misery sank to the bottom, where it began to melt. It dissolved into memories of sadness, taking her back to her past.

“Why did I become a soldier?” she cried out. “If I hadn’t, I never would’ve had such sadness in my life!”



Handwritten signature

成人の日、振り袖姿で





ライバーと、デートの指切り

White Sketch



The sound of clinking glass. People's mellifluous voices. Today, the usually quiet Hayase residence in Aoyama was almost raucous. Dishes piled high with fine food were laid out before dozens of guests, and glasses overflowing with wine were passed back and forth. The mansion was crowded with people dressed in their finest formalwear.

In July of 1999, a giant meteorite had split the sky and fallen to earth. The shock waves caused by its fall had demolished many cities and had killed multitudes. Soon after the meteorite had crashed on South Ataria Island, a research team was dispatched to investigate it. Their initial report created an even greater impact to the world than the shock waves from the object's descent. A single copy of the report was all it took to cause a tremble of fear to run through all the inhabitants of earth.

It turned out to be a massive space ship, which became known as the Alien Star Ship One, or A.S.S. 1 for short. The people of earth quickly learned that they were not the only life in the universe. Moreover, the ship was made for battle. Thus, even in space, war was being waged. And the level of technology used by whatever species created the starship far outstripped that of the humanity.

People pushed for unification of the governments of earth. What had been thought to be empty void ruled by silence was transformed instantly into a universe overflowing with menace. Because of predictions of difficulty in communicating with aliens, a global defense system was demanded. Individual countries couldn't accomplish this, and so a unified government was required.

Of course, before that could happen, some countries' egos stood in the way, because of barriers between the cultures and races of humanity. In some areas, small-scale conflicts

erupted, and before long, the entire world was engulfed in the fires of war. People called this “the Unification Wars.”

But once the giant cogs started turning, it was in no one’s power to stop them. By and by, each nation disappeared, and all were joined together under a united banner.

When Japan changed from a nation to an “Autonomous Region,” the UN Forces Command Center for the Asian territories was set up in the outskirts of Tokyo. And the finest soldiers from every Autonomous Region were selected to create a truly global military unit.

And on this day, there was a party – a small one – at the Hayase Residence, one being thrown for the new unit so that everyone could get acquainted. People from all over the world were gathered there, and all of them were doing as they pleased. There was plenty of liquor and food, which helped fuel conversation. Throats dry from laughter were wetted with alcohol, and food barely reached the guests’ stomachs before they were drinking more. Voices cried out toast after toast, while other voices, tinged with drunkenness, laughed.

And in this bustling party, one little girl ran through the crowd. She was wearing a very grown-up dress, which didn’t suit her at all. But more childlike clothes wouldn’t look very good on her either. She was in that instant of time between being a young girl and a young woman. This clever and pretty girl was the blossom of the party. She was the type of girl that nobody could look at without feeling affection. And, with her childish sensitivity, she knew it.

She was playing tag with a few younger children, and seeing her at play brought smiles to the faces of any onlookers.

“Over here! Here!” the girl cried as she weaved through the guests. But then she ran right into the back of a boy who had been too involved in conversation to notice her. The glass in his hand jostled, and juice sloshed out of it, drenching his sleeve.

“I’m sorry,” gasped the girl. She bowed her head, realizing her blunder. Her action brought the harmonious party to an abrupt halt.

“Don’t worry about it, Miss,” the boy said. Hearing the warmth in his voice, the girl timidly lifted her eyes. The boy was looking down at her, a big smile on his face. Although he seemed to be nearing adulthood, she noted that his face still retained something cherubic about it. And he, for his part noticed the deep intelligence in her eyes. They spent a moment just staring at each other.

“I’m really, really sorry,” the girl repeated. She pulled out a handkerchief and started wiping the young man’s sleeve. Through the handkerchief and the cloth, she could feel his not yet mature arm.

Suddenly the party’s host, the Commodore, rushed up. “Misa!” he scolded, “Do you mind telling me what this galloping around the room is all about?”

“I’m sorry, Father,” replied the girl.

“Apologizing to *me* won’t solve anything,” said the Commodore.

“It’s perfectly all right,” said the boy, seeing the girl’s distress. “This shirt is overdue for cleaning anyway.” Yes, the girl had made a mistake, but the boy, remembering his own adolescence, knew that she was already wallowing in self-recrimination, and it didn’t need to continue. But it looked like the Commodore wasn’t through scolding her.

“Everyone is enjoying themselves at this party, and then you start flying around the room. It’s immature.”

Misa's head drooped low, her earlier cheerfulness having fled. The boy understood that to a girl her age, the word "immature" was humiliating. "Please, Commodore Hayase," he said, "It's all right, isn't it? She didn't do it maliciously, after all."

Then a stern-faced soldier approached. He was about two heads taller than the Commodore, with broad shoulders and arms as big around as Misa's waist. "I apologize for his terrible behavior," the soldier said, patting the young man on the shoulder. "He should have been able to get out of the Young Miss's way." The pat looked light enough, but it sent the boy staggering back two or three steps.

"Is this your son?" the Host ventured cautiously.

"Oh, there's no doubt about that," said the soldier with a loud laugh, "even if he's unworthy of the family name." They looked nothing alike, the bluff and hearty father and the slim, almost feminine son. They say that even a hawk can give birth to a dove, or a dove to a hawk... Of course, Commodore Hayase had been able to tell.

"Misa, I'd like to introduce Commander Herbert Von Fruhling. You've never met him before, but he's an old friend of mine."

"Oh Commodore, you can dispense with the 'Von,'" the Commander said. "Our Brave New World has thrown out all those titles of the aristocracy."

Herbert drew closer to Misa and bowed down to shake her hand. Her hand was enveloped completely by his up to the wrist, and her eyes widened at how huge it was.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Little Miss," He said.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, too, sir. I'm Misa Hayase," the girl replied, her face breaking into her most radiant smile. Herbert responded with a wide grin of his own. Then, although his smile didn't change, his eyes softened and became even more kind.

“And this fella,” he said, shaking the young man’s shoulder, “is my son, Riber. But I guess you two’ve already met.”

Riber’s face reddened in embarrassment.

“And what do you do?” asked the host.

Riber straightened himself as he answered. “I’m a student at military academy.”

“Oh, no need to get formal,” smiled Commodore Hayase. “It’s a party. Put your feet up and relax.”

Just then, a server bearing a tray of glasses walked past. The Commodore nimbly grabbed three glasses, and passed two of them to Herbert and Riber.

“Oh, he’s still underage,” said Herbert. He moved to take Riber’s glass, but the Commodore stopped him.

“It’s all right, isn’t it? How old are you?”

“He’s still just a kid,” Herbert replied.

“I’m not asking you, I’m talking to Riber here.”

“I’m seventeen, sir,” Riber said.

“Seventeen and a strapping adult.” The host slapped Riber on the shoulder. “But you need to build up some strength in those shoulders. And from today, you can forget about formalities.” So saying, he clinked his glass lightly against Riber’s, and then downed his drink in one gulp. Riber stared for a moment at the champagne bubbling in his glass. Then, as though making a momentous decision, he took a deep swig.

The stink of alcohol-tainted breath hovered around Misa. Why, she wondered, did adults seem to think that it tasted so good?

After that, the conversation became difficult for Misa to follow. Talk of communicating with aliens, talk of military victories...there was no way a middle-schooler could be expected to understand. And yet, it was the first time Misa had ever seen a young man disagreeing openly with her father. Usually, they shrank before him, often not even daring to speak, but Riber was actively debating with him. And the young man's tone conveyed a strong and sincere hopefulness.

Why was Misa's heart thumping as she watched Riber? She became uneasy...couldn't her father, Herbert, and especially Riber...couldn't they hear her pounding heartbeat?

But the three men were speaking to each other as if in a dream, and other things, like the bombs exploding in her chest, seemed not to penetrate the conversation.

"Why is my heart beating so loudly?" Misa thought. "Please quiet down."

Before long, the party began drawing to a close, and people started leaving in groups of three or five. Misa continued detaining the Fruhlings, and they stayed to the very end of the party. Finally, even the two of them left the house, and silence settled back on the estate.

As the usual quietude returned, the tumult of the party gave way to a sense of stillness. Even the sound of Misa's mother putting away the dishes didn't disturb the conspicuous tranquility surrounding the house. Misa carefully climbed into a deep, large chair, and sat dangling her legs. And for some reason there was a small handkerchief wrapped around the little finger of her right hand.

Misa's father returned from seeing the Fruhlings off at the gate.

"Thanks for everything," he said to Misa's mother.

She simply replied, “Not at all,” and continued straightening up the dishes. She was usually quiet, and had appeared at the party like a woman of unfathomable depths. She had lovely features and a taste for gorgeous things, but, like an old-fashioned lady, she stayed behind her husband.

“The food tonight was exquisite,” Misa father remarked as her took her mother’s hands, making her pause as she picked up the plates. “You’ve worked enough for one night, don’t you think? Let me finish putting everything away.”

“Oh no, dear. Really, that’s not necessary.”

“All right then, let’s do it together.” So saying, he started cleaning up as well. He was not accustomed to such work, and even his hands seemed uneasy. Next to him, Misa’s mother deftly stacked the glasses and plates. Both of them were breathing in rhythm. Of course, Misa always loved her father, but she loved him best when he was showing tenderness to her mother. Misa always wanted to watch them get close to each other, but she was also grown-up enough to know when she was getting in the way. So she clambered off the chair, said good night, and went up to her room.

But even after she had gotten to bed, her excitement wouldn’t allow her to sleep; the evening’s party had been that much fun. For a long while, she dwelt on Riber’s promise...

“Coming here, looking out the VTOL’s window, I was amazed at how New Tokyo has developed.”

“This is your first time in New Tokyo?”

“Yeah, but I really like it.”

“Good. Then you should enjoy exploring.”

“Well, then, shall I give you the guided tour?” Misa interrupted. Riber looked surprised for a moment, but then broke into an easy grin.

“Thanks,” he replied. “I’d be happy to be shown around New Tokyo by such a pretty young lady. With the Commodore’s permission, of course.”

Commodore Hayase frowned slightly. Misa worried that he would refuse. “It’s all right, isn’t it, Father?” she ventured.

“Hmm. Well. I suppose it’s fine, with Riber around.”

“Thank you!” Misa cried, jumping for joy. “So, next Sunday. Promise!”

“Got it. Next Sunday.”

Misa stuck her little finger out in front of Riber’s face, but he didn’t understand that he was meant to do the same, and so just stared at it.

“It’s a pinky swear,” offered Misa. “Don’t you know it?”

“Sorry,” Riber replied. “I guess we don’t have that custom in Germany.”

Saying, “You do it like this,” Misa took Riber’s right hand, and hooked their little fingers together. Riber, at Misa’s mercy, was amused at her childish conduct.

“Pinky swear!” declared Misa. “If you tell a lie, you must swallow a thousand needles!”

“Well, then, I guess I’d better not break the promise, huh?” Riber said, laughing brightly.

Recovering herself with a quick exhale of breath, Misa jumped to her feet. Turning on the light, she ran to the calendar and drew a big circle around the following Sunday with

a red marker. "Today's Wednesday," she remarked to herself. She frowned charmingly and ran her finger along the days on the calendar between now and Sunday. "Still three more days..."

Those days, however, passed quickly.

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Oh no, not at all," Riber replied, laughing. "Actually, I just got here as well."

"I'm sorry," Misa said. "A friend called me just as I was about to leave."

The truth, however, was that she couldn't decide what clothes to wear. Trying on flashy clothes, followed by chic dresses, and then, before she knew it, it was time to leave. The outfit she finally settled on was a white, fluffy affair that looked somewhat childish, but she thought it suited her.

"Shall we go then, Mister Riber?" she asked.

Riber frowned slightly and said, "Please don't call me 'Mister Riber.'"

"Why not?"

"I've only ever heard it used for adults. I can't get used to being called 'Mister Riber.'"

"All right, Riber," Misa answered. Then she tilted her head slightly. "It feels strange to address someone formally, and then two seconds later, speak to them casually..."

"Anyway," said Riber, "Let's go." He stood up and Misa noted that he threw a number of chewing gum wrappers into a trash can. Probably, he had showed up at the agreed time, and had been waiting a long time for her to come. She felt a small pain in her chest.

The two of them ascended to revolving viewing platform near the top of the Shinjuku Trade Center building.

“Oh, look! Over there, where those small buildings are lined up? That’s Aoyama, where the big military base is.”

In the gap between buildings, they could see a mass of steel frames. “Oh, there’s New Tokyo Tower. It’s about fifty meters shorter than this building. The old Tokyo Tower is on the other side...you can’t see it from here. Oh wait...it’s behind us.”

New Tokyo Tower disappeared among the throng of super-skyscrapers. Only the pinnacle could be seen over the lifeless buildings as they rotated away.

“Riber, what is your birthplace like? Is it like this?” Misa asked, pointing out the window. The super-skyscrapers rose to the heavens like multiple Towers of Babel, burying the gardens of Meiji Shrine in the valley below.

“Oh, no,” replied Riber. “It’s very different. Röhlm, where I grew up, is out in the country. It’s not a big city, like this.”

Until he said the name, Misa had never heard of Röhlm. She asked, “What kind of place is it?”

“I’ll show you sometime, if you’d like,” he answered. “It’s quiet, but it’s a good place.”

Riber’s eyes filled with scenes of Röhlm. Green hills, wide fields; cows chewing on grass, birds chirping and soaring high. Taking a deep breath, he felt the gentle scent of early summer tickle his nostrils.

Really, it was just an average German rural area.

“I’d really love to see it, the place where you grew up,” Misa said, breaking Riber’s reverie. The scenery of his hometown faded, replaced by the crowd of super-skyscrapers. The vanished daydream left the young man with a sense of wistfulness.

The view of the sky was lovely as the two descended back to earth.

Shinjuku was always filled with young people. The town was filled with gaudy outfits, and shrieking with color. The air was clogged with the scent of youth. The city was the cutting edge of exuberance for the entire world.

The show windows were adorned with goods, outfits, shoes, and accessories that anyone would want. Misa and Riber lost track of time, gazing at all of these things.

Harajuku, Shibuya, Roppongi... Riber wanted to visit these famous historical areas. However, Misa was acting as his tour guide, and for the twelve-year-old girl, Tokyo was just another plot of land. But for the young Riber, all of it was exciting. Still, when a very youthful Japanese person leads a foreigner who is new to Japan around Tokyo, all but a very small amount of information is bound to slip through their grasp.

“Are you hungry?” Riber asked suddenly. “Should we get something to eat?” It was already mealtime. But this invitation made Misa uncomfortable. Probably lunch was already waiting for her back home, and eating out was strictly forbidden in her household.

“Just a moment, please,” Misa said. “I’ll need to call home.” Her cute legs scurried off.

When she was about ten meters away from where Riber was standing, her expression changed. She hesitated, then grasped the phone receiver. She paused again before inserting her phone card. She slowly pressed the buttons for her home phone number, one by one. Before she reached the last number, though, she hung up. But then, she decided again to call.

All during the phone call, a nervous look covered her face. She was hesitant about her explanation, but once it was out of her mouth, she shrugged her shoulders. First she was

surprised, then she was happy. As she hung up the phone, her whole face split into a big grin.

This was her very first adventure.

Misa and Riber traveled to Yokohama by VTOL. Riber said he was hungry for Chinese food, so they headed for Chinatown.

In Chinatown, the small, household-style shops are better than the big restaurants. And the backstreets are better than the main roads. But because those restaurants are well-known, they're always crowded. And this day, since all the famous places were full, Misa and Riber went to one of the places on the main street.

A girl who looked to be in about third or fourth grade brought them some jasmine tea. As she placed the tea cups in front of them, she stared wide-eyed at Riber.

"Mother," the girl called, "doesn't this man look just like Kaifun?"

A matronly woman flew over from inside the shop, saying sternly, "Minmay! What are you saying about our customers?"

The woman shooed the little girl away. "I'm very sorry," she apologized to Riber and Misa, bowing many times. "Please forgive my daughter's impudence." Misa didn't think it was worth making a fuss over, and soon had forgotten the whole situation.

However, the person named Kaifun would one day influence Misa, just as the girl named Minmay would influence the fate of the world, although there was no way Misa could foresee that.

After their meal, Misa and Riber went to a café near the harbor. Because it was April, the days were still short, and already, the darkness was beginning to spread. The New

Marine Tower lit up, and the harbor navigation lights started running. Even the lights of the shop were reflected in Misa's cup of coffee.

Misa gulped down the mug full of the harbor night, and looked out the window. "I always dreamed of being the captain of a small ship, and traveling around the world. I'd say all my hellos and goodbyes in harbors like this."

"Hmm...I always wanted to be either a poet or an astronaut," Riber mused. He suddenly got a distant look in his eyes. "But you've still got a good chance for your dream...that's great."

"A good chance?" Misa asked.

"Yeah. It's wonderful if you can pursue your dreams. Don't throw them away, like I did."

Riber's eyes conveyed a seriousness which surprised Misa. Her "dream" was really a romantic fib she'd just made up. Actually, if she had any dream at all, it was forever to remain "Daddy's little girl." But as she knew there was no way for that dream to come true, she was currently in the process of searching for something new.

"Why did you abandon your dream?" she asked. As soon as she did so, though, she regretted it. There are some subjects that people should never broach, and judging from his expression, this was one of them.

"Well," Riber began, "you saw that my Dad's a tough, iron-fisted old soldier. He enrolled me in officer's academy against my will." He spoke briefly, but she could tell there was a lot going on in his head that he wasn't saying. She thought Riber's Dad sounded like her own inflexible, military father.

"Well, if that's the case, why don't you just drop out of the academy?"

Ah, she didn't need to hear this! She felt like she was poking him with burning hot tongs.

“Ultimately, I guess I just don't have the courage to disobey him. And it's not like I'm *opposed* to the military, really. So I just keep getting dragged along.” Riber let out a hollow laugh.

But Misa instinctively knew there was more to it than Riber let on. It wasn't that he had no reason to quit; in his own way, he was merely accepting the necessity of the military in his life.

Quaffing the last of his now-cold coffee, Riber checked his watch. “Shall we get going?” he asked.

They walked through a park with a view of the harbor. The cold wind was sending chills down Misa's spine. Riber removed his jacket and draped it around the girl's shoulders. This above all made her feel warmer, and she felt the lingering heat from his body. The two of them felt tranquil and calm.

Then, a jet fighter tore through the night above them, enthusiastically smashing through the starry sky. Riber's eyes followed the fighter's trail, then stopped. “Oh look,” he exclaimed, “there's Mars.”

Misa looked to where he was pointing and saw a shining star. It was the first time she had ever seen it. Because she had never been interested in astronomy, she had never really noticed any of the heavenly bodies.

“It's beautiful.”

The two of them gazed at Mars for a short while. Misa wished she could lock this moment up and keep it forever.



食事に入った店にはミンメイが……



ライバーから、うれしいプレゼント

Riber said, "If I get space duty, I'd like to go to Mars."

"That's romantic..."

"Romantic, huh? Hmm...it looks pretty from here, but really, it's all deserts and windstorms."

"So why do you want to go, then?"

"I'm interested purely in the science of it. Also, I'd like to escape the war, if I can."

To Misa, this sounded odd. "Escape the war?" she asked.

"I can't kill people the way other soldiers can," Riber explained. "There's got to be a solution that doesn't involve becoming a murderer."

Misa stiffened. "My father has killed people in war. Is he a murderer?"

Riber's face fell, and it was obvious he knew he'd said the wrong thing. He had forgotten that he was speaking to the daughter of the decorated Commodore Hayase.

"Sorry," he said at last. "I shouldn't have said that."

However, Misa's mood was beyond repair. She felt that Riber had insulted her father. She took off Riber's jacket and handed it back to him.

"I'm not cold anymore," she said, although the opposite was true: her heart and body were ice-cold.

"I'm sorry," Riber said again. "I've upset you."

"No, not at all." She tried to flash a grin, but it looked hollow and unconvincing.

They continued trudging through the park, and didn't speak even two or three words to each other. They were like two gears completely misaligned, and any words they could say slipped through the gears' teeth.

Riber escorted Misa to her door, but even after he left, she felt sour.

“I’m home,” she called.

“Welcome back,” said her mother. “Did you have fun?”

“Yes, lots of fun,” she answered brusquely, and started climbing the stairs. “But it’s been a long day and I’m tired, so I’m going to bed.”

Her mother looked worriedly up the stairs after her. “She was so looking forward to this,” she said. “I wonder what happened?”

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” Misa’s father said, not looking up from the newspaper. “You can understand a young girl’s mood swings?”

“I hope nothing bad happened...”

“Hmmm.” Commodore Hayase’s eyes rose from his newspaper, and a worried look spread across his face. “As far as Riber’s concerned, I’m sure he didn’t pull anything. He’s quite a good lad,” he said, and then fell back to his newspaper. But the furrow on his brow didn’t go away completely. He read the paper thoroughly from one end to the other, as if trying to forget his worry.

“Riber, you idiot.” Misa threw her pillow against the wall. Then her favorite teddy bear hurtled through the air. Then a doll bounced off the wall.

When she had run out of nearby things to throw, Misa calmed down a bit. She picked up her huge pillow and plunked herself down on the bed. In her mind, she recalled Riber’s form.

“And it’s not like I’m *opposed* to the military, really,” she recalled him saying.

“So you’re not anti-military?” she responded in thought.

“That’s pretty much right,” he answered.

“But people always get killed in wars,” she pointed out.

“There’s got to be a better solution than murder,” the Riber in her imagination said. His face turned sorrowful. “In the end, I guess the army is just a necessary evil,” he concluded, then gave a heavy sigh. Misa lay on her bed face up.

Misa had heard from her classmates about the anti-war and anti-military movements. At the time, it seemed like a silly and naïve attitude to take. However, Riber believed in the same cause, and she wasn’t opposed to *him*. Deep inside, she felt an almost physical pain from the gap between reality and her ideal. And then, finally, she understood.

It wasn’t a repudiation of her father’s philosophy, it was an entirely new line of thinking. And as she thought more, she felt Riber draw near, larger than life and completely mesmerizing.

Completely reversed from the way she had felt when she first entered her room, Misa drifted into sleep feeling happy and content.

Riber, meanwhile, was fretting. He was contemplating how such a small, off-hand comment ended up making Misa so angry. How could he defuse her rage? And how could he communicate his own feelings?

A few days later, Riber appeared at the Hayase residence bearing a large box. Mrs. Hayase was both surprised and delighted to see this unexpected guest. Misa on the other hand had peevish look on her face. She knew that he had come to apologize, but somehow she couldn’t flip her feelings around and accept that.

“Thanks for the other day,” said Riber. “I had a really good time.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“I’m sorry for speaking out of turn then. Are you still upset?”

“No. Please forget about it,” Misa answered, more brusquely than she had intended. Inside, she was thinking, *No, no*, but her attitude remained stuck. Why couldn’t she be more open?

“Still, I want to apologize,” Riber said, handing the box to Misa.

“What is this?” asked Misa, and just this once, her face broke into an honest smile. At any rate, it was the first present she had ever received from Riber. And it was big, too.

She gazed hopefully at the box. “Is it all right if I open it?” she asked.

“I’ve been waiting for you to,” replied Riber.

Misa quickly undid the ribbon and tore off the wrapping paper.

“Oh my!” she cried, with wonder in her voice. It was a blue summer dress...a little childish maybe, but it suited her.

“I hope you like it.”

“It’s beautiful,” she breathed.

She held the dress up against her chest. “Well, Father,” she asked, “is it me?”

“It’s very you,” he replied. “You should thank Riber for such a splendid gift.”

“Of course,” said Misa, bowing her head. “Thank you very much, Riber.”

“Well,” he said, “It’s not very high-quality, really. The design is a little old-fashioned, and it was quite cheap. So I should be thanking you for making a big fuss over it.” He smiled brightly, but there was a far-off look in his eyes.

“We’d all love to see you in it,” said Misa’s father.

“Sure!” said Misa, already bounding joyfully up the stairs.

“Is it all right, getting such an expensive gift?” asked Commodore Hayase, a worried look on his face.

“It’s not important,” Riber shrugged. “It’s made her happy, hasn’t it? So it’s worth it.”

The Commodore noticed the distant look in Riber’s eyes.

“I assume there’s some reason...?” he said.

“Of course there is. But you’re making me feel a little ashamed, Commodore,” Riber answered with a bright laugh.

Mrs. Hayase grasped the situation. “Why, what on earth are you getting at?” she asked.

“All right, here’s the truth. That outfit was my younger sister’s.” For Riber, time seemed to stand still. The past started fraying, memories unraveling.

“If she had lived,” he continued, “she’d be about Misa’s age.”

“She passed away?”

“Yes...when the Unification War started, there was an outbreak of guerilla warfare around us. It became one of my incentives for joining the officers’ academy, but...”

“So it wasn’t recent.”

“No, it happened about a year and a half ago...No, wait. Not quite a year and a half. Anyway, both Misa’s looks and manner, even her way of speaking, resemble my sister’s...” Riber trailed off, cutting his words short. His buried feelings of longing suddenly gushed out. The Hayases understood and stayed silent. A single tear flowed down Riber’s cheek.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Overcome by memories, I’m afraid.”

“I think we can all sympathize,” said Mrs. Hayase, closing her eyes.

“Well, at any rate, that’s it. When I saw Misa, I was reminded of my sister. So you might think it improper, but I decided to give her clothes to Misa, so that she could try

them on..." He stopped himself short again. The three of them were bathed in a warm glow from the early spring sun as a ray moved slowly through the room.

"But...please don't mention any of this to her. It would only make her upset again."

"Look! It fits me perfectly!" Misa cried as she tumbled down the stairs and stood before the three onlookers.

She was in the blue dress, sunlight glinting in her hair, her shadow spreading across the floor. A warm breeze caressed her ankles. The scene looked like a painting.

"What is it?" she asked. "You all look shocked."

"Er, not at all. We were just stunned by your beauty."

"Oh Riber, don't talk like that!" Misa twisted in embarrassment.

But Riber wasn't really looking at Misa; he saw his late sister standing there. If Misa's flaxen hair had been golden blonde, they would have been identical. But that difference merely reaffirmed that his lost sister was gone.

"What's wrong?" Misa asked.

Riber blinked, and saw Misa again, looking worried.

"I was just overcome by how lovely you look."

"Flatterer! I can see right through you, you know."

"Sorry, sorry. Really, I just got some dust in my eye is all."

"Well, *that* spoiled the mood!" Misa laughed. And now, their cogs were again meshed together, running in concert, as destiny continued marching forward...

Under the glistening July sun, the outside of the Alien Star Ship-1, which had fallen to South Ataria Island, was too hot to touch. The atmosphere was muggy with humidity and salt which permeated the entire island. One gunshot was fired, echoing through the air.

The Japan Autonomous Region was the first to hear that gunshot. UN Forces Far East High Command immediately dispatched troops to South Ataria Island to defend the A.S.S.-1. Both Misa's father and Riber's father were summoned.

"Well, I'm off," said Commodore Hayase.

"Take care, Dear."

"Father, please return safely."

Misa's father grinned and lifted her up in a big hug. "Don't worry. I'll be back before you know it."

Misa brushed his cheek with a goodbye kiss, and he in turn kissed her. The unshaven stubble hurt, a little. He put Misa down and picked up his luggage. Misa hurriedly grasped another suitcase.

"That one's too heavy for you," he said.

It certainly was. Even using all of her strength, she could barely lift it off the ground. Her father made a move to get the suitcase, but she refused him.

"It's all right," she grunted. "I'll carry it to your cabin."

"No, it's not all right, Misa," he said firmly. "Even though you're family, civilians aren't allowed on battleships. We'll most likely see some action. As an officer's daughter, you should understand this."

Realizing the futility of arguing, she put the suitcase down. With a smile, her father lightly picked it up.

“Be sure to take care of everything while I’m gone,” he told her.

Misa’s mother nodded in assent.

The Commodore looked back as he climbed the ramp onto the ship. In the space between the husband and wife, the thread of long-cherished love pulled taut, but of course it remained strong and unbroken.

Similar partings were being acted out all along the ship’s perimeter. Even Riber was there. His farewell to his father, Herbert, was much simpler. Just a silent handshake, and that was all. There were no words of farewell, but they each understood the other’s feelings.

Family, friends, and lovers were all lined up on the pier. With similar sadness in their eyes, the men gazed at spouses, mothers, fathers, and loved ones. If asked, they would deny it, but they were heartbroken thinking they might never return to these people.

Some early cicadas were buzzing in a distant tree. Seagulls were squawking, fighting over some small fish. Besides these sounds, the waterfront was silent. Suddenly, the quiet was broken as the military band started playing a lively march.

The fender lifted and the anchor was winched up. The steam whistle sounded, drowning out the marching band.

The aircraft carrier *Sentinel* broke away from the pier. A tug boat helped pull it from dock. From each of the piers, ships like the battleship *Minsk* and the ancient aircraft carrier *Intrepid* began to depart. Surrounded by many smaller ships, the UN Forces Third Mobile Naval Division majestically moved out from Yokosuka Harbor.

The crowds waiting at the pier gazed on until the last ship disappeared over the horizon. As the *Sentinel* vanished from sight, Misa put her hands together and prayed from her heart, "Please God, let my father come back quickly and safely."

Suddenly, she noticed a horrible stench, like sulfur and grease mixed together. It was the first time she had smelled the stink of war, but she still didn't know the true misery and hardship contained within the odor.

Arriving home with her mother, Misa was almost shocked by how empty the house felt. Things that should be there weren't. The oft-smoked pipe was gone from its place on the shelf. Things she should have been doing, she couldn't. She always sat on her father's lap in the cozy armchair while he smoked his pipe. Voices she should have heard, she didn't. Her father wouldn't be scolding her. He wouldn't be praising her, either.

Misa threw her arms around her mother and wept. Mrs. Hayase gently stroked Misa's hair. In spite of the emptiness Mrs. Hayase felt at the absence of her husband, she didn't cry. From the moment she became the wife of a soldier, she had started preparing for a day like this. But, when she really thought about it, she became worried and upset. He had tried to encourage her by telling her things like, "Be sure to take care of everything while I'm gone," and she was resigned to more days of hardship. But thinking about it all made the day seem cruel. She longed with all her heart for the day when he would return.

To the Hayase mother and daughter, that summer seemed never-ending. The days passed, hollow and empty, and then the next day would come, exactly the same. Not a day went by in which they didn't dwell on thoughts of the husband and father. Misa would meet with Riber, but there was no joy in it; her heart was off wherever her father was.

The conflict stretched on. The Anti-UN Forces put up an unexpectedly strong opposition, and the UN commanders spent day after day with no rest. Because the island was small, mopping up the guerillas was not a difficult task, but no sooner was it done then more would invade from the neighboring islands. They came, slipping through the gaps in the defense network. The commanders fought alongside the weary enlisted men. Supply lines were cut, and the days between replenishments grew longer.

The one thing that could alleviate the soldiers' fatigue was a letter from home. Only when the mail arrived did their grimness turn to smiles. They greedily devoured the letters and read them over and over again.

The families left behind, for their part, were reading the letters from the troops and rejoicing and worrying by turns. The mail was delivered just once a week, but they wrote every day. And always on mail day, they would be gathered around the post box, clutching their treasured letters. But among them, there would sometimes be a final letter, delivered personally by an officer. The officer would be standing gravely by the door, a mournful expression on his face, and the family's happiness would melt into despair.

During the long summer, such an officer never visited the Hayases. And before Misa's pale skin was bronzed by the summer sun, the conflict had ended. Finally, the last of the guerillas were eliminated from the area surrounding South Ataria Island, and the hot summer continued in peace. Still, Commodore Hayase had to process the wrap-up of the conflict, so he didn't return home for a while.

That day, an unexpected visitor arrived at the Hayase residence. Misa and her mother were preparing dinner when they heard the door open and the visitor was standing before

them. Misa's mother dropped the dish she was holding, and the cup slipped out of Misa's hand.

"I'm home," said the visitor, Misa's father. He stood in the doorway, holding his heavy suitcase. Mrs. Hayase rushed toward him, stepped on the forgotten pieces of the dish. Then she stopped, bent down, and started picking up the broken shards.

"Don't do that now," the Commodore said. "Come here." He embraced and kissed her with the love born of two months of sadness and loneliness. After the lengthy kiss, he looked into her eyes long and hard. "You look a little tired," he said finally.

"And you've gotten much thinner," she replied.

It was true. Two months of worry had eaten away at his body, making him almost gaunt. His wife had been worn down the same way.

The couple gazed at each other for a long time, Misa all but forgotten. Which was fine with her – she understood that her parents were a man and woman reunited, and a child had no place in this reunion.

Finally, her father turned to her and said, "Hello Misa."

She leaped to him, shouting, "Welcome home, Father!" Then her eyes grew moist and the room blurred. Misa's mother's body fell slack from relief, and she started crying.

That night, he told them about the fight against the Anti-UN Forces: how the enemy crept in in the dead of night, about their surprise attack, and about the lives lost in the battle. They talked well into the evening.

Misa's eyes glittered as she listened to his tale. To her, her father was just like Superman, fighting the Anti-UN Forces who threatened the unity of the planet, and restoring peace to the world. Today, more than ever, she thought he was splendid.

But still, Riber's words from before continued to gnaw at her.

"Killing people isn't a solution."

What her father did was right, wasn't it? And if her father was right, then Riber's assertion was wrong. To Misa, it seemed like both of them were right, but that was impossible. She couldn't tell which one was correct, and she started to feel uneasy, but she drove the thoughts out of her head and continued to listen, enraptured, to her father's story.

And on that day, tranquility returned to the Hayase household.

That tranquility, however, only lasted the night. The following day, the officers from the Defensive Battle of South Ataria Island got together for a surprise visit. People whose life Commodore Hayase had saved, people who had saved him, wounded people, people who had downed the enemy, all of them came to visit and talk about the battle. Among them were Riber's father Herbert (who had brought Riber along with him) and a charming bachelor, somewhere in his forties, named Commander Global. There was only perhaps a five-year difference between Global and Hayase, but Global had never been married and as such had no children. It wasn't really his choice, it was just the way fate had played out. In spite of being childless, or perhaps because of it, Global liked children. The truth was, if he had had a daughter, he would have liked her to be like Misa. Despite the difference in their ages, they became fast friends, and Global often found himself visiting the Hayase residence and spending long hours chatting with Misa. Misa's father joked that Misa had two daddies now.

With her parents and Riber, and now with the addition of Global, Misa's world continued revolving slowly and calmly. Before long, a year had passed, and Misa turned

thirteen. She finished the first year of middle school and was about to start the second. Probably that year – 2003 – had the most ups and downs of any in her life.

In March, Global got married, to a woman he met through the Hayases. His fiancée was a stunningly beautiful young lady in her twenties, and everyone found the match to be faintly unbelievable. Her name was Miho, and she came from a highly respectable family.

At the wedding, while exchanging vows, a spotlight fell upon the couple. Global looked a little startled, and his embarrassed bride hid her eyes. Her dress glittered in the lights, throwing sparkles off among the guests. Everyone gasped in wonder at the beauty of the scene.

Of course, Misa was also mesmerized, and she daydreamed about the day that she might wear a bridal gown, resplendent in a white dress. And naturally, Riber would be next to her. Upon seeing a wedding dress, any girl will fantasize. Such daydreams are pure, and thus beautiful. And they make the girls themselves beautiful.

Then, in the dwindling light of the March evening, the bride and groom walked down the aisle, and everyone applauded and threw rice. The couple bowed and tossed out the bouquet, which Misa caught, convincing her that she was destined to be with Riber...but that conviction was like a castle made of sand.

After he got married, Global didn't visit the Hayases much. It was just to be expected, really, but it led to drab days for Misa. And whenever Global did visit, he brought his wife along. This was also just to be expected, but it likewise left Misa feeling bored and excluded.

The season started to change. Flowers and trees started blooming, and the faint sound of brooks could be heard. And then, among the fluttering, falling cherry blossoms, Misa started school. Riber for his part finished his second year at Officers' Academy, and was appointed a Second Lieutenant.

He stood smartly at the Hayases's front step. Neatly dressed in his uniform, he snapped a salute as Misa opened the door.

"Riber Fruhling," he announced, "recently given the rank of Second Lieutenant."

Commodore Hayase, who was also at the door, saluted back solemnly. Such was the military, a world Misa hadn't entered. She was stunned by how different Riber looked, and though he had gone to some far-off place.

He saluted her as well. But the way he dropped his hand was pure, familiar Riber. The difference was only because of his uniform. Misa wondered if she would look as formal too, if she were wearing one.

"Riber, wait a moment."

"What is it?"

He stooped down and put his ear near her mouth, and she spontaneously kissed his cheek. It was the first kiss she had ever given a boy, and she was surprised at her own boldness.

"Just because the uniform looks so good on you."

"Thank you. And you're entering the second year of junior high, right?
Congratulations."

"Thank *you*. And someday, I'd like to try on a military uniform, too."

“Oh,” Riber said, “girls shouldn’t wear a uniform like this. Oops, I shouldn’t say things of that sort in front of an equal-rights advocate like Commodore Hayase.”

The four of them laughed, but although he played it off as a joke, Riber was actually expressing his real feelings. He didn’t like the idea of women going into battle, carrying guns, or killing people.

And even though he said that, Misa couldn’t abandon her longing for a military uniform. She decided that she would follow the same path as Riber, and in five years she’d be where he was now. For every day’s work that he put in, she’d have to do more, and then she might actually overtake him.

Riber’s path, however, was approaching a crossroads that Misa knew nothing about as yet. Because of this, Misa’s own path would change. And then... And then...

And time passed. And destiny flowed along, tossing people around in its rough currents.

The cherry blossoms fell, the hydrangeas changed color under the heavy rains, and summer arrived. The stifling air was bewitching, and was suffused with the fragrance of life. Cicadas chirped at people walking under the trees. At night, the new Moon rose, looking like a sharp, poisonous serpent’s fang.

It was another sweltering day, and Misa was in Shinjuku Gyoen National Park. The buzzing of the cicadas was deafening, and the sunlight was blinding. She was lingering in the shade of a tree holding a wide-brimmed hat. She was wearing the blue dress that Riber had given her.

Standing in the copse, there was an oppressively strong smell of grass, and the air was filled with the chattering, shouting voices of children playing in the pool. She stood still,



お祝いに、ライバーのほおへキス



ライバーとの別れ、初恋の終わり……

dripping sweat in the heat. Because she loved summer, she didn't feel terribly uncomfortable. The day wasn't very humid, so standing in the shade of the trees was pleasantly cool, and a small breeze wafted by, coiling itself around her.

Suddenly, hands covered her eyes. "Guess who?" a voice asked. She knew it was Riber, but this seemed a little childish for him.

"Riber, most likely," she replied.

"Bingo."

Misa turned around to see Riber standing there, his face bright and smiling. Too bright for his usual low-key demeanor. For a while, they said little. Riber found it difficult to talk to Misa when she so resembled his late sister. Misa of course had no idea that this was the cause of his reticence.

Finally, Riber spoke. "I told you before that I wanted to go to Mars, right?"

"Yes, you did," Misa answered, as a small sense of dread welled within her.

"Well, today, my application was approved! I'm going to Mars!"

Misa heard something inside of her break.

The buzzing of the cicadas, the voices of the children, all of it faded.

I'm going to Mars! I'm going to Mars! I'm going to... At Riber's words, Misa's heart felt like an empty hole. She didn't even know how she could remain standing. But from inside her, another girl, another voice answered him.

"Um, oh. That's really wonderful. I'm so happy for you!" The other girl frantically concealed Misa's shock and agitation. But the words she spoke weren't the ones Misa wanted to say.

“Whew,” said Riber. “Thank you. It all happened so suddenly, I was really worried that you’d be angry or something.”

“Of course not! It’s your dream come true, so of course I’m happy!”

I’m starting to hate Riber. Hate him, HATE HIM.

“And I’m sure your father’s efforts helped push my application through,” Riber added. For perhaps the first time ever, she resented her father.

“I’d like to thank him in person,” continued Riber, “but until then, please give him my sincerest gratitude.” But his words simply passed through the hollow void inside Misa.

Riber looked up into the blue summer sky. “People will be migrating to Mars before long,” he mused. “I’ll be one step ahead of the pack, huh?”

Misa finally spoke. “I will join the military and go to Mars myself,” she resolved.

“Great!” Riber said with a chuckle. “I’ll be waiting for you.”

Riber thought she was joking, but she was completely serious, and determined to become a soldier. After all, joining up was the easiest way to get to Mars. She would become a soldier to follow him. As she thought about it, tears welled up in her eyes.

Riber looked at his watch and said, “Well, it’s time to go. There’s a lot of procedural red tape that’s keeping me busy. I’ll drop by your house tonight to express my thanks to your family properly.”

Misa closed her eyes and put out her lips. Riber smiled and planted a small kiss on her forehead. And then he spoke:

“So...” *Misa prayed for time to stop.*

“...I...” *The seconds slowed down.*

“...guess...” Ah, if I have to say “Don’t go” a hundred thousand times to get him to stay, I’ll say it millions of times.

“...it’s...” No! This can’t be happening! I’ll become a soldier and follow him to Mars. Tears continued to well up in Misa’s eyes.

“...good...” No more, no more! Please God, don’t let this instant ever end!

But... God can be cruel.

“...bye.”

At the sound of that last word, time’s slowly grinding cogs popped back to life. The dammed-up seconds burst through in torrents around Misa. She was swept away like a small stone in a hurtling current. Completely dumbfounded, completely washed away.

Then, she could hear the whine of the cicadas. She saw Riber waving as he walked away. She waved back, looking like a wind-up doll.

The evening cicadas started buzzing: *Weeeeeeeep... weep, weep, weep... weeeeeeeeeeeep...*

And Misa knew that her first love had ended.

White Letters



Dear Misa,

How are you? I've been doing fine. After a long, three-month journey, I've finally reached Mars. It wasn't a comfortable trip, and that's an understatement! When so many people are crammed into such a small space for that long, people tend to get stir crazy, to a greater or lesser extent...so we were all pretty ecstatic when we arrived here. There's nothing living here; it's a dead world. All day long, sandstorms rage and gust, and our base is just a fragile little outpost of humanity, clinging to the bare rock in the middle of those storms.

My work is mostly observation. I watch the movement of the high and low air pressure fronts, which is useful in predicting sandstorms. However, we have to use an annoying method very different from weather forecasting on Earth, since we're still in the process of mapping out Mars's weather patterns. The rest of the job involves watching the heavens. Because the atmosphere is thin and there isn't much light, the stars are astonishingly clear. When I'm on watch, and everybody else is asleep, I turn the telescope to distant earth. It looks like a small blue jewel sparkling in space. It seems close enough to reach out and grab, but I know that there's a three-month voyage across the sea of stars separating it from me. In the entire solar system, with its wealth of air and water, it's the only world that holds life, but it's also the only world that has wars. Here on Mars, that makes me extremely sad.

Inside the base, life is pretty regular – that is to say, monotonous. Everyone wakes up on schedule, does their jobs on schedule, and goes to sleep on schedule. Of course we're all aware of the state of affairs on earth, but it doesn't really affect us here on the red planet. You'd probably be surprised at our self-absorption. Mostly, we just look for ways

to kill time. Some people read the same books over and over, others play games. Henry, the guy next door (he's a reaction furnace engineer), is making a ship in a bottle. Me, I've started writing poetry inspired by the Martian landscape.

So here's a really terrible poem I wrote (please don't laugh at how awful it is!):

Surrounded by a lonely sky and desolate land.

The land is the crimson of blood from a long-past war,

The sky is dyed violet with sorrow.

The road was bulging with people,

The stores were bustling with energy,

Boisterous voices were heard in the bars,

Happiness filled every home.

However,

Now there is no one.

Time has dragged on, and the people have vanished.

The wind blows, and the long hair tosses and flutters.

The rattle of the thoughts of men echoes in the wind.

In the ancient city,

At the decaying pillar,

A hollow sound rings out.

On a different topic, we're currently prepping heat plates for the polar base. The plates will melt the ice at the polar cap, which will help change the climate of Mars to make it habitable. That said, it'll take nearly a hundred years for that to happen.

The staff at the polar base rotates out completely every three months. I haven't been assigned there yet, but the guys who have say that it's pretty tough work. Obviously, it's freezing up there. But right now, I'm dying to slurp up all the information about Mars that I can get my greedy little hands on, so I think the polar base might actually be a lot of fun for me.

Uh-oh, it's already 2 AM! I'd love to keep on writing, but I've got to get up early. There's still so much that I want to tell you. The Martian landscape, the wind, my friends, etc., etc. However, I should really stop here.

I'm including a goodnight kiss with this letter.

P.S. I'm sending you some Martian sand in a separate package.

*

Dear Riber,

I got your letter today. It was waiting for me on the table when I got home. You seem to be doing better than ever! Your enthusiasm about exploring a new and different world really shines through in your words.

It's November already, and the wind is getting chilly. It's too cold now to wear the dress you gave me, unfortunately.

And so, I've firmly decided to join the military. When I talked with my parents about it, my mother started crying (I must be a terrible daughter to make my mother cry). My father didn't say anything.

Later, he said that he didn't think I should become a soldier. He said that my future husband (!!! I'm only 13!!) would be a splendid military man, and I should be content with that.

Right now, I think about thirty percent of the armed forces is made up of women. But they still face a lot of discrimination, so I understand my parents' reluctance. I think that they at least want me to wait until I finish high school before deciding.

But I'm going to do my best. Because I hate to lose, even to my parents, I didn't bring it up again (I'm also stubborn!!). I'm sure I'll be able to persuade them eventually.

To change the subject, I thought the poem you wrote in your letter was very beautiful, so of course I didn't laugh at it at all. Is the Martian landscape really as lovely as you make it sound? If so, I absolutely *must* go to Mars myself, and I expect I will, once I've enlisted.

Since you've been gone, I miss you each and every day. It's just like last summer, when my father was sent to South Ataria Island. And whenever I look at the picture we took together, I'm overwhelmed with memories.

Well, because I was so excited to get your letter, I can't think of anything else to say, so I'll just leave it here. But I'll write to you every day.

*

Dear Misa,

I was surprised to hear you say you wanted to join the forces. When you said it before, I confess I never expected you to go through with it. I think I mentioned this before, but I don't like the idea of women becoming soldiers. There's a fundamental contradiction for a woman to bear children and to kill people. It's not because I'm sexist or anything like that. So although I know you want it, I still think you shouldn't. But of course, that's merely my opinion. Take it for what it's worth.

Also, although I'd love to get a letter from you every day, I won't be able to reply as often. Quite simply, I don't have the time here on Mars.

0700 – wake up. 0830 – start work. 1730 – finish work. 2400 – go to sleep.

Now if I just typed that out and made dozens of copies, I'd have an accurate journal of my year at the polar base. But at least there's peace and quiet here.

So while I'd be ecstatic to get a letter from you every day, I'm afraid I'll be a poor correspondent.

*

Merry Christmas, Riber.

Because you said that you couldn't respond even if I wrote a letter every day, I haven't written in a long time.

You said you really don't like the idea of women soldiers. But if they're in a non-combat position, like you are, are you still against it?

Because Father is a soldier, I don't think he really opposes me becoming one.

This letter is very late, I know. Today, I'm wondering what Christmas presents I'll get. Father started the process of enrolling me in officer cadet training, which was the loveliest gift I could receive. (Of course, he usually still treats me like a child. Last year, he gave me a giant stuffed bear! Ugh! I'm not a kid anymore!)

So I think Father has finally given in, but even though my mother hasn't brought it up, I still don't think she approves.

Still, next March I'll be starting Officers' Academy! I'm never going to be a high school student... Did you know? Toyo Eiwa Elementary School will be the last traditional school on my résumé! I attended junior high school for two years, but it won't be going on my records. When I get to Mars, my final school to be listed will be Far East Officers' Academy.

Here in Tokyo, not much snow has fallen, but it's winter everywhere. When I go out, I really need to bundle up, and when I'm inside, I don't want to let go of the heater or stop eating tangerines. But where you are, it's much colder, right?

Now, my mother is teaching me how to knit a scarf. Because it's the first time I've ever knitted anything, I'm not progressing very quickly. Actually, I wanted to send it to you as a Christmas present, but since I have no idea when I'll finish it, please accept the promise of it instead. (And please don't expect the actual scarf. It'll probably turn out to be a total disaster! I've got no talent for this kind of thing!)

So, I won't get a reply until after New Year's, but that's okay. I'm using my winter vacation to go skiing in Nice. I'll stay until New Year's Eve.

I've always been hopeless as a skier, so this time I'm really going to try with all my might! I don't really have any time for proper training, but I think it'll be useful when I

get to where you are. I'll be working on cross-country skiing and driving a snow mobile, so when I get to the Martian polar base, I'll be able to show off my skill!

I get the feeling 2004 will be a wonderful year!

*

Happy New Year, Riber.

I haven't heard from you in a while, and I'm a little worried. Could you reply, please?

*

Merry Christmas, Misa. Also, Happy New Year!

I'm sorry. Since I was at the polar base from a little before Christmas until January, I didn't receive your letter until well after New Year's. I haven't had any free time to write a response lately, but I haven't forgotten – I've been thinking about it every day. I'm really happy for you that you've entered officer's academy. Congratulations! I have nothing but admiration for your perseverance. You must tell me your secret someday! If I had just a tenth of your drive, I think my father would be happier with me. I'd love to be able to follow in your footsteps!

Life at the polar base was more than I expected. *Everything* there freezes and turns to ice. Not only does your breath freeze, but rather lovely little ice crystals form on the tip of your nose. Observing the weather was part of the job, but we've also got to install the heat plates, and we only have a little time each day. Even with ten people working as

quickly as possible, we could only install three heat plates per day. The installation rate has been cut by about 50%.

At any rate, it's always a war against the cold. Don't try cross-country skiing here unless you think you'd enjoy turning into a human icicle in a matter of moments. That's how cold it is.

Anyway, I've got a report that desperately needs to be written, so I'll have to stop here. Again, sorry for the delay.

*

Dear Riber,

No letters arrived today, and I feel a little lonely. My last letter was the final one I ever wrote as a junior high school student, and now I'm writing one as a cadet at Far East Officers' Academy.

This is the first time in my life that I've left home and moved into a girls' dormitory. Because I'm an only child, I'm used to doing whatever I like whenever I like, but it's different here. Since I now live in a five-person room, we've all got to work around everyone else's schedules.

To be frank, the classes are really tough. Because the subjects are all high school level, they're difficult for someone like me, who never even finished middle school.

Furthermore, my classmates (that sounds wrong, but I'm not sure what else to call them... Upperclassmen, maybe?) are all older, and high school graduates, so there's a huge gap between my skill level and theirs.

Still, everyone works really hard, and the teachers are very polite and professional.
(Heh, heh, heh... I'll catch up to them all one of these days, Watson!)

But what I really hate with all my body and soul is outdoor drills. The equipment is heavy, your clothes get all muddy, you run some ungodly amount of kilometers, the classes still pile on the work, even though you're exhausted... (These words would, I'm sure, make my Father weep in shame, but I guess I've grown rebellious.)

This letter is much longer than my previous ones, isn't it? Perhaps I'm trying to change everything *too* fast, but sometimes I think it's just impossible to.

Still, I won't lose heart! And one day, I'll be a fully grown soldier!

I'm sorry... I'm writing these words under my covers, using a flashlight. I'm a little worried that one of the upperclassmen might catch me! Tomorrow morning, we have to run five laps around the training area, so I apologize, but I'm signing off.

*

Second Lt. Riber Fruhling,

Let me dispense with the preliminaries. I wish to extend my gratitude for your thoughtful words recently. I must find myself agreeing that sending my daughter Misa to military academy before she had even finished her compulsory education was a rash decision. Furthermore, it is indeed a fact that I entered her into the academy in an exceptional manner, by using my political influence.

No doubt you will think me an overindulgent father. It pleased me enormously to think that my only child's desire was to carry on the family legacy.

And therefore, I am committed to do all I can for her.

You presented your opinion, that because of a parent's attempt at aid, the girl is now struggling as best she can, but deep in sorrow. I, however, do not find this to be the case. If Misa works her hardest, I believe that will be sufficient for her to excel, despite the supposed handicap of her relative youth. I have no "angle" or "scheme" here, but having been talking to Misa, it appears that the teachers may be going somewhat easy on her, and she has also been making friends among the other cadets.

I also understand that you are worried that Misa will be placed on a battlefield, carry a gun on her shoulder or some such. For several generations, the Hayase family has had a legacy of career military service, and I believe that Misa was brought up not to be ashamed of that legacy. Moreover, that sweet and kind girl has no first-hand knowledge of death or murder. At any rate, when she graduates, she will be an officer, and will not be participating in any battles on the ground, just as you haven't.

Naturally, because of her determined and competitive personality, I am concerned that if she detects my influence in her affairs, she will rebel. And thus, I earnestly request that you say nothing of this to her. Furthermore, placing my trust in you, I humbly beg you to keep the contents of this letter private, and talk to no one else about it.

Signed not as a soldier, but as a doting father,

Takashi Hayase

P.S. Burn after reading.

*

Dear Misa,

Thank you very much for the sweater. I found it and the scarf you sent me earlier to be extremely helpful when I was stationed at the polar base. At any rate, shut in with permafrost all around me, I had the sweater and scarf with me at all times. Also, thanks for the books! You sent me everything that I'd read about in the newspaper book review that looked interesting. *Shubie Borts – His Life of Bleach and Isolation* was especially great. I heartily recommend it to you.

Life at the Mars Base never changes, as regular and systematic as clockwork, but it doesn't seem like Earth is the same. Every day, the front page of the newspaper is covered with horrible news: guerilla wars have broken out everywhere, and it looks like the national liberation fronts aren't quieting down anytime soon. When I was on earth, even normal events weighed on my mind, but now that I'm on Mars I'm even more worried. If things keep going in this direction, I wonder whether Earth will even be all right? When I get the paper, I immediately search the headlines for the name "Tokyo," and it's only after I don't find it that I can relax. If I *do* see it, I have to read the entire article from beginning to end. I'm just making sure that nothing bad happens to the area you live in.

*

Dear Riber,

It seems really quick, but it's been one year now. A year since that day in Shinjuku Gyoen National Park, when you told me you were leaving for Mars. It's been as hot all day today as it was then.

Why couldn't I say what I wanted to that day?

"Riber, don't go. I love you."

But I simply couldn't say it. If somehow I could see you now, though, no one would be able to stop me.

I'm feeling melancholy today.

I'm wearing a mourning dress, remembering my first love, which has died.

(This letter was never sent.)

*

Dear Riber,

I apologize – I've been so busy lately that I haven't had time to write. In order to catch up with all the people around me, I've set aside all my free time for studying, and weeks pass in the blink of an eye. Recently, things have gotten much worse here on Earth. I know you're aware of this – the bad news tends to stand out a little more in the headlines, doesn't it?

The SDF-1 (which my friends say stands for "*Sugoku Dekai Fune*," i.e. "Really Big Ship") Restoration Project is running well behind schedule, and the cost is ballooning astronomically. Furthermore, defense spending has gone way up in order to build a



ライバーへの想いをこめて、マフラーを編む



ライバーの死——悲しみに心を閉ざして

space fleet, and military spending in general has sharply increased. Naturally, the world economy is taking a huge hit because of this.

It's just a rumor, but I've heard that most of the military budget is going towards a single mysterious project. (*Editor's Note: This is the Grand Cannon Project.*) I wonder if it's true.

Because of all this, everyone in the academy is getting a lot of criticism and hostility. Even I, when I go out into town, get nothing but cold stares. Maybe I should start wearing civilian clothes when I go out...

Oh! Speaking of civilian clothes, I've got some terrible news – the blue dress you gave me doesn't fit anymore (and it's *not* because I've gotten fat or anything – REALLY!!). I've been growing taller, I guess. It's natural, of course, but I still regret it.

I tried to put it on the other day, but it's hopeless. My arms stick out from the sleeves and the skirt is much too short. Before, when I wore it for one of my friends, she kept calling me "Blue-Dress Misa." Unfortunately, I think the dress is going to stay inside my cabinet. I'd like to give it to my daughter when she's old enough, but for now, I have to say farewell to it.

But still, why do they have to attack people like Father and me?

Hmm... I reread what I just wrote. I think I'm a little incoherent right now. It's probably because one of the tabloids ran an article today titled "The Truth about Officer's Academy." Everyone here is furious about it.

But really, since November arrived, everyone here has suddenly gotten very busy and flustered. If things keep going this way, I'm worried about what'll happen next.

P.S. I've included a photo of me that one of my friends took. If you look at it closely, maybe you can see that I've grown (NOT gotten fat!!!).

*

Dear Misa,

I'm a little surprised... last year, you never talked like this or showed any interest in topics like increased defense spending. Perhaps being around an older crowd is rubbing off on you...?

Concerning the backlash against UN Forces personnel, it sounds like people's concern about "The Alien Menace" is beginning to weaken. The crash of the A.S.S.-1 originally gave people a serious shock, and everybody understood that there were extraterrestrials out there with enough firepower to cause a lot of damage to the planet. But that was five years ago, and nothing's happened since. Once the danger's past, people tend to move on, and everyone's probably starting to forget the terror they felt before. Therefore, I guess they've started to get annoyed about paying taxes to prepare for an alien invasion which may or may not ever come.

The thing is, if they say the Overttechnology of the A.S.S.-1 (they're calling it the SDF-1 now...?) is bad, then it's bad, despite the fact that it helps civilians as well as the military.

Oh wait, someone just walked in, and he's got a pen...

Hi, nice to meet you! I'm Henry Colton. I've heard all about you from Riber, who talks about you all the time. See ya!

Sorry, sorry. Henry from next door just walked in. Because he wrote on this letter, I can't really continue what I was saying. I was trying to write a sober, thoughtful letter, but that's ruined now. And since I can't delete his words before I transmit this letter, I guess I've just gotta be more vigilant. What a pain.

Still, don't be mad at Henry. He's a good guy. Next letter, he and I will send you a cool present.

*

Dear Riber,

The New Year arrived with a massive riot in Russia. 2005 has dawned with trouble in the air.

Troops are currently massing at South Ataria Island, and Father departed yesterday to defend the island again. I had a special pass, so I was able to see him off. It's sad to see any ship head out, but these soldiers might die (I don't want to jinx them, but it can't be helped – it's just the truth) so saying farewell to a military ship is especially hard. Since I became a cadet, I've tried to always be stoic, but I ended up crying, and Mother looks ten years older than she did the day before yesterday.

During the First Defensive Battle of South Ataria Island, every day was difficult and lonely, but it's not like that now, because every day I've got incredibly tough training. But I can't be there for Mother, and I kind of hate myself for that.

The SDF-1 Restoration Project was started in order to prepare for war with aliens, but the ship itself has become the symbol for the UN Government, so I guess I'm not surprised that it's become a major target for the Anti-Unification Forces.

Oh, why did the ship have to fall on South Ataria Island? If it had fallen further south, it would've fallen under the jurisdiction of the Antarctica Branch or the Australia Branch, and then Father wouldn't have to go off to battle...

*

Dear Riber,

Thank you! And thank Henry, too! I received your present today! You weren't lying when you said it was cool! I have the only ship-in-a-bottle made of Mars crystal in the entire world... no wait, in the entire *universe!*

Of all the presents I got for my fifteenth birthday, yours was by far the best. My heart is still thumping while thinking about the present that was better than my wildest dreams. I don't think I'll even be able to sleep tonight!

My bunkmates are all quite envious. The little Misa Hayase who's always dragging everyone else down has suddenly been transformed into a queen!

Thank you, Riber. It must have been hard work, collecting all that Mars crystal.

Thank you, Mr. Colton. I can't even imagine the painstaking skill and long hours it took to assemble such a beautiful ship.

Let me say it again: Thank you both very, VERY much!

Let me send you both a kiss of gratitude along with this letter. Since I think the kisses will arrive before the letter, you'd both better have a cheek prepared!

*

Dear Riber,

Suddenly, there's only a week left for my first term. Just the other day, I wrote an uneventful letter about my end of term, but really, something happened which I still can't believe.

It happened yesterday. All my friends finishing the first term and I went off to Hakone for a picnic. Since it was still March, and cold, we figured that Hakone would be on the off-season. Plus, there's a hotel there that Father knows.

Riding separately in a few cars, we went off to the hotel in Hakone. That night, we were pretty noisy into the wee hours. The next day, again by car, we visited Lake Ashi, Fuji Five Lakes, Jukai, and other places.

A lake with no one else around is a great thing, isn't it? But there's something a little sad about it, too. No matter how boisterous we got, our voices sank into the depths of the water. But...that's not important, really.

What happened was, we decided to go to a restaurant for lunch. As is often the case, there really wasn't much around except a family restaurant.

As soon as we walked into the place, the whole atmosphere changed. Before, the families eating were chatting away happily, but when we entered, the talk stopped, and

they just stared at us coldly. To be honest, I got a little scared. Everyone was looking at our military uniforms.

The girls said that they wanted to leave, but the boys were concerned about showing the proper military pride, so they strode forward and sat down boldly. The waitress didn't even bring us water and was very curt with us, but she still took our order.

But then, the food we ordered didn't arrive. The boys tried to show off their bravery by talking and joking loudly, but after a while, cracks began to appear in their façade. The girls were simply silent.

After a bit, some of the local no-good boys started harassing us. "Oops, sorry!" they'd say, spilling a glass of water on us. "It's my fault, sorry about that!" But they were grinning while they said it. And we heard them saying awful things about the military.

But we did our best just to ignore it. If a fight broke out, it'd be in all the papers, and that's exactly what the boys and their supporters wanted, no doubt. It was like enduring the most punishing training possible, but we withstood it.

When the food finally arrived, we ate it very quickly. I don't think I've ever eaten food that tasted that terrible before. When the atmosphere is that ugly, it naturally affects the taste of the food as well.

It was my first experience with anything like that. Of course, in our town, there are people who give us cold looks, but they'd never do anything so nasty. Probably because it's a base town.

I really didn't realize before now how much hatred there is for the UN Forces uniform outside of our town. Of course I'd heard rumors, but I didn't think it would be *this* bad.

It's gotten me very depressed.

But now, I'm going on to Second Term. If I quit now, I lose, simple as that. I've got to be prepared for people to misunderstand, and I've got to show them what a splendid officer I am.

*

Dear Misa,

It's March 29. A day that humanity will remember forever. Today, after a long wait, the Space Destroyer *Oberth* enters service, and humanity brings its firepower into space. After the first Oberth-Class ship will come the second and third, and on and on, filling the void. But that's not important. The important part is that the goal is to inaugurate the UN Space Forces by July. Until now, the UN Forces have controlled the land, sea, and air, a three-branch organization, but now they're creating another corps. Our superior officers are many: Army Captains, Air Force Lieutenant Colonels, Navy Lieutenant Commanders and the like. Me, I'm a member of the Air Force, but Henry is in the Navy. Once the *Oberth* launches, the Space Forces will rise in status and importance. Humankind will finally turn its gun away from humankind, and point them elsewhere. March 29. Ah, a day to be remembered. I hear that members of the Space Forces will be chosen from all three branches. Misa, please sign up with the Space Forces.

*

Dear Riber,

Don't worry. It looks like all of us have been awarded the necessary qualifications for joining the Space Force. And of course, I hope to join. Now I'm starting to prepare for the entrance examination. Everyone at the training center is excited about the creation of the Space Force. As you might suspect, because we're young, pretty much all my friends want to sign up. As horrible as it sounds, I hope none of them pass – after all, it would diminish my chances of being accepted.

*

Dear Riber,

I never knew that a single day could bring such fear and uncertainty. It's spring now, but it all feels gloomy, and it's like everyone is holding their breath.

I'm sure you know this already, but the day before yesterday, April 14, the first Prime Minister of the UN Government, Harlan J. Niven, was assassinated. They say they've finalized the succession, but still...

The sound of the assassin's bullet has shocked the whole world. In stealing away one man's life, the killer has also changed the earth's destiny.

Why did Niven have to die? And right in front of the general public, no less? Where did he go wrong? That's the discussion going on now, with no solution in sight.

But they're saying it hasn't even begun. The dead don't come back to life, after all. Tensions between nearly every Autonomous Region have swelled. At the training center,

the mood is strained, and everyone's on edge. If someone makes even a small mistake, the instructors lash out at them.

What's become of us now, I wonder?

*

Dear Misa,

The death of Prime Minister Niven has exerted its influence all the way out here, to Mars. Everyone is looking towards tomorrow with a sense of uneasiness. Personally, I was really unhappy with a lot of his policy decisions. I hasten to add that most of his policies were mere stopgaps, and we'll never know what he had planned next. However, I don't think the assassination has changed the situation much. Public sympathy will flock to the UN Government ruling party. The Anti-Unification Forces killed him as the symbol of the UN without realizing that by doing so, they have turned themselves into photo-negative symbols. They're as unprepared to make policy as he was.

Why do people think that violence is the answer to all problems? In the end, are we nothing more than Neanderthals bearing reaction weapons?

(As the Mars Base was under martial law at the time of the writing, the section criticizing Niven's policies was blacked out by the censors.)

*

Dear Riber,

I'm terribly sorry it's been so long since I've written. The truth is, last June Fifth, my mother collapsed. At the beginning, we thought it was just strain, and she was receiving treatment at home, but it didn't work. So she went to the military hospital for a thorough examination. There, they discovered that she had chronic liver disease, and promptly hospitalized her.

Mother's body was always weak, but to have her go into the hospital was completely unexpected.

Father wasn't there, so our house was a whirlwind of activity. I want desperately to visit her every day, but as an officer cadet, I'm helpless. On every leave day, I go as fast as I can to the hospital, and every time I see her, her face is thinner and more emaciated. Her awareness is still sharp, but that's small relief.

*

Dear Misa,

I'm very sorry to hear about your mother's collapse. I wish there was something I could do from here on Mars, whether visiting her in the hospital or even just sending flowers. But don't get discouraged. Right now, it's very important to keep your spirits high. If you feel down, your mother will worry. The right attitude can conquer any illness. I'll be cheering you from the sidelines, so do your best! ...Of course, I hate that I can't do anything but offer words of encouragement.

Right now, there's an ugly rumor floating about the base. It's been said that the creation of the Space Force has been delayed, due to the increased guerilla activity after Niven's death. What in the world are we going to do? I want to get an accurate report ASAP!

*

Dear Riber,

Finally, Father has returned. Mother has also come back, to convalesce. Today, she even took a second helping at dinner. Father doesn't want to leave her side until she completely recovers.

However, the Second Defensive Battle of South Ataria Island was a long fight, nearly six months (I can't believe it's been half a year since I've seen Father! The summer before last felt much longer. I guess it's because that year, I had nothing to do, but this year, I've been so busy with training...).

Father has been promoted to Rear Admiral for distinguished service, and Commander Global has been promoted to Colonel. Furthermore, Commander Global, no, wait, he's a Colonel now... so Colonel Global has been given command of the second Oberth-Class Space Destroyer, the *Goddard*, it seems (being inaugurated next week).

Father returned carried on the shoulders of his men. Instead of being tired, he suddenly emerged.

In addition, I'm sending a photo of Rear Admiral Hayase and Colonel Global.

*

Dear Misa,

Your father's return should allow you to surface for air a bit, and I'm also a little relieved. I'm sure you're also thrilled to see your long-absent father. Accordingly, I've got some happy news of my own: Henry asked a young woman named Alisa Haggard to marry him, and she accepted! The two of them met here, and got engaged here. When the Space Force comes into being, they also plan to marry here, and give birth to children here. The Martians of ancient times are extinct, but it seems like we'll be having some new Martians before long.

*

Dear Riber,

Please give my congratulations to Henry. However, after only a week, I've been plunged back into unhappiness.

Father has left again to join another military action.

As I'm sure you know, repeated instances of guerilla warfare have broken out all over America. And a huge segment of the Anti-Unification Forces headed to America to exploit this. To fight them, Father has departed for the front. However, because of his recent promotion, he's now the commanding officer...

Mother's condition was improving, but after she heard about Father's departure, she took another turn for the worse. While I understand that it's his duty, I think it's unreasonable to force Father to abandon his sick wife for the battlefield. Of course, I'm a

soldier's daughter, so I know that orders from above must be obeyed, but I still think it's cold.

I appreciate that this is an inevitability in military life, but I can't stop thinking, *How terrible it is to be a soldier!*

And because I'm so worried about Mother, I haven't even touched my studies recently.

Is family supposed to be scattered around the world like this?

*

Dear Misa,

I hope your mother is doing all right. How is she?

Well, July has come, and no sign of the Space Force. Everyone here at the Mars Base is overcome with uneasiness. Every day is gloomy, and we never talk about anything else. Sometimes people say there was never any intention of making a Space Force in the first place, other times the rumor is that it'll be inaugurated tomorrow. All of us are full of fear and doubt. I guess the guerilla war outbreaks really are creating an obstacle. But we can't shake the sense that the way things are, the Space Force will never come into being.

The UN Forces must look to the future. I mean, that was the original intention, right? It's the only branch whose guns won't be pointed at other humans. What can the brass be thinking?

*

Dear Riber,

I, too, am worried about the future of the Space Force. I can't believe that the current Space Division will continue as it is now, though. It should definitely be an official military organization.

I haven't heard anything about it from Father, as he hasn't come home yet. Mother obviously has no answers. None of my friends, even the ones with high connections, knows anything concrete, either. Why can't anyone give an answer to ease our worry?

With Father gone, Mother's condition continues to worsen steadily. The blood vessels in her arms are bulging out, looking like the roots of a withered tree, and she's lost a lot of weight. She also hasn't been eating, so they've hooked her up to a drip. I'm very worried.

Someone once wrote, "WORRY x WORRY = HOPE." But this isn't hope. Until the Space Force is created and Mother recovers, I'll keep working my very hardest.

*

Dear Misa,

Something terrible has happened. The Mars Base is about to be closed down, and it's all because of that oft-discussed topic, the guerilla warfare breakouts. In order to quell the insurrections, the UN Forces are recalling all troops. So soon, all of the top class officers here are going to withdraw from the base and will be assigned to different areas all over the earth to join the defense. The brass are looking only at the short term and are missing the big picture. What will the abandonment of the Mars Base mean for humanity? We're

losing our foothold to the deep stars. The information we can obtain in one day here is over one hundred times what we could get by observing the planet from earth. If they shut down the base for even one year, that's one hundred years worth of information that we'll have to catch up on. In order to wage a needless war, the military thinks it has the right to delay mankind's progress by more than a century.

But of course, whatever I say, I'm still a soldier. Even if it's contrary to my hopes and desires, I've got my duty, and I must carry it out to the best of my abilities. If you weigh a century of progress against the unity of humanity, I guess unity comes out the heavier. I'm not a coward, running to and fro, trying to escape.

Everyone at the base is shocked speechless. Henry and Alisa are being especially strong, though, probably because they really plan to stay here forever. They want to get married here, have children here, and be buried in Martian soil. These last few days, they've gone the day through without speaking a word. My fear, and, I think, their fear, is that they'll be separated once we leave Mars. After all, Henry is Air Force, and Alisa is Navy. But enough of that. They plan to conduct the wedding ceremony as soon as we reach earth.

The withdrawal is being carried out at a fever pitch. Our hands are full just sorting and packing all the research documents. I'm probably leaving most of my personal effects here. The books and disks you sent me, I'll keep on my desk, where they are now. That way, when I return, it'll be like nothing has changed.

I wonder when I'll be able to come back here.

*

Dear Riber,

When this letter reaches you, I'm guessing you'll already be aboard ship, coming home.

The news of the closure of Mars Base has even reached earth. Everyone at the training center is terribly depressed about it; they all wanted to go there someday soon.

So the Mars Base staff is just adding more numbers to the troops fighting here on earth... That day when you received approval to go to Mars, you were so happy and your eyes were so bright, but... surely, it was unfortunate. At the time, I was thoughtless, and couldn't really sympathize.

But that was just selfishness on my part. I understand your feelings, but I'm overjoyed that you'll be returning.

My life recently has been nothing but terrible things happening one after the other. The anti-military sentiments and the cold stares, Mother's sickness and hospitalization, Father going off to war... You returning home is the only good news I've had.

To be honest, I feel a little guilty to be so happy at what for you is a tragic turn of events, but what can I do? Still, since you left, it's been two long years. A reunion after two years.

Do you remember? Since that day you said farewell to me in the park, it's been nearly two years to the day. Since that time, many things have happened, and I've learned many things, too. In these past two years, I've grown up considerably.

When you return to earth, I think you'll notice how much more of an adult I've become. I'm not the "little princess" I was when you left, I've turned into a splendid soldier.

Ulp! If I don't hurry up and send this, I'll miss getting it on the next ship out. There's so much more that I want to write, but I guess it'll have to wait until I see you when you return. Really, since a ship in transit is so hard to pinpoint, who can decide what fixed time gets approval for urgent letters? It's really irritating!

So let me say goodbye, eagerly awaiting our reunion in three months.

When Riber finished reading the letter aboard ship, he smiled. The way Misa emphasized her adulthood came off to him as rather childlike, really.

And in the next instant, he was enveloped in light.

*

FLEET RETURNING TO EARTH DESTROYED

On the tenth of this month, UN Forces High Command reported that the fleet *en route* back to earth from the Mars Base (Fleet Captain: Henry Miler) was destroyed by Anti-Unification Forces on the Eighth, at roughly 6:00 PM GMT.

The Anti-Unification Forces had hijacked the *Tsiolkovsky*, an Oberth-Class Space Destroyer, and approached the returning fleet. Details of the battle have not been made public, but it has been confirmed that within three minutes, all ten ships of the Mars Base fleet were destroyed. Of the fleet's 3,055 personnel, no survivors have been found, and there appears to be little hope of finding any. The fleet was returning to earth so that its crew could be deployed to help fight the uprisings in various countries around the world.



母と娘、心やすまるひととき



自立を決意した朝、童心に帰って雪合戦

It is believed that the Anti-Unification Forces attacked the fleet in order to prevent this outcome.

In response to the disaster, UN Prime Minister Robert A. Rhysling will soon deliver an address.....

*

Today, I received your poetry collection. It probably would've arrived last month, but I think it was delayed because of the closing of the Mars Base. And then of course there was the Incident.

I still haven't started reading the book yet. Reading it would remind me of you, and I don't think I could keep from crying if I began it. All the more because it's written out longhand, rather than typed up.

So, it rests on my shelf. Martian sand. Polar ice. A necklace of Mars crystal. The pendant of the god of war. The bottled ship, also of Mars crystal. These are all lined up next to your poetry book. There's still some space on the shelf, but I'll never get a seventh present from you.

A while back, I started knitting some mittens for you. I wanted to finish them quickly, but I was sabotaged by my life getting busy (No, truly, I was *really* busy!). I finished all but about twenty percent of them. I'll probably never finish them. And even if I did, you wouldn't be there to receive them. That day, you went away from my world forever.

I'm sorry. I've started crying again. Since that day, my tears won't stop. As soon as I say I'm not going to cry anymore, the tears start flowing once more. But it's all right. If God has measured out the amount of tears one can shed in a lifetime, then I plan to shed all of them.

When I heard the news about the destruction of the fleet, I couldn't understand it. It's like it was just a series of sounds: "flee-tre-tur-ning-to-earth-dest-royed." The fleet was due to return home soon. I couldn't comprehend the meaning of the words.

Or perhaps I simply didn't *want* to understand, because my heart melted like butter when I heard. And when I realized what the news was saying, my whole world went pale.

When I came back to myself, I was in bed, and to my surprise, several days has passed. I have no memory of what happened during that time. I awakened with only my heart being rent by needles of sadness, and tears that wouldn't stop. But I don't know why I didn't remember, and honestly, I don't want to know.

During those days, I didn't eat and I shed no tears, because my heart wasn't in my body. I was closed off, with nothing but misery filling the hollowness within me. Perhaps I quickly killed my own heart. I've completely blanked out on that time, but.....

After I recovered consciousness, the days continued, filled with sorrow and pain. Perhaps I'll never recover.

Your enemy was taken care of by Colonel Global. He attacked in the *Goddard*, and destroyed the hijacked *Tsiolkovsky*. Still, I wish he had been able to destroy it earlier, but it attacked the returning fleet. And then you... No, stop it. I'm just uselessly complaining.

There was a quiet and solemn service on September 22 for those who lost their lives on the return fleet. It was raining that day, and the meeting area was filled with people dressed in black, holding black umbrellas aloft. Prime Minister Rhysling was brought in, and he and other distinguished people gave their memorial addresses, but they all went over my head. It seemed like all of them were simply using the service as a propaganda tool against the Anti-Unification Forces. No one was there to shed tears for you, or Henry, or your companions.

Speaking of whom, I'll never get to meet Henry and Alisa. I never met them even once, but I still cried for them. And of course they were engaged, but they'll never have a wedding ceremony... This is an incredibly rude thing for me to say, but they must be happier this way. If they had returned to earth and been sent to battle, one or the other of them might have been killed. At least this way, they took their final journey together...

As for me... While you were being scattered into vast space, I was naively knitting some mittens for you. I couldn't do anything for you. Totally powerless.

If I could change things, I would undo my father's plans and stop him from sending you to Mars. I wonder if that would've been possible.

But of course, it's too late. And I'm left alone. Alone without you. It feels like a part of my heart has been ripped out.

Why were we only together so briefly...? And why couldn't I have been with you and Henry and the others...?

Stop it, Misa. After all is said and done, the death of a person is *death*. There's no beauty or ugliness to it. If we had died together, that still wouldn't make it romantic or beautiful.

And so, finally, I wrote it: The word “death.” It’s just a word, and yet... I could write the word tens of thousands of times, and it wouldn’t express the sorrow I feel... I wonder why I couldn’t write it before?

I wonder if, until I started writing this letter itself, I didn’t really understand the fact that you are truly dead? No, that’s not the case. Even now, I can’t fully bring myself to believe it. After all, it’s nothing but a word. No one saw the instant in which you died. “Mortality” is such a plain, dry word, isn’t it? Do you believe in things like that? I certainly don’t.

So if I don’t believe in it, why am I crying?

I don’t understand.

I don’t understand.

I don’t understand.

I’m don’t really know what I’ve been writing in this letter. I mean really, what am I trying to say? It’s completely incoherent.

A letter which will never be sent. It defeats the purpose of sending a letter when there’s no one to receive it. A letter like this is just weird, isn’t it? Again, what exactly am I writing this for? I suppose it’s an epitaph of sorts.

Maybe that’s not it at all, maybe my sadness just forced it all out of me.

In one of the books you recommended to me, it says this: “Every person dies twice. First, when they physically die, and second, when they are completely forgotten.”

But I’ll never forget you...you’ll only die once. So, in spite of the sadness welling up within me, I’m determined to live. In order to convey your dying wish.

I'll lock this letter up and hide the key away. I doubt I'll look at it again.

*

The preceding letter and all of Riber's presents were destroyed in the Zentradi attack on earth.

Additionally, the items made by Misa's hand, like the muffler and the sweater, she herself incinerated in a reaction furnace in a moment of recklessness.

The day after writing this letter, Misa Hayase was formally inducted into the Space Force.

And that is all.

White Parting



“Misa.”

Misa, hearing her classmate Melissa calling her, looked up from the book she was reading.

“Someone’s here to see you. Can you guess who?”

“Come on, tell me,” said Misa.

“The hero of the *Goddard*, Commodore Global.”

Misa was surprised by the unannounced visit.

“He’s waiting in the reception room. C’mon, hurry up!” Melissa urged her on, acting excited as though Global had come to visit *her* instead of Misa. Pushed along, Misa left her quarters.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” Misa squeaked, softly as a mouse, as she opened the door to the reception area. The Headmaster was standing in the room, and also, there sat her old mentor, Global, smiling the way he always did, as though nothing had changed in the intervening years.

However, it seemed as though the smile on his face was frozen there. He was surprised that he couldn’t even imagine her as the girl whose doorway he used to walk through so often. Even in those few months, she seemed to have changed considerably. The intelligence that always glittered, gem-like, behind her eyes seemed to be shrouded. Even her hair appeared to have lost some of its luster. The girl who was so full of life was nowhere to be seen. She seemed as insubstantial as a shadow.

Words finally spilled out of Global’s mouth: “It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?”

“Yes, it has,” Misa replied, bowing to him. The girl she used to be would have cried out “Global!” and rushed over to him.

“Commodore Global came all this way to see you,” the Headmaster said, then gestured to a chair. “Oh! Please have a seat, sir!” As he said it, they all sat down at the table. The Headmaster offered them tea and cakes. No one touched them.

Global was unsure of what to say. Misa had shut her real self in. The Headmaster, understanding nothing, just grinned rather maniacally, overjoyed that such a hero would be paying a call.

“I’m sorry,” Global said to him at last, “but would it be possible for me to speak to Cadet Hayase in private?”

“But of course, Commodore.”

Global had another concern. “Will this cause a problem with her afternoon classes?” he asked.

“Not at all,” replied the Headmaster. “Cadet Hayase is an excellent student; no one will mind if she misses a few lessons in order to catch up with an old friend.”

The Headmaster would ordinarily not have made any exceptions of this sort, but this was the great, dashing war hero, Commodore Global, wishing to speak to the daughter of one of the most powerful men in the military. No one could blame him for allowing Misa to play hooky.

“Well, I’ll leave the two of you now. But I’ll be right in the next room. If there’s anything you need, please don’t show the slightest hesitation about popping over and asking.” He then exited the room, with no trace of the usual haughtiness and contempt for the students that he usually displayed. In the tiny world of the training center, he was at the top, but in the larger world of the military, he was little more than a flunky.

After he left, silence ruled the room. Under the table, in the corners of the room, silence crouched, hiding its glee or dancing in the hidden spaces. Silence splashed around inside the tea cups. Silence purposefully slithered between the two people's ankles. Misa had become well-attuned to this silence.

"So," said Misa, "what brings you here?" At her words, the silence panicked and scattered from its various hiding places. And her upturned eyes gazed at him imploringly, full of fondness.

"Sorry to barge in with no notice," Global replied. "I just wanted to stop by and say hello. Speaking of which, I visited your mother yesterday. She seems to be doing better, doesn't she?"

"I'm still very worried about her."

"If she continues to improve, she should be able to leave the hospital soon."

"That would be wonderful if it happened."

Global could feel the atmosphere of iciness surrounding Misa. Anyone who tried to make contact with the girl now would be ensorcelled by that aura. No one would be able to get close to her like this, and it would be useless to try.

Global said softly, "I'm sorry about Riber."

Misa's shoulders began to quiver. Global's words pierced the chill around her.

"If only I had arrived a little sooner, I might have been able to save him," he said with a sigh.

"Please stop!" Misa lowered her face and covered her ears with her hands. As the chilly feeling around her dissolved, she felt raw. Global drew near her, and gently tugged her

hands away from her head. Misa looked up at him with eyes moist with tears. He took a handkerchief, and just like a father, slowly wiped away the tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Why do I feel such grief?”

Global addressed Misa very directly. “Riber died,” he said.

Misa started to clap her hands to her ears again, but Global immediately snatched and held her wrists. “I’ll say it as many times as I have to. Riber’s dead. He won’t be coming home. I know what it’s like to feel that grief, too.”

With her hands firmly in his grip, Misa couldn’t do anything but hang her head and weep.

“When I was younger, I also lost someone I loved very much.”

Misa looked up with surprise, and stared at him. The strength drained from her arms. Realizing that she wouldn’t be covering her ears again, he let go of her wrists. Then he stood up and walked to the window.

“You’re still not even twenty yet...”

And with his back to her, Global began to tell his tale.

“I was just a young man of twenty then, and it was a young love. She was a little bit older than I was, and very gentle. We had a love that even the gods envied.”

He paused, and looked down out the window at the never-changing scenery of cadets going through their drills.

“Maybe the gods really *did* envy our love.”

He continued with his story.

“One day, just because a single screw had come loose, the passenger plane she was on crashed into the Pacific Ocean. She was on her way to see me. And in an instant, I had lost the woman I loved... so I understand your grief better than you know.”

Even though his back was turned to her, Misa could see that he was crying. And she finally understood why he had remained a bachelor for so long.

He turned around to face her and said, “But, and this is the point, I couldn’t kill the part of myself that loved her. You have to kill the way you are now. You can try to hide in the emptiness inside you, but it won’t change the truth that Riber is dead. Don’t spend your life in memories. Turn around and face forward again.”

His words opened a little window in the hollow nothingness in her heart. And little by little, she flowed through that window back into the world. However, she would never again be the bright, smiling girl she had been before.

“Oh, the flowers really brighten up the room.”

Misa had come to the hospital to visit her mother, who was sleeping.

Saki, however, woke up, saying, “Don’t they, though?” and pressing the button to raise her bed upright.

“How are you feeling?” Misa asked.

“Oh, I’m fine. I’m feeling wonderful today,” Saki replied, although her complexion was ashen, belying her words.

The cold wintry wind banged against the thick hospital window.

“It looks cold out there,” Saki said, her shoulders quivering.

“It’s already pretty bitter outside,” Misa said, “but nothing’s frozen over yet.”

Saki said, “The hospital has central heating, so I can’t even tell what season it is in here. But since the fruit on the persimmon trees outside have turned so red and ripe, I’m guessing that it’s winter time...”

Misa looked out the window, and indeed, the persimmons on the trees, buffeted by the wind, looked ready to fall.

“The persimmons at our house have also ripened, I assume,” Saki said.

“Yes, they’re just about ready,” Misa answered.

“You used to eat so many of them at one time that you’d give yourself a stomachache.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me, Mother.”

“The ones at the tops of the trees were the only ones you couldn’t get to, so when the snow fell, they were the only ones left to look at. I used to enjoy putting on a hat and going out on snowy days to watch the birds eating them.”

“If you can leave the hospital soon enough, you can see that again this winter.”

But Saki didn’t have confidence in the idea of herself even *surviving* through winter, though of course she said nothing to Misa about that.

Misa said, “Shall I get you an apple?” She pulled one out of the care package she had brought and deftly began peeling it.

“Misa, you’ve become a splendid young woman.”

“Thank you.” Her hands stopped cutting the skin from the apple.

“Just now,” Saki said, “you sounded like you were beginning to feel better, even though your face is still pretty pale.”

“It’s already been two months, Mother,” Misa said. “I’m not just moping about all day. Commodore Global came to visit me last month, and he really lit a fire under my ass!”

“Misa, don’t use that kind of language.”

“Of course. I’m sorry.” Misa’s mother still treated her like a child, Misa felt.

“So the Commodore paid a visit?”

“Yes.”

“He’s an extremely busy man, you know, Misa. So for him to take time out of his schedule solely to see you, that’s very special.”

“Yes, he’s very different from Father that way. Here’s your apple.” Misa put the peeled, sliced apple on a plate and set it down next to her mother. Saki picked up a piece to eat, but paused with it halfway to her mouth.

“What is it, Mother? You look a little scary.”

Saki was glaring at Misa sternly.

“Misa, what did you just say?”

Misa didn’t know what she had said that upset her mother so. “I said, ‘Here’s your apple.’”

“Before that.”

“I said that the Commodore is different from Father.”

“What do you mean?”

“Um... just what I said.”

Inside Misa, all the pent-up anger she felt towards her father suddenly erupted. “But it’s not just that. Even though you are in the hospital, Father has never come to visit you. I mean, I’m a soldier, and I know the importance of duty, but my friends’ parents have been able to get special leave sometimes, and they’re also stationed on the Ataria front. So why can’t he do the same? One day – no, even one *hour* – would be enough. I just

want to see his face again!" Misa stopped short, and looked at her mother's reaction, but Saki was just smiling. "Now, I know that the top commanders on the front lines don't have much time each day for personal matters, and there's not much they can do to change that. But... I want him to come visit. Even a letter would be enough. Is just a letter too much to ask?"

"Is it really necessary?" Saki asked. Misa was surprised, and took a long look at her mother's face.

"Misa," Saki spoke gently, "I know you think it's some kind of requirement. To see his face, to hug him, to exchange letters... But it's certain that these things are *not* necessary. He's thinking about me, and I'm thinking about him. All the time. And we both know that. And I can even *feel* him thinking about me right now." Then she covered her face with her hands. "Oh no, I said too much and ended up embarrassing myself!"

Misa was surprised at how cute and girlish her mother looked when she was embarrassed. But on the other hand, she was also impressed by her mother's strength. The strength of lovers who can believe in their love even when they can't be together. This was the first time she really understood the fierce love this normally quiet, unassuming woman had for her husband.

"I wonder if I could ever be that strong?" Misa mused to herself.

"No, I couldn't. I can't believe that I wouldn't even need letters or anything like that. If I had even have a tenth of her strength, I wouldn't be so miserable right now. Of course. If I had my mother's fortitude, I would be content with only my memories of Riber."

She felt determined to feel that way. But was her determination really good, or even possible? She made her resolution, having no idea what it would cost at a later time.

The next day, after some particularly strenuous outdoor training, Misa was called to the Headmaster's office.

"Cadet Hayase reporting," she announced when she arrived. She looked disheveled, her fatigues were caked with dirt, and she still had her equipment with her, including a lightweight machine gun cradled in her arms. She looked very small in comparison. Her face was also spattered with mud.

The usually cheerful Headmaster didn't even have the slightest grin on his face. He looked bitter and sour. Misa began to feel uneasy.

He said, "Your mother is in critical condition right now. You're to go to the hospital immediately." Misa flew out of the office, still carrying her equipment. Her heavy bag was biting into her shoulder, but she no longer felt it.

The instant she put her hand on the doorknob of her mother's hospital room, she knew that something had happened. Her hand began to shake so much that she couldn't even open the door. The weight of her equipment, which she hadn't noticed on the way to the hospital, suddenly felt extremely heavy. Her heart likewise sank with sorrow, and she broke down crying.

Just as when Riber had died, her tears overflowed now. Just like before, she had been cursed to lose another cherished person, cursed by God and fate.

But the cruelty of other people often stabs more fiercely than God or fate.

The funeral was conducted quietly. The deceased never enjoyed loud affairs, and a ceremony for the wife of a commanding officer should be done modestly. The people in attendance were few, all of them closely connected to the deceased.



士官への道はきびしく、激しい訓練がつづく



晴れて、マクロス乗員に任命されて

Misa went through the motions of greeting everyone, but her mind was elsewhere. Her body was visibly sunk in grief, inviting the tears of anyone who looked at her.

That day also, her father didn't return.

After everything was finished, Misa was alone in the vast Hayase residence. A chill December wind gusted outside, and everyone became occupied with preparing for New Year's. But none of those busy people visited the Hayase home, and Misa was caressed only by the bitter cold.

And Misa found herself with a single white box in front of her.

And that was all. Everything left of her mother was inside. Everything of the mother who she loved, who loved her, and who even Misa's father loved.

The womb that Misa was born from, the breasts that fed her, the arms that raised her... all that was left was a small box of bone and ashes. The sickness and suffering, the pain at her daughter's folly, all this had vanished. The happy memories of the love between parent and child, that had vanished as well.

The end of a human life is ever thus.

As Misa stayed in the house filled with misery, time continued onwards. The feverish preparations of others came to a halt, and another year came to its end.

In 2006, the rioting in America was finally quelled. Compared to the previous year, in which there was a massive revolt in Russia as well, it wouldn't be wrong to say that this year was dawning on a hopeful note, and people were beginning to feel good again.

However, Misa couldn't share the joyous mood.

Takashi Hayase gradually finished all the loose ends from the end of the battle, and returned home at the end of January. There was finally someone besides Misa in the house.

Smoke wafted upwards slowly from a newly-lit incense stick. Takashi placed the *ihai* next to it. His memories of Saki echoed through his mind. The first time they met, their wedding, the day Misa was born... The memories seemed inexhaustible.

Misa, however, thought her father a hideous person. He hadn't even shed a single tear. To her, it looked like he was acting as though this was just ordinary daily business.

"Why on earth did you come back *now*?" Misa demanded harshly. Takashi, surprised, turned around to look at her. "Mother died all alone. Even after I sent you a letter, why didn't you come back then? You didn't return when she was hospitalized, and you didn't even return when she died!"

Takashi reacted to her stern words with merely a kind gaze. Misa continued, "So why didn't you come back when you were needed? I know that military life is busy and demanding, but couldn't you have even sent a letter? Mother never stopped believing in you..." And suddenly, she was weeping again. Tears of rage, tears of grief... "Why? *Why?*"

She couldn't say any more. Memories stuck in her throat, and the words wouldn't come. The only thing that could escape out her mouth was the sound of sobbing. Anything more was impossible.

Takashi said nothing.

In the silence, a freezing wind snapped past the both of them.

Still quiet, Takashi slowly pulled his beloved pipe from his pocket. It was a meerschaum pipe older than his great-grandfather. He made a move to light it up, but suddenly broke it in two instead.

“That day also, things were broken for no reason,” he said, and put the halves of the pipe on its stand. “I was unable to leave the Far East Headquarters. Now calm yourself.” He hugged her gently, and picked up his briefcase. Misa saw him off with an expression of disbelief.

That’s all. That’s all you’ve got to offer, Father.

The door closed, and she was once again alone. It had been just like a dream. Moreover, it was what she had wished for.

Without her father, the massiveness of the house enveloped her.

“What’s wrong? You don’t look well, Misa. Misa?”

Since she returned to her barracks, Melissa seemed worried.

“I admit, I don’t really understand what it’s like to lose two people close to you, but please cheer up. You’re bringing everybody down.”

“Sorry,” said Misa.

“Anyway, if there’s some kind of problem or something, we can discuss it, right?”

Yes, there was a problem... but what could Misa do?

“Honestly...” she ventured.

“What is it, a guy?” Melissa asked.

Hearing Melissa say that, Misa’s feelings became dammed up.

“Sorry, sorry,” said Melissa. “C’mon, just tell me. I promise to listen.”

Misa sighed. "I want to quit the military." And once Misa had opened her mouth, it wouldn't stop. Riber's death, her mother's death, and the coldness of her father... all of it came pouring out.

"So," she concluded, "if Riber and Father hadn't become soldiers, none of these tragedies would've happened. And if I quit, I won't have to go through these kinds of things, either."

She said all of this in one big gulp. Probably everything had built up to a point where it needed to gush out completely.

Melissa, after listening to all this, hit her own forehead with her palm.

"Are you serious?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Misa.

"So you really blame your father so strongly?"

Urged on by her conviction, Misa nodded.

"Wow... you're a terrible person," Melissa said, shaking her head furiously. "Right now, I'm sure your father is weeping over how awful you are."

Misa was shocked. *Why am I a terrible person...?*

Melissa continued, "You can do *anything* you want. You were brought into this world, you can go your own way, any way you like. Who do you think made that possible for you? You're really weak, Misa."

No one had ever said anything like this to Misa before. It was the first time she had been called "weak."

One of their roommates suddenly looked up and started watching the two of them.

“So you understand the importance of military duty, but you think it’s just some kind of part-time job? From the first, you never understood *anything*. And you know, people die on the battlefield every day. *Every day*. What do *you* think would happen if High Command got half a day off every time someone got killed? Any faith in them would be lost in an instant. And the soldiers out there gambling with their lives every day, they’ll be able to go home one day. High Command doesn’t have that option. And *furthermore*, your father is Vice Admiral Hayase, the commander on the front line. He’s *famous*. How could he encourage the men and woman under him if he goes running off?”

Misa sighed. “I understand.”

“No you don’t. *No you don’t!*” Melissa exclaimed, shaking her head again. “If you really understood it, you wouldn’t have even brought it up. Do you even realize how much your father has done for you? Probably, the only reason you’re here in this training center is because of him.”

This was the first time Misa had heard anything like this. She suddenly wondered if her father had done anything special to enter her.

“Without him pulling the strings, do you really think some silly kid like you could’ve really gotten in *here*?”

So that’s it... that’s how I entered so easily. And all this time, I thought it was my own ability... Misa’s eyes started to well up with tears. “Leave me alone,” she whispered. “Go away.”

“Huh, *you* can go if you like. This isn’t just your room, it’s everybody’s.”

Misa stood up suddenly, and, not wanting to sob in the room, started to run out of the room. One of her roommates went after her.

“Stop,” Melissa told her.

“*You* stop, Melissa,” said the roommate. “Can’t you see she’s crying?”

“That’s fine. If she doesn’t learn to take what’s coming to her, she’ll never understand the bitter and the sweet of the world.” Melissa spoke loftily, but her conscience nagged at her.

Misa was sitting in the restroom. She wanted to weep with all her might, but suddenly found herself unable to cry. Why wouldn’t the tears flow? Her pride was in tatters, but the tears simply wouldn’t come.

She sat for a long time, staring at the white plaster wall. She ended up memorizing the graffiti scrawled on it, as she sat there.

She had always wanted to become an adult, but really, now she wasn’t so sure she still did. But she understood that even without her, the world would continue on turning. In the end, she thought that she had yet to enter the world of adults and had only seen it in glimpses. But she was wrong. She had already become a member of that world. And yet she still childishly resented her father.

From the next day, she participated even harder in drills. More than ever before, she now wanted to be an excellent soldier.

When she became a great officer, she could look her father in the eye. The thought almost physically pierced her. And there was still the thought of following after Riber.

Moreover, if she had never realized that her father had asked some favors to enter her into officers’ academy, she probably would have given up and quit. But she chose to become a soldier using only her own ability, because it was the best way for her to be able to face her father again.

She understood the futility of death on the battlefield. And she wanted to pursue that world on the border between life and death – the world of Riber and her father. And she would refuse to give into despair or run from reality.

Still, despite the great effort she was putting in, she still didn't really know if her father had been right to use his influence to enter her in the academy.

Soon, it was February. Misa finished her second year at the training center, and was awarded the rank of warrant officer. Deep inside, though, she wasn't happy about it. None of this was caused by her own efforts, and this left her frustrated. Her graduation diploma felt like nothing more than a cheap piece of paper, no weight to it, just a bunch of words.

Her father was also transferred, and would soon be going to UN Forces High Command in Alaska.

“Misa,” he said, “it's not official yet, but you are now a warrant officer. You have come of age as a soldier. Congratulations.”

The term “come of age” made her feel uneasy. By what standard had she come of age? Had she done it all herself, or had she done it only with others rushing to her aid?

“For myself,” he continued, “I have been transferred to UN Forces High Command. And of course, I very much wish for you to join me there...”

Misa didn't reply. Really, what was she to do? Wasn't she trying to escape out of her father's palm? As a warrant officer, if she went to Alaska, such an escape would be impossible.

“At least consider it, Misa.”

Again, she didn't answer, but her determination strengthened. She would never backtrack, and she didn't want to be under her father's supervision anymore.

Because of that decision, she decided finally not to attend her commencement.

That day, snow had been falling since early morning, turning the whole area into a silvery world. The feet of the new warrant officers trod on the fresh snow, packing it firm as they approached the hall. Originally, Misa would have been among them. The hall filled with chattering and shuffling sounds, as the former students abandoned all the discipline they had learned in training.

Misa was in a nearby park having a snowball fight with some children. Despite abandoning two years worth of hard work, she looked happy and refreshed, and this would be her final childish playtime.

Completely soaked and with a flushed face, she returned home, where her father was waiting.

“Misa...”

“Just a moment, please. Let me change out of these clothes. I'm simply drenched!”

Misa hurried upstairs, quickly changed, and ran back down. She flung herself down in front of the fireplace, legs splayed out in front of her. Snow was in her shoes, turned to water, and her feet were numb.

Takashi said, “When I was a child, every snowy day, I did the same thing,” and handed her a cup of hot cocoa.

“Thank you,” said Misa.

Takashi sat down next to her in front of the fire. He wrapped a blanket around her.

“Pins and needles” she said. She was rubbing her feet together vigorously, and as feeling returned to them, they started to feel itchy and tingly.

“Misa,” asked Takashi, “is this what you really want?” The warmth in the room seemed to decrease a bit. Misa stood up, and, taking a chair with her, went into the kitchen and sat down.

“Yes, it is,” she answered.

“At long last, you’ve reached adulthood, so what are you upset about?”

“I’m not upset about anything involving becoming an adult. However, I only made it because you gave me a helping hand. So in my own mind, no, I haven’t grown up yet.”

Misa didn’t think she could ever reach her father’s social status. She could never get away from her father’s influence. She wanted to be judged based on her own efforts. Because she was young, and because she was innocent.

“You’ve failed to become a warrant officer, so I hope you know you cannot come to Alaska.”

“Yes, I understand that.”

Misa’s father was disappointed. And yet, he was impressed with her decisiveness. The day would come when she became self-reliant, and wouldn’t need his guiding hand anymore. All fathers hope to see this day, and yet they are also frightened of it. He was sure that today was that day.

“I see,” he said. “Well, you may do as you please now. What are you thinking of doing?”

“I want to try to become an officer using only my own skills.”

“Then, from now on, I will offer you no assistance. You’ve chosen a difficult path for yourself. I hope you’re ready for it.”

“I’m positive I can do it,” Misa answered unflinchingly, her resolve hardening. He realized that he believed her. He also thought that the next time they met, whenever it would be, they would be meeting not as parent and child, but as two adult military officers. He wondered when that time would come.

And in the fireplace, the burning wood crackled.

White Journey



The next day, Takashi departed for UN High Command in Alaska. And Misa went through the process of enrolling in the UN Space Force Officers' Academy.

As opposed to the two years of Prospective Officer's Training Center, the Space Force Academy was only six months of study. However, it seemed quite long indeed, since the other three branches (army, navy, and air force) required only three months. Still, all the training was so brief because after the loss of the nearly-christened space force officers returning from Mars, the UN Forces desperately needed people to take their place. As a result, the training was especially arduous, and the drop-out rate was high. Moreover, both boys and girls trained together, following the same regimen.

Knowing all this, Misa still submitted her application, and was accepted. Even so, the training was more severe than she could have imagined. The difficult training continued on every day, and she barely had enough time even to eat. She felt nauseated from cramming food into her stomach so quickly, meal after meal. "Dining" soon lost any elegant and refined association it may have had, and became merely "feeding." And Misa went along with it. Those that didn't generally found themselves dropping out or deserting.

And yet, she clenched her teeth and endured it. For half a year, she threw herself completely into the exhausting regimen. She made friends, but if she found herself relying on them, she backed off and stopped speaking to them.

Because Misa was still younger than the other students, she stood out, and quickly got a reputation for being unpleasant. Behind her back, the others were whispering awful rumors. But she ignored it all, running forward swiftly and single-mindedly.

Finally, September arrived. Standing alongside the brainiest, brawniest men and women in their twenties, sixteen-year-old Misa was awarded the rank of warrant officer. Just as she had sworn to her father, she had shown that she could become an officer purely on her own merit. She attended the graduation ceremony, along with barely one-quarter of the cadets that had joined her the previous spring. As diplomas were handed out to the newly-minted officers, Misa's heart overflowed, but she ended up not thinking about anything.

The principal's words flowed out. But as soon as she took her diploma and warrant officer orders, they felt like lead in her hand. She had never felt paper so heavy. Or perhaps it wasn't the paper itself, but only its importance. The new warrant officers all threw their caps into the air, as though trying to replicate a twenty-one gun salute.

Then, after three months of earthbound training, as January of the following year arrived, Misa was awarded the chance to participate in a real battle. A plan was developed to attack the Anti-Unification League's base in the First Russian District from satellite orbit. She was chosen to join the mission as a bridge operator.

With a loud roar and a blast of water vapor, the large shuttle (a heavy lift launch vehicle, or HLLV) was about to launch from the surface of the ocean. But Misa thought she was prepared for the sudden acceleration, and was at ease.

"Three... two... one... zero!"

With a lurch that shoved her back into her seat, the HLLV took off from the water. Because it was a military craft, not much concern had been placed on the comfort of the passengers. The acceleration continued almost to the breaking point of the human body.

Misa wanted to vomit up her breakfast but was physically unable to. Still, stinging, bitter bile jumped from her stomach into her throat.

The booster rockets separated from the HLLV, which continued to climb. The color of the sky changed from blue to purple, finally fading into pure darkness. The earth had already become a blue sphere, transfigured from a homeland into merely a planet.

Misa watched the earth below her. She didn't believe that war could spread out and completely cover such a beautiful world. Misa wished that the world would always stay this beautiful. A little over two years later, the entire surface of the world would be scorched, but of course she had no way of knowing that.

Bit by bit, while playing *Vanka*, the HLLV entered orbit, and to Misa's eyes, it looked like they were falling.

The soldiers were all seated together, performing final checks on their weapons. That sound alone echoed frightfully throughout the narrow confines of the ship, and it heightened the air of ugly tension among them. Misa and the other operators had their headphones on tightly, listening for orders to come through.

Finally, with the checks completed, silence and nervousness filled the cabin, and the soldiers strapped themselves in tightly. Nobody moved. Nobody was tapping his feet impatiently. Probably if one of them even cleared his throat, the rest, astonished, would jump.

The buzzer sounded for five seconds before the jump, and everyone's heart thumped faster. Everyone tightened up even further. From their position, everyone could see the five lamps that had been installed. Each second, a lamp would light up, and then another. When all lamps were lit, the jump would commence.

A light. Three seconds left.

The sound of nervous swallowing resounded through the cabin. Palms that were oozing sweat clenched their guns tightly.

Another light. Two seconds left.

Some of the soldiers became aware that they needed to urinate, but it was too late.

Another light. One second left.

No turning back now. Everyone's body tensed up in preparation.

But suddenly, the count down stopped. The soldiers' tension melted, and everyone let out a long sigh.

And Misa received an unbelievable order.

“Zero. Zero. Zero.”

This was the code for aborting the mission. Misa let out a gasp and felt a sense of anticlimax. This was meant to be her first real battle experience, and now it had been cancelled. On the other hand, she felt relieved that none of the soldiers would be killed.

When Misa and the rest of the soldiers returned to earth, they were greeted by peace. Peace, like someone hiding behind a corner, jumped out and startled her.

The Anti-Unification Forces who had resisted for so long had finally surrendered just as Misa's mission was about to start. On January Twentieth, 2007, The Unification Wars that had spanned six whole years of chaos finally ended, and peace was restored. People celebrated with loud parties and festivals. Wine barrels and beer kegs were opened by the score, and it seemed like the whole world was suffused with the smell of alcohol.

Misa and her comrades embraced, and showered each other with wine, feeling peace throughout their entire bodies. It was for *this* moment that they had all become soldiers,

they felt. When it came time to demobilize, nobody hesitated. Now that peace had come, keeping the various divisions together was no longer necessary, and some even thought that the army itself had outlived its usefulness.

Nearly all of Misa's comrades were repatriated, as seemed natural.

However, as they departed one by one, to be reunited with their families, Misa was left alone and felt lonely and miserable. Finally, her turn came. She walked along the road to her home, the collar of her coat turned up to protect her against the cold winter wind.

Her house in Aoyama looked exactly the same as it had the day her father left for Alaska. The fireplace was still filled with crumbled firewood, and the desk was coated with a thick layer of dust. Misa ran her finger along the tabletop, then stared at it, lost in thought. Everything she saw belonged to a house with no one in it. No family to greet her, and no smell of a working household remained in the air. There was an empty hole in Misa's heart.

However, it was only because she was at rest that she even noticed the hole. It had been there for a long time, but she had been so busy that its existence had eluded her. But now that she had no goal to strive for, she saw it, and had no idea how to fill it.

She put down her suitcase and went down to the wine cellar. She picked up the closest bottle and opened the seal. The former soldier drank down the fluid which was red as blood.

And Misa remembered the taste of wine.

All the celebrations had ended, the world was calm and tranquil, and Misa and the other soldiers felt the same. While many soldiers had returned to civilian life, there were still at

least as many who stuck out and couldn't adjust. Some of them simply reenlisted, while others started drinking or became prone to violent outbursts.

Little by little, the gap in her heart began to overtake Misa. She was no longer a soldier, and confronting that reality was imperative. She tried filling the emptiness with alcohol, but that only made it grow bigger, and furthermore, the hangovers were murder. She tried many things to get away from the terror she felt. She would spend all day reading, or cleaning the house, but it was all useless. The hole dogged her every step.

One snowy day, while returning from shopping, she was on a street corner and saw a poster. It was advertising enlistment in the SDF-1 personnel training center. Because of the end of the war, the repair of the SDF-1 had been advancing quickly, with the launch ceremony planned to be held in a mere two years. And of course, people to man the ship would be needed. Misa lost track of time, staring at the poster. People eager to escape the cold kept bustling past her.

She continued looking at the poster as falling snow piled up on her shoulders, and she felt the Wheel of Destiny begin to turn. Just as water in a freezer turns to ice, her resolve once again hardened.

“I've got to reenlist.”

So saying, she clutched her shopping bag tightly under her arm and hurried to the airport.

Normally, she always considered her surroundings and the implications of her actions, but now, she could simply no longer endure her purposeless life. *I could never end up living this way!* she confirmed to herself.

She was the only woman among the passengers on the plane for South Ataria Island, which netted her some odd looks from the others. Probably the men were also staring because, even though they were going to a south island, she was wearing a winter coat and a scarf. And that her carry-on baggage was a supermarket bag containing just some French bread. But Misa endured the puzzled gazes calmly, and her heart was filled with joy. Spontaneously, she started grinning. The strangers watching her didn't bother her, and she felt truly happy.

And the gap in my heart is gone. I've finally sealed it up. However, she felt dimly that it was not over. The gap wasn't gone for good, and it would follow her later. Moreover, everyone has such gaps that continually chase after him or her. The attempt to outrun them is what we call "living." But Misa didn't understand this yet.

And then, she felt like she was dreaming. Before her stood the largest object on earth, the battleship SDF-1...

Later, it would be named the *Macross*, but for right now, it was just a pile of rust, its metal exterior baking in the southern sun. The repaired SDF-1 would eventually depart for space, bringing the fate of the earth along with it. And on it, Misa would meet a man whose fate was entwined with hers.

But that's another story, and shall be told another time.

The End

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