



# 月の珊瑚

Coral of the Moon

月の珊瑚・Tsuki no Sanga  
**Coral of the Moon**

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コメント 朗読する坂本さんの背後で映像を流すという事だったので、作画枚数はかなりの数になりました。挿絵というよりは、ゲームの演出素材を作っている感じでした。



初出：2010年 月の珊瑚

コメント：珪素のお姫様は、  
かくや姫をモチーフにして  
います。なんちゃって十二  
単は結構可愛くデザイン出  
来ました。







初出：2010年 月の珊瑚

コメント：作品の裏のコンセプトは、「月姫 2010」同人版の月姫が頒布されてからほぼ10年後にこの作品を公開できたのには、何か運命的なものを感じます。





# 1

It's probably not true, but my grandmother supposedly came from the moon.



The year was finally nearing its end.

Tonight is the eleventh full moon. After one more month, this year will die away as time embraces the new year, one that offers no promises.

There was even less guarantee for us than the translucent jellyfish that we would survive to see it.

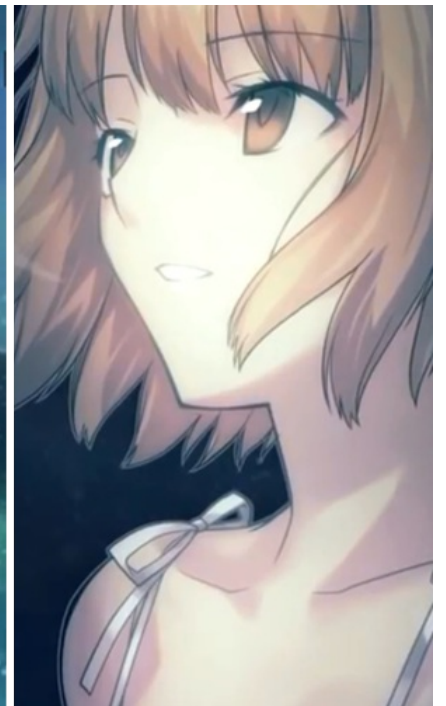
For the humanity of today, days and months are simply things that are lost. The word "death" is a part of everything here. From what I hear, the people of times long past used to hold a more positive view of things. The calendar was not something that inexorably consumed time, but rather was a cyclical symbol, treated as something that comes back around, or something like that.

To put it simply, it came down to data re-use. They took recycling too far. They say that humanity was once gluttonous and greedy, but from our perspective they were incredibly stingy.

By the Gregorian calendar, it's probably around the year 3000 AD right now.

Humanity as it once was has long since ended. There is no longer any guarantee that the sun will continue to come up, but on the other hand no one fights anymore. However, the civilization that humanity spent thousands of years developing has all but drifted away into the air. I offhandedly ignored several dozen marriage proposals, and today, as with yesterday and the days before, I spent my time gazing at the coastline from the high ground of the island.





*Water in the sky, sky in the water. In the sky of the moon is a shattered sea.*

As I watched the glimmering sea, I unconsciously blurted out part of a song I learned from my grandmother.

More accurately, the song actually came from my great-great grandmother, and while I understand the words themselves, I've never understood their meaning. I don't like speaking ill of my ancestors, but I get the impression that she may have been a little too girlish. These are times when you can taste the end of the world, and yet she seemed to have been a person who lived in dreams.

My mother and grandmother and her mother all shared the same tastes, and likewise, were all stunningly beautiful. Unfortunately I turned out to be a bit of an ugly duckling. I'm not as beautiful as my mother, and more importantly, I didn't inherit her girlishness. The only reason that I keep getting marriage proposals is probably because of this island.

“Oh? I guess Arishima's prince is returning home.”





I felt the wind as I looked up towards the sky just in time to see a jet black airplane flying by.

*Gaww*, sounded the sturdy engine.

One of the last traces of civilization, it cut off the moonlight as it floated away. Or perhaps it's already merely a remnant. Its dull steel frame shone as it headed into the eastern sky.

With that, the kill count had reached sixteen.

And a new record this time, too. I had forced upon him an even more impossible task than usual, and the suitor had turned tail before even a day had passed. It was so unprecedented that the island even scolded me, but I couldn't help it today. It was his fault for coming on a full moon. He should realize that everything has a time and place. I know the oxygen is thinning, but if you're going to talk about love, then at least understand that much.

The island I live on is a small colony of less than fifty people. The land that holds a city lies far across the sea. There is no port here, and on the beach is a coral reef unique to this crescent-shaped island. For the people living on the island, the coral reef is a part of everyday life, but for the people of the city, it's apparently more valuable than jewels.

Since around my grandmother's time, this island has been treated as sacred ground. It is absolutely forbidden to enter by sea, so only the privileged who own an aircraft are able to come. The reason I'm called "princess" by the people of the city is also due to how special the island is. They say it is the star of hope for the restoration of humanity. For us living here though, it's completely ordinary. We probably wouldn't even raise an eyebrow when the end does eventually come.

"That's too bad, though. Even if you could travel beyond the sky, you'd never be able to find a fish on the Moon."

Every time a suitor arrives, I task him with something impossible.



This time it was to retrieve a fish from the Moon.

Going to the moon is a one way journey. While there still remains the means to get to the moon, no one knows how to return. Simply going there is certainly possible, but you could never return. It is essentially a world of death that we can only gaze upon while we're still alive.

And as harsh as it was to tell him go to there, to then further ask for a fish, something that would obviously not exist on the moon, certainly explains why Arishima's prince departed in an angry huff.

But this I swear—I was perfectly serious.

If he could complete an impossible task, I would stay by him my entire life.

Because, that's the only way for me to measure love. Many things have been lost from this planet, but the most important of them all was probably the love people had for each other.



It has been many long years since the moon became a world of death.

Though, technically it was a world of death for humanity to begin with, so perhaps it's more appropriate to say that it returned to normal.

The Lunar Immigration Plan was one of the strategies they came up with to deal with humanity's overpopulation crisis. The moon became a new frontier, and its immigrants created a city, a nation upon the lunar surface.

But then a great disaster struck. The pole shift was also cataclysmic, but the unpredicted calamity that befell humanity was even more critical, and marked the species' end credit roll.

How can I put it?

Humanity all of a sudden lost its fire.

Its enthusiasm towards expanding, its excitement for invention, its passion for

propagation.

And it wasn't at the same level as a mother complaining about her son locking himself away in his room all day, but rather on the scale of the entire species suddenly declaring, "Everything is far too troublesome." Those on this side simply pushed civilization onto the hands of those on the other side.

Civilization is not a necessity to live on Earth.

But it is a necessity to live on the Moon.

And so the people of the Earth told them,

"The task of advancing humanity as a species now rests on your shoulders. Honestly, we're tired of it."

And like that, they left everything to the Moon.

Following that, it only took 50 years for the Earth and Moon to become entirely independent of each other. Humans on both sides decided there was nothing left to negotiate, and sealed their doors to each other. We were able to make do with what we were left with on Earth, and those on the Moon were able to secure their living conditions in their environment.

The light of the moon disappeared some decades later, apparently.

At the same time, humanity's population on Earth also dramatically declined.

After all, no one felt like propagating the species anymore. Left alone, humanity would have become extinct after fifty years. The only reason why it still survives is because about one in ten people still harbor the will to "keep trying."

People who had their hands full already, but still had the devotion and diligence to care about others. It was those people who got together and created something that was like the old gathering places—a garden for life called a "city". I've never been there myself so that's all I can say about it.

They called themselves the Committee for Restoring Humanity. A movement



for returning to the basics of life, with love as their fundamental principle.

I honestly don't understand it. It's not that I find what they're doing distasteful or anything, but the concept of two people loving one another is something I cannot fathom. Does it actually feel good? I can only imagine it leading to failure. I think a more systematic method of supporting one another would be better. You could be both comfortable and selfish, and have a clear objective. You can't even see someone else's heart, so I feel that trying to comprehend it isn't even remotely realistic.

Just like this. The reason I impose an impossible task on every one of my suitors is because I can't measure my own love, so I have him measure it. If he can retrieve something much more valuable than me, and still be willing to exchange it for me, then I'd consider that proof that he needs me.

I like them, and I like humans, but I don't understand love. Even so, I'm still happy. As long as there's sun and water and air, we're able to live our lives. I suppose things like this are why humanity is coming to an end. I do feel a pang of guilt over it every now and then.

*The stars twinkle, the sea ripples. The coral sings for man's love.*

*Like jellyfish, we live day by day, floating, ephemeral.*

I spun as I walked, singing in the dark field.

“Well now! Relating life to a jellyfish? How powerful.”

A voice cut through my solitude.

A man's voice, wrapped in a film I couldn't see.



“Excuse me, would you be Ms. \_\_\_\_?”

As I turned around upon hearing my name, something strange floated in front of me.





It looked like a tin-plated vehicle about the size of a lunch bag, shaped like one of those sashimi boats.

On it rode a person also seemingly made of tin. The surface of his figure was as polished as a kettle, completely smooth all over. There were two clear sight holes around where his face would be, but because of the moonlight reflecting off it, I couldn't see inside.

In any case, he addressed me by name, so I was obligated to reply.

“Good evening. I suppose I should say, ‘A pleasure to meet you’?”

“The pleasure is all mine. Please accept my card.”

The tin man pulled out a small piece of paper. I didn't know what it was for, but since he politely offered it, I respectfully took it.

“Did you come from outside the island?”

“Yes, I came to meet you. If it's not too much of a bother, may I speak with you for a bit?”

My eyes opened wide in surprise. As rude as it was to blink in amazement at him, I couldn't help it. A new suitor? How rare. Many people had come here to propose to me, but this was the first time I'd met one who was small enough to sit on my palm.

“Ah, I'm actually a deliveryman by profession. I came to this island half because of work, half due to personal curiosity.”

That tin suit was probably the reason why his voice sounded like it was coated in something.

A lightly floating small boat, and a guest in dressed in something I'd never seen before.

Unable to restrain my curiosity, I found myself immersed in observing him rather than holding a conversation.

The tin man didn't seem to mind, and began telling me about the current time, generation, climate, and other such things. It seemed to be idle chatter. Needless to say, my responses were absentminded at best. The conversation never took off.

Eventually he ran out of things to say. He seemed to be a bit troubled. Embarrassed by my selfishness, I offered a topic of conversation.





“You mentioned earlier that you came here half out of curiosity?”

“Yes. I am also a merchant. The other reason I came here is because of you. I would like to exchange something I have for something you have. What do you think?”

He said he had come to stock up on something he needed. This time it was my turn to be rather troubled. The reason being, a guest this rare would certainly not find anything he'd want on this island.

“You'd have better luck asking someone else. I don't have anything that important.”

“On the contrary, merchants fundamentally purchase what is lacking. I have many things that are lacking here. And the opposite holds true, too. Do you know any stories? Perhaps one that hasn't been heard anywhere else, and has never been published?”

Once again, without any particular reason I stared intently at the tin man.

Perhaps it was because he had made such a child-like request, despite having the composure of an adult. His words struck the depths of my heart. Normally I would make light of a request like this, but this time I felt compelled to help him.

“I do have one thing—a song you may want. It's a story I learned from my grandmother, if that's good enough?”

“An oral tradition? That is certainly of value. I do apologize, but I cannot clearly hear everything you say, so if I may trouble you further, could I ask that you write it down for me?”

The tin man apparently couldn't hear me very well. I was a bit taken aback at how we'd managed to hold a conversation thus far if that were the case, but upon thinking it over, I realized that we hadn't actually spoken that much.

“I can't. I'm unable to read or write.”

“Indeed, I’m aware of that. I will be leaving on the next full moon, so I would ask that you put it into a book by then. At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I shall take it upon myself to teach you.”

He thumped his chest with his fist, as if to say, “Leave it to me!” It didn’t raise my confidence a single bit. My lack of studying had only now come back to curse me. Humanity had long since ended, yet my life was still full of trouble.

We’ll leave that aside for now, though.

“By the way, you said that jellyfish are powerful. Why?”

I asked him my first question.

“This happened quite a long time ago, but a relative of the jellyfish managed to solve the fundamental biological problem of aging through cell death. It is one of the few life forms that has managed to attain immortality. As such, jellyfish are, contrary to what you may expect, quite a robust life form.”

Unsurprisingly, he responded politely with complicated words I didn’t understand.







This is a story from a long, long time ago.

In a prairie named the Sea of Shadows, there sat a rock in the shape of a young girl.

Beautiful light-brown hair.

Innocent eyes and peach-colored lips.

Slender, human-like arms and legs.

Fair, polished, lime-like skin with not one wrinkle or bump.

Unblemished, fair skin like polished limestone.

It was a statue of a girl, beloved by thousands, created to conform to man's image of beauty.

Was it shaped like that originally?

Or did it take that shape afterwards?

As far as this world is concerned, the Legend of Pygmalion is but a story from far off exotic land.

What is certain is that this girl was a princess from birth, and awakened through the desires of many people.

The rest of the world was a single vast prairie, but around her was an ankle-deep lake, with blossoming flowers as far as the eye could see. It was all fake of course, merely imagery carved from limestone.

*Water in the sky, sky in the water.*

They asked her to wrap this cold world with warm ice.

She was no longer sure exactly who had asked this. Many people had existed when she was born, but after taking a short nap, everyone had vanished.



She was now alone, and she passed the time by coming up with theories as to what had happened.

One theory was that everyone had died due to the system malfunctioning.

But as long as she was alive, that couldn't have happened.

She had continued to provide any necessities, so it couldn't have been any sort of accident that had annihilated everyone either.

The next theory was that everyone was sleeping.

There was a good chance that they had decided that staying awake was too troublesome and all closed their eyes together.

She stretched out her senses over the surface of the world but could find no human presence.

The humans really had disappeared completely from this land.

As she slowly discredited one theory after another, she stumbled upon the laws of the land.

According to these rules, residents were prohibited from loving other residents.

Anyone who broke this rule was punished by exile down to the Earth.

Perhaps then, everyone had been struck down by this law, and had fallen to the other side.

Yes, that must be it, she nodded to herself. Or rather, since she wasn't able to move her neck at all back then, she nodded with her feelings.

This theory seemed to be the most credible one so far.

But she was faithful to her duties, and so she continued to perform the task that was asked of her.

First, she cut surplus nuclear energy to the cities. The entertainment facilities

were clearly no longer needed. She redirected all the extra energy to environmental control. Within half a century, the Sea of Shadows had transformed into a city filled with trees and skies.

That said, the trees were limestone, and the sky was just a fake sheet of ice cover, but it certainly fulfilled what was ordered of her.

It was easy to fulfill what man wished for, as long as man himself wasn't tasked to do it.

She created seven seas on the Moon, and another half century passed.

She thought man would return once she had fulfilled their wishes, but there was no trace of them.

All alone on a soundless world. Sometimes, she came close to the truth, that people weren't the ones exiled, but that she was placed on this planet alone to travel by herself. But because it was just a theory, she never gave it much more thought.

She gazed up at the blue planet's reflection off the ice, which would normally not be visible from here.

Did everyone really travel there?

She had built such a beautiful forest.

The fact that no one would ever see it now really made it seem like it was all for naught.

At any rate, she had no attachment to the forest.

Then one day.

She awakened to the sensation of footsteps on sand.

She then remembered the feeling of something bumping into her body a little while ago.

Upon becoming fully conscious, she was astonished to see something walking down the tree-lined street.





It had a short and stout physique, and walked in a manner with limited movement range.

It had the same kind of smooth monotone skin as herself, perhaps even shinier.

It was almost like a tin kettle, a life form that would be taken as a joke in comparison to the aesthetic sense of this world.

Her heart danced with excitement at such an unfamiliar experience as she observed it in astonishment.

After all, this was the first time in all these years that an alien from space had come to visit this planet!

“Wait, that can’t be right. Why is there an alien on the surface of the Moon?”

She was, of course, mistaken.



What had actually arrived was a human from the surface. Technically speaking, it did come from space, but just like the previous inhabitants, she was unable to speak with it. Because she had no throat.

But just as in the past, she was able to analyze his mumblings.

What she was able to glean was very trivial, however.

He had come to this planet alone, against the wishes of his peers.

There was no particular meaning to his arrival.

There can be no reason for leaving on a one-way trip alone, with nothing to gain.

“I see, now. They have everything they need to live, but they were never able to overcome the emotional deficiencies. I suppose it’s not too surprising that a civilization more advanced than the surface eventually self-destructed.”

And so he began living here, using the machinery of the city.

A leisurely retirement, as one might call it. Every 12 hours he would come visit her location and mumble to himself while filling his tank with hydrogen.

“Despite having the form of a human, perhaps it’s a little too arrogant to force human culture onto you too.”

As he said this, he attempted to take off her dress, but she stopped him with all her might. As difficult as it was to believe, this was the first time she had been able to move her body freely.

“Please forgive me for my actions yesterday. You hit me so hard I thought I was going to fly to Mars. If this were the surface, you’d be behind bars already. It looks like I’ll need to teach you about some of the finer points of humans.”

He said this a bit sharply, despite blatantly accepting her aid.

Still, she found the sound of his voice fresh, and felt a strange closeness to him.

You could of course argue that anyone would have sufficed in such a situation, but I won’t dwell on that point.

He was a new world for her.

*Why did such a wonderful person come to this world of death?*

Unbelievable as it sounds, she empathically worried for him.

Of the many theories, the one that she thought the most credible was that he was one of the humans.

That he had been dropped onto this world as punishment for loving another.

Or perhaps in the same way, he’d fallen in love with someone from this world, and had climbed back up this far after being sent down. But unfortunately, everyone living here had vanished.

He had come here for love, but was unable to return to his world.

This saddened her greatly, and so she worked even harder in order to try to

provide a better life for him.

However.

“You shouldn’t waste. We don’t have limits on how we use resources, but if we run out, what will you do? If you run dry, you’d take me to the grave with you.”

Her efforts were always in vain.

At this point she had learned human words, and had even constructed vocal chords to talk with, but he would never listen to her.

Rather, the more she spoke to him like a human, the more displeased he looked.

She prepared many things for him.

She worked harder than she ever had.

She put enough effort into it to twist the roots of life, the very laws of nature.

I probably don’t need to explain why.

That was simply how much she had fallen in love with him.





*He was such an amazing person.*

*He defined life for a stone like me.*

Those words have been etched into the coral till this day.

Yet he never thanked her, but simply continued to consume.

*Have I become more human?*

She danced under the sky as she asked.

This was the first day that she had been able to lift her legs off the ground.

“If I had to compare, I’d say your body is closer to a coral.”

Looking back on it, that was the first and only time he had ever praised her.

But grandmother, I don’t think he was praising you. I think he was being sarcastic.

Still, those words made her very happy.

And for the next twelve hours, she felt nothing but pride for her silicate body.

Their time together continued for almost half a year.

The end came suddenly.

When he finished repairing his ship, he carried her with him on board.

She had grown weak and was unable to move, so boarding the ship and taking care of everything else was done without her say in the matter.

Even so, her anxiety over leaving the Sea of Shadows was eclipsed by her joy in being with him.

She closed her eyes in happiness while she sat in the tight enclosure that was only made to fit one person.

“I grew tired of humanity and climbed to the Moon, abandoning everything.”

His voice came from outside the ship.

It echoed throughout the prairie, where up until now there had been no one, and where from now on there would be no one.

“So it would be silly for me to love a human.”

Her body wouldn't move.

Even if it could, the door wouldn't open.

She had already moved away from the planet, so the planet wouldn't move for her either.



The sky of ice which covered the planet shattered like a dream.

“I don’t think that the affection you have for me is love. You simply don’t understand people yet.”

As she pressed herself against the window, she remembered the law that she had forgotten.

Anyone who falls in love with someone from the other world would be separated forever as punishment.

“If you simply wish to satisfy your primal desires, then there are plenty of suitors on the surface. You should just live there.”

Ah, he intends to stay behind, she mourned.

But at the same time, she also understood that it was the best choice for him.

“However. No matter what happens, you will not be a good thing for that planet. This will be the second time that I’ve killed humans on the surface.”

For the past her, it would have been just a tiny spark of light.

But for her now, the ship departed from the surface spewing a terrifying amount of heat and flame.

Silver plains.

The world that used to be her drifted farther and farther away, like a stranger.

In her eyes, now that she’d almost become human, it was now just a small far-off planet.

It glimmered alone in the dark sea.

But even as she sailed across the blue sky, she had no time for tears. Because he was so cruel, he hadn’t made sufficient preparations for her safety. The ship only had enough fuel to enter the earth’s atmosphere, and it had no means of



dealing with the impact of landing on a planet with six times the gravitational strength.

The ship dissipated in the air, and just like the punchline of a bad joke, she plunged into the blue ocean upside-down.

That was how this island started.

She managed to survive, but the shock of the landing blew away her memories.

It was at that time that the island grew a new coral reef.

She lived here, gave birth to a child, and lived out her life.

But every month.

When the night of a full moon came, she would look into the sky, and smile happily.



Thus my first literary creation came to an end.

“I get the feeling that you’ve mixed in your own personal opinions here and there. I can tell there’s bias in the depictions of the characters in certain places.”

The tin editor voiced his disapproval three times in this manner.

The next day would be a full moon. The little deliveryman had been teaching me how to write for a whole month.



He couldn't always understand me perfectly, so sometimes our conversations would run off course, but in general, they were stimulating days. I was taken aback by his appearance at first, but after a few days it became an ordinary sight to me. I still couldn't see inside the tin suit because of his light-reflecting glass cover, but I could tell he was earnest, full of vigor, and above all, honest. It was almost as if he were a life form that didn't understand the concept of lying or deceit.

“I finished reading it. Would you like to hear my thoughts?”

I nodded nervously in answer to his polite request. Even though I'd simply rewritten an ancient story in modern letters, I still felt a bit of embarrassment.

“Please be gentle.”

“It's quite a bit different from the story I know, but it was very enjoyable. This lady was quite a beauty, wasn't she?”

“I suppose. I think she was a bit too naïve, too peaceable. What about her did you like?”

“She didn't hesitate in anything she did. She must have been a very honest person. The reason why she couldn't see everything else around her was because she believed intently in just one thing.”

“You seem to be quite a supporter of hers, even though you shouldn't have been able to read into her that much from just what I wrote.”

“Oh, but I can. I can tell she didn't have a hint of regret. All I read was her happiness from start to finish.”

I was at a loss for words.

That wasn't how I thought I'd written it. I'd even gone out of the way to voice my own objections in the story.

From my perspective, this was a cruel story. Ever since hearing it as a child, I'd

always had questions about my grandmother's tale. She had been thrown aside and abandoned after working so hard, so how could she be so happy? If love means being able to accept betrayal, then I can't ever imagine myself embracing it.

"I actually meant to write this as a tragedy."

"Her perspective is your perspective. That's the type of life form you are. You inherit your mother's memories as your own. And that's why, no matter how much you disagree yourself, you are unable to stray from the true roots of this story. No matter what you may think, the original emotions are etched into your genes."

"... I don't really get it, but can I take that to mean you approve?"

I couldn't hide the slight displeasure in my voice.

The tin man nodded.

"It wasn't what I was expecting, but it turned out to be even better. I definitely like it."

"Expecting? What were you expecting?"

"A story about the coral reef. In my country, the coral reef of this island shines in a mysterious way. I was wondering if perhaps you knew why this coral reef glows."

The most precious product of this island.

The coral reef that glows during the full moon.

Those trees, shaped like coral, give birth to great quantities of oxygen and nitrogen on a routine basis. They say that it allows the history of humanity to keep going for just a little longer, pointless though it may be. Personally I don't think there's any particular meaning to it.

"I'm sure your people must treat its glowing as an ordinary event. I imagine that

the illumination is some sort of ecological function. I believe such coincidences just happen.”

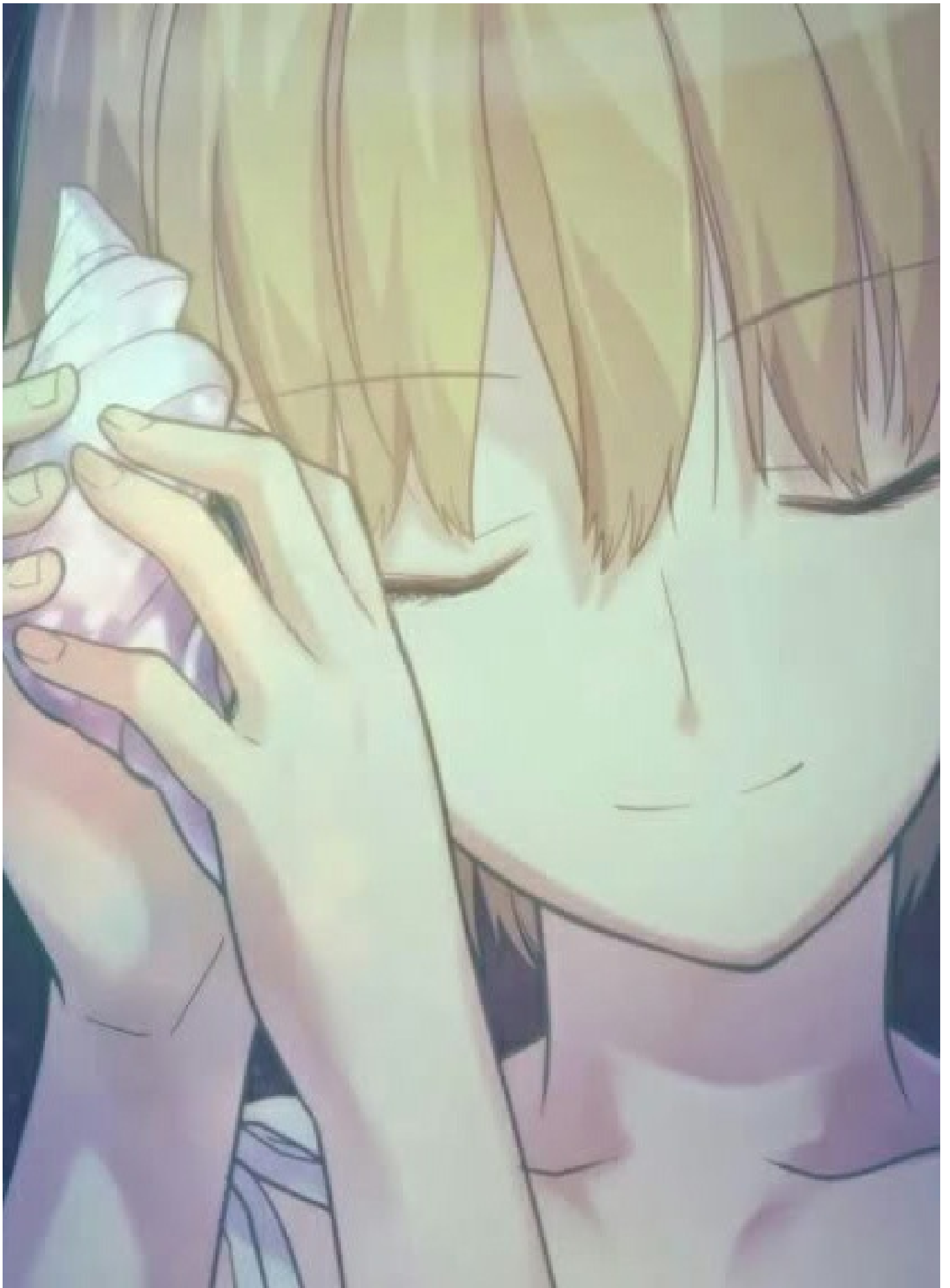
With that, he hid himself in his ship. Rather, he buried himself in it. Not long after, he pulled out a wrapped object about the size of himself.

“I’d been wondering where I should deliver this, but after some investigation, it would appear that you are the recipient. This is an exchange, but also part of my job. Please accept it.”

Within the wrapping was a single sea shell. It was as pure white as the galactic nebula.

I instinctively placed the shell to my ear.





*Tss, tss.*

It was a constructed like a spiral shell. The sound of waves could be heard from the organ-like swirl.

*Tss, tss.*

*CQCQ, can you hear me?*

Following the sound of waves was a quiet recording.

Ah, this is a recorder.

It was a sound recording of the story of someone in some far off place.

“I don’t understand what it means. I’ll entrust it to you for a day, and if you find it to your liking, please keep it in exchange for this book. Until tomorrow, then.”

The small man gripped the helm and pointed his ship towards the sky.

I quickly called out to him. The acceleration and mobility of his vessel was nothing to sneeze at. He’d be long gone if I looked away for even a second. It vexed me to admit that I’d not once been able to catch him.

“What is it?” he replied, turning back.

“You didn’t give me a grade. How many points do I get?”

“Oh, come now. Assigning points to a book? I can’t do such a thing.”

He seemed to be hiding his embarrassment as he replied, and then disappeared into the western sky.

That was the first time I’d heard a human-like, emotional voice from him.





Dyslexia. One of many types of educational disabilities.

While most intellectual functions remain intact, the disorder causes difficulty in understanding language. For the dyslexic, words look like oil spilled over water. My ears are similar. I was born unable to comprehend the beauty of sound. I cannot disseminate the information in sound. My world is composed of text and texture. From the day I was born until the day I die, I will never be able to have a conversation.

I feel reluctance in someone like me leaving a recording like this, but there's no other way. After all, she had been able to pick up on almost everything, but she had never been able to acquire the knowledge to read and write.



When I was born, the Gregorian calendar had already been lost.

Humanity had passed through its hour of death, and was simply waiting for its turn to fall into eternal slumber.

I was born in the reconstructed 12th Protective City.

It was a relatively effective cultural garden that managed to keep its population of about 10,000 alive.

That year there was one death and zero births in the 12th Protective City.

The records say that at one time on this planet, there was one death and three newborns every second. The plus outweighed the minus. That was how powerful humans were as a species. Such power is nowhere to be found today.

On the other hand, the environment problems on the surface had been solved. Not by the strength of people however, but rather as a result of this planet standing firm for a long time. Sunlight, water, and air had become extremely precious, but still filled the earth. It's not that the prosperity of old was no longer something to aspire to. After all, there wasn't any problem with simply rapidly breeding again. But there was one simple reason for why the human



population was on a steady decline. And that was because the humanity as a species had lost its desire. Its motivation, you could say.

Fuel is needed to move forward on the road of evolution, but humanity had used it all up. We'd worked so hard to avoid leaking life, to store it up, yet no one ever realized something was still needed to drive our basic life force. That fuel wasn't something that belonged to any one individual, but rather was consumed by the entire species. There was also a limited quantity of it. It should have been obvious. Even in the metaphysical world, there is nothing truly infinite in this universe. We live in a closed universe, and at the end, balance will ensure that everything will return to nothingness.

Even so, there were some who worked to continue the species.

As one of those, I was granted the privileges of a citizen.

The restoration project was grandiose, split into Resurrection and Continuation.

The Resurrection section worked on the restoration of sensitivity and culture.

The Continuation section was responsible for preserving that which was being lost. That included technology of course, but also life. The Continuation section was responsible for preventing suicide.

I was sent to the Continuation section. Entertainment was necessary to continue humanity. This was deemed the best way to improve the bottom line of culture, as opposed simply leading people by the nose.

Communication and networks are vital to human life, and at its core is "entertainment." I was the last person to be entrusted with its management and improvement.

The year I was born was also the year that designer babies—specially gifted children created using genetic modification—were tested.

There were no successful cases. Upon birth, each one stopped breathing and went into eternal slumber. Leave it be. Some scientists blamed the collective unwillingness of humanity to continue living as the cause.

Testing moved onto the next step. If the heart is stopped by consciousness, then one simply needed to create a heart that couldn't be stopped by human will. An actual robot-like human wouldn't find the very act of living distasteful. There were several successes on that front, but they had some faults. Specifically, there were problems with their five basic senses, and they tended to lack emotional sensitivity, but from a biological standpoint they were very much human. At least, that's what I've heard.

Regardless, the result was an insatiable curiosity and an indomitable will. The Continuation section's staff managed to preserve one of the reasons for humanity's strength on this planet.

But I couldn't be like them.

As someone who couldn't understand sound and didn't know conversation, I wanted the world to be simpler.

While I was working on expanding the sea of information thrust upon me, I stumbled across the remnants of space exploration.

Without taking into account the inability to return, there remained several ways to get to the moon.

That was the only reason I decided to head there.

I restored a rocket, rebuilt it, and gradually acclimatized my body to handle space flight.

Despite being open about my work to the people of the city, due to their inherent apathy towards others, they never paid any attention to it. The prevailing philosophy was that as long as you were fulfilling your duties, no one interfered with your life.

I donned the spacesuit, which once worn, could not be taken off. Even as I climbed into the rocket, I never once hesitated.

I didn't fear my inability to turn to my birthplace. I had no anxiety even after I was well into space. There were no traces of life remaining in the lunar cities,

but the buildings still stood. The bare minimum for survival should still be intact. And if I had underestimated what I needed to bring with me, then the result would simply be the death of one more idiot.

After being released from the Earth after circling it twice to gain momentum, the rocket slowly slid into the Moon's gravitational pull.

I looked down upon the world I used to live on.

A strong sense of guilt hit me.

I didn't hate humans. I just didn't want to deal with them.

I'd been born into the world in the hopes of fulfilling the hope of humanity, but I had my hands full with my own problems. All I wanted was the network, myself, and a small room. I was at peace in a world without sound, where I could simply look at information. I would be able to lock myself up on the Moon with no one to bother me.

It wasn't that I had killed anyone.

But I had abandoned myself, along with humanity.

Everything had become too troublesome, so I physically cut the ties for mutual aid.



A bit of effort was required to land on the lunar surface.

I'd already noticed it while I was performing observations from the Earth, but most of the Moon was covered by a sheet of ice. It was a blue ceiling that seemed to be protecting the seven cities that were built on the lunar surface. When I was planning to leave the Earth, determining a method of entry turned out to be the most troublesome task. I spent an entire month trying to calculate an entry path under the ice umbrella. The more I did the math, the more this ice layer puzzled me. I became exasperated to the point that I wanted to directly ask the one responsible what purpose it served.

Of course, there was no one I could complain to.

I slid onto the lunar surface and entered a city.





Scanning for signs of life revealed nothing. The seven cities were a huge grave.

There was only electric lights twinkling under the gray monument.

Looking up at the sky, I saw sunlight dancing under the thick ice wall.

The empty buildings were like a reef, sunken into the dark ashen blue.

This was more like the bottom of the ocean than the surface of the Moon.

I glanced down at my hand, encased in the space suit.

It had been created to sustain life on the lunar surface, but now seemed more like a tin plated diving suit.

I had intended to climb up here from the Earth, but had apparently instead sunk to the bottom of the Moon.

Regardless, the first order of business was to secure resources.

I used the Fifth Lunar City “Matori” as my headquarters and headed to the other side of the moon. My research indicated that there should be a nuclear core there that provided hydrogen to the seven cities.

However. When I got there, just once, I doubted my sanity.

On the other side of the moon, which could not be seen from the Earth, was a gray forest.

Trees made of limestone. A thick layer of ice covering the sky. And at the center of it all, at core of the nuclear reactor providing the necessary molecules for hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen, there it stood.



An ancient fairytale came to mind.

Was it Andersen's "The Little Mermaid" where she melted away into tears at the end?

It was sculpted unbelievably human-like.

A living girl illuminated by blue light.

Glowing flaxen hair, smooth stone skin. It reminded me of white, unblemished alabaster.

It remained unmoving, only its serene, glowing eyes gazing at me.

She was beautiful, and also not human.

She had an old dress made of some unknown material placed upon her.

Yes, placed upon her.

Because she almost certainly hadn't worn it herself.

The girl was sitting in a shallow lake, with her arms falling to the ground at her sides. That was where they ended. Both of the girl's hands were fused into the ground of the Moon. Her arms were discolored black from the elbow downwards, and her construction became sharper as it connected with the ground.

Because of this, she looked like a pillar extending from the ground. There was no way she could have worn that dress. I would later find out that one of the scientists responsible for her creation had felt bad leaving her naked like that, and placed the dress over her. His peers had apparently chided him for treating her as a human, and at this point I'm inclined to agree with them.

After all, it was effectively imprisoned.

Yet, you could also say it was being protected.

A figure that was a mixture of both beauty as well as ugliness.

The girl also seemed to be wary of the new visitor as I was of her.

My first impression was, of course,

“Wait, that can’t be right. Why is there an alien on the surface of the moon?”

I had come all the way to the Moon so I could be alone!



Of course, she was a proper life form falling under the umbrella of terrestrial life, not an alien.

According to records left in the lunar cities, she was an input mechanism for managing the planet more efficiently. Apparently they treated the planet as a life form of its own, and isolated its soul into a silicon- based body. It says “soul”, but presumably they meant “brain”. Planets have parts that you could call their “body” and “heart”, but no such organ as a “brain”. The scientists on the Moon had created an artificial brain, and a command body to go along with it with which they could control the planet as they pleased.

I felt reluctant to approach such a grandiose life form, but the resources required for survival came from her surroundings. Hydrogen, electricity, all of it needed to be directly retrieved from the forest in which she resided. As such, we would always naturally make eye contact. This was the only place on the Moon from which water sprung. Every twelve hours I would go to replenish my stocks, and each time, I would gaze at the forest by the girl’s side for an hour.

The girl never took a single step, nor did she ever seem to try to communicate with me.

Silicon life—the girl, made of stone, was an immortal life form that operated on a different time scale from us. She was not an incomplete life form like me.

Replenishment cycle number 112.

It was simple, hard work, yet I felt no pain.

It would seem that I'd taken a liking to this forest.

The forests on Earth had far too much life for my tastes. I couldn't stand it. But this forest was pure. And more importantly, silent. If there were someplace I could live in this area, I would move there without a second thought.

I planted the tank into the ground and retrieved only as much resources as I needed. While I waited, I would sit beside the girl and offer her information. It wasn't that she had requested it. After all, we had no method of communication to begin with. This was just symbolic exchange of goods in order to satisfy myself. I had only information to offer her, so I told her stories. It was nothing more than an exercise in self-satisfaction.

“Still... Despite having the form of a human, perhaps it's a little too arrogant to force human culture onto you, too.”

I had nothing in particular to do since I was just waiting, so I grabbed a hold of the girl's dress. I felt that even though she was shaped like a human, there was something wrong in forcing human perspectives onto her as well. But just as I was about to pull off the dress which in my mind was bothering her, an intense pain jolted through my abdomen.

It was a historic moment. The girl's arm, which shouldn't have been able to move, suddenly sprang into motion.

I must have slid across the ground for maybe three kilometers. I probably would have put mass drivers to shame. If I hadn't gotten caught on a crater, I would no doubt have flown right into space. Non-human life forms can be split into two types: aliens and invaders. I had determined that she was not an alien, but I could only pray that she wasn't an invader.

“I apologize for my rudeness yesterday, but I hope you can also consider your actions. If this were Earth, you'd be behind bars by now. You should probably learn a little about how fragile humans are.”



48 hours later.

I constructed a new vehicle and confronted the girl.

Quite frankly, it was dangerous, but I also wanted to avoid having to put my life on the line every twelve hours. I wanted to negotiate peacefully if possible.

I figured that even if I couldn't hold a conversation with her, I could at least convey my intentions. If the residents of the Moon were using her to control the planet, then she must have some sort of input functionality. I tried using my arms to indicate that I wouldn't repeat my previous actions, and after about an hour, she nodded her head and accepted my apology.

And so my fears of invasion disappeared.

I would have to meet the girl every twelve hours, but she wasn't human, so I was fine with that.

“It's not because people don't want to die that they fear death. People need to propagate, so what they actually fear is dying before they can do that.”

I continued my one-sided conversations in the forest.

That's the reason why humans consider death taboo. Life is based on the preservation of life. The genes that act as blueprints for our bodies are made of nucleic acid, or DNA. The double helix code is created as complete pairs. You take these strands and attach them upside-down from end to end. In this way, one strand creates the blueprint for life, and the other duplicates it. Even if one were to be lost, the other would take over that role, and continue the work of life. In this way, we are constructed from the beginning to always prioritize leaving a remnant of ourselves.

“To propagate, to create children, or in other words, to pass on our own genes, means to continue forever. The truth is, life forms become worthless once they create a child. After a superior duplicate has been made, keeping the original alive is just a waste of resources.”

To choose someone of the opposite sex that you match with, and to seek out

more beautiful partners is not a function of the soul, but rather a primal drive to inject superior genes into your own duplicate.

We are nothing but carriers of genes. The fact that people have emotions is simply due to it being an efficient system for passing on those genes. There was once a bird that duplicated more 500 million of itself. It had a population in numbers that no other species could challenge. If humans were like every other animal in nature, they shouldn't have been able to propagate to the same degree as birds given their body size. And yet, humans managed to do just that. They consumed the 500 million birds as food, and in the end surpassed that species in number. Humans don't have emotion and knowledge in order to enrich their lives. Those faculties exist solely to be the ultimate weapon for ensuring that homo sapiens would dominate the planet. Emotionless machines wouldn't be able to achieve that, because machines desire only efficiency. Once the most efficient state is reached, evolution would halt.

“Life must continue to propagate. Until that goal is fulfilled, death will always be feared. But as soon as a child has been raised, the fear of death that grips them will be loosened a bit, because they've fulfilled their duty. After that, they're free to live the rest of their lives as they wish. They can decide as an individual whether to continue assisting in the propagation of the species, or to work for their own gain.”

That said, the people on Earth do not fall under this description.

Humanity's soul had hardened. After having reached the “endgame” and seizing the future, they no longer felt constrained to continue the species. Everyone left the job of self-preservation and self-improvement to others. For them, propagation was no longer a primal will or obligation, but rather just a hobby.

“Even so, as long as it's at least a hobby, there's still hope. If we ever lose that, we'll no longer have the right to call ourselves living beings.”

The girl, as usual, didn't so much as blink.

I didn't really care whether she understood what I said or not. I'd spoken enough to make up for the resources I was taking, so I quickly left the forest.

The Moon's forest was silent and pure as usual. I couldn't help but stop and take in the scene, but when I looked back, I saw that the girl had lifted her hand slightly. It was as if she was plucking at a winged insect in front of her. I would later realize that it was a time-delayed reaction to something thirty minutes prior, but at the time, I couldn't understand her intentions.



“You shouldn't waste. I only need to fill this one tank. I'm using your resources freely, but there's still the possibility that they might run out. If the planet dries up, you'd be taken down along with it, wouldn't you?”

Replenishment cycle number 180.

The creation of chemical elements had been increasing lately, so I tried to warn her.

To my surprise, she reacted by casting her eyes down in sadness.

She understood what I was saying.

And more importantly, she was learning how to convey her own thoughts.

She may have learned nothing from my words, but by observing me, she was slowly evolving herself. I was dumbfounded at the time, so it never occurred to me to wonder why she was doing it.

“First your hands, now your legs. I don't think that becoming independent is necessarily a good thing though.”

On the 240th replenishment cycle, the girl had learned to stand.

Her hands and feet that were previously fused to the ground had become like that of a human.

She was still only able to stand, but at this rate she would soon be able to walk.

It was small news to me. Of more concern to me was the damage to parts of the forest that I had begun to notice. Small bits here and there being eaten away

was not good for my emotional wellbeing.

I launched myself into repairing the trees. When I looked back, the girl was smiling contentedly. She seemed to be appreciating it almost as if I were doing her a favor. Maintaining the forest became a part of my daily routine.

“Try not to approach me without warning. I don’t have a spare space suit so if this one breaks, I’ll definitely die. Oh dear, you tripped again. If you want to move more like a human, you should probably make some knee joints.”

Unlike a human, she lacked an internal skeletal structure. Rather, she was encasing her organs with bones, so she was inside-out compared to us. That said, I myself was covering my body with a space suit, so I suppose I was somewhat like her.

I did my best to help her, but I didn’t let her touch me. Safety was a concern of course, but I also didn’t want to be touched by those fingers.







Now that she was able to walk, her dress fulfilled its intended function.

Her figure slid through the ashen trees, almost as if to ask,

*Have I become more human?*

Noise reverberated through what should have been a silent forest. It couldn't possibly have been a signal from earth.

It was probably the space suit malfunctioning. I'd have to check it when I returned to the city.

The girl was persistently frolicking amongst the trees.

I took it to mean she was asking for my opinion on her new-found ability to walk.

“Let's see... If I had to compare, I'd say your body is closer to a coral.”

The girl spun around in her dress as if she were jumping in response to my nonsensical mumblings.



I spent roughly six months in Earth time with her.

The chemical production rate had been dropping lately. It was still more than sufficient for me to live alone, but taking her into consideration, I decided cut off power from the terminal in the city. I'd long since disconnected the network. If I could make the city more efficient, I can start it up again. If I cut all the surplus functions out like food and heat production, I wouldn't even need a tank's worth of fuel. I could go twelve hours with a single cup.



More than half of the Moon's forest had reverted to sand.

This forest is probably the girl's only suitable habitat.

As it receded, her liveliness also diminished.

*I'm sorry. I haven't been able to move the planet as well as I used to lately.*

The girl moved her mouth. Waves emanated through the vacuum.

It wasn't a malfunction of the spacesuit. She had acquired vocal cords.

I didn't understand. *Why does she push herself like this*, I asked myself.

*I want to know more about you. I want to touch you.*

She pleaded, her eyes clinging to me.

I recorded it, but I couldn't decipher the sounds.

The girl's voice didn't seem to fit any known language, and even when I tried converting the recorded sound to text, all that came out was a string of letters. To me, sounded words were just like the song of an exotic country.

“You're continuing to develop. I told you this before, but self-preservation and evolution are the obligation of all life forms, as well as their proof of existence. However, your evolution is not progressing in a good direction. Why did you create such an unwieldy body?”

*I don't care about those complicated things. I just want to talk with you.*

She placed her hands over her chest and glared at me.

The expression on her face seemed to say, “This is my body here”.

Even now, I don't understand my mental state at the time. I felt a cold pain as if someone had slashed my back, and a small fever, as if my heart were being compressed. It was the same as when I was looking down at Earth after leaving it. An inexplicable movement of the soul.

The girl was acting on what you'd call a heart.

She was beginning to experience emotions.

I had realized it long ago. I was just averting my eyes from it until now.

This life form wasn't growing to fit her surroundings, but rather was growing to fulfill the wish she had chosen.

"I see. You want to take the form of a human."

She nodded vigorously.

For the two of us who had all this time been unable to communicate, this was probably the only time we fully understood each other.

The reason why she didn't harm me was because she wanted to use my body as a reference.

The reason why she smiles for me and the fondness that she feels for me however, is not because of love.

She simply doesn't know any other humans.

Time passed.

There was no stopping her degradation.

She was trying to transform into a carbon-based life form. What lay ahead for her on that path was nothing but an irreversible weakening of her species.

The resource pool of the moon was also starting to dwindle.

As she lost more and more of her functionality as the Moon's brain and limbs, the surface naturally reverted to a world of death.

Hello, Captain Armstrong. The Moon was returning to its natural form, to a world where humans are not supposed to live, just as it was when humanity first set foot on the moon.

The girl began tumbling towards death.

The more human she became, the more the planet abandoned her.

The more she became enchanted by humanity, the more I lost my drive.

But even so...

If such a beautiful stone wished to obtain life, then I had to fulfill her wish.

I began working on repairing the rocket.

I secured as much of the remaining resources as I could.

The seven lunar cities would soon all become part of the sea of dust.

I did what I could. I prioritized my own survival, of course. If I were to neglect myself after having taught her that very principle, I wouldn't be able to look her in the face.

She began spending over eighty percent of her time sleeping.

I embraced her as she slept. I'd forbidden her from touching me all this time, but as I suspected, I couldn't touch her through my space suit. That's why I'd at least remember this reading. In this sea of weightlessness, data was the only definite memory.

She woke up as I was bringing her from the forest to the city. Even without saying anything I'm sure she could probably understand what was happening. The girl resisted, but lacked the strength she used to have.

After struggling for a while, she returned to sleep.

I laid her down in the single-seat rocket.

What would normally take five minutes, for some reason ended up taking several hours.

I'd made sure she would be safe, but she would no doubt resent me for it later. After all, this plan relied on the ship breaking up in mid-air.

As long as she could enter the atmosphere safely, she should be okay. The escape pod would then drop her into the ocean. She may have gotten weak, but

she's still partly a planet. Her body's exterior would quickly adjust to her surroundings. It might hurt a bit, but I hoped she'd forgive me for that.

Just two minutes remained until takeoff.

It was a grandiose project that took roughly eighty percent of the Moon's remaining resources.

It all belonged to her in the first place though, so I didn't feel bad about it.

My sensors picked up waves again.

I heard pounding from the walls inside the rocket.

Through the window I saw her disheveled, flaxen hair.

I had nothing else to do, so I spoke to her, as I'd always done.

"Calm down. You don't need me anymore. Your soul simply seeks love. Once you fall onto that planet, you'll find everything you want there."

*No, you're wrong! I didn't love humans. I loved you!*

"Don't worry. After you're gone, I will become something like you were originally. When the resources run out here, I won't be able to continue existing as a human, anyway. This was what I had originally intended, to be honest. So I'll no longer be lonely, just like how you were before."

*That's wrong too! Eventually you will also seek love!*

I don't understand songs.

Yet her waves felt wonderful and didn't discomfort me at all.

The pounding on the walls grew stronger.

I couldn't help but chuckle as I wondered if she might actually punch through.

In my mind, I wasn't worried about the plan being stopped so much as how to keep her safe if she were to do that.

That train of thought would normally be unthinkable for me. Actually, that's not right either. Ever since I'd arrived on this planet, I'd worked for that girl. Not a day had passed without me thinking about her. So in that sense, the way my heart worked now was the norm. I will never forget the days I spent with her, the days I wished would never end.

"Some time ago, I spoke to you about the definition of life. I said that those who abandon living aren't considered life forms. That was true. If you wish to truly live, then you must leave behind a child."

*Please wait! At the very least, let me speak with you just once more.*

My decision to drop this girl down to Earth was wicked.

It may be an action that ends humanity.

But then again, I had already abandoned humanity.

That's why I had come to this world.

And that's why, until this moment when I was about to lose everything, I never realized where my heart truly lay.

My memories hit me as though they were delivering my punishment. That's the kind of human I was.

"I hated humans. I'd given up on everything and climbed to the Moon to escape. A person like me has no right to love."

I was weak and selfish like so many other humans.

Yet even a machine like me, lacking even the functionality to empathize...

"...But I fell in love with you."

Without even understanding the meaning of happiness,

I selfishly wished that you might live a peaceful life.



Light and heat assaulted my vision.

The rocket pulled back its tail and descended into the dark ocean.



A ship to emptiness.

I watched it through my visor.

The planet left.

You left.

Right now, more than any other time in my life, I feel human.

I see. The real reason I had climbed to the Moon was to learn about love.

# 4

You could measure the lifespan of this year, too.

The twelfth full moon shone in the sky. In less than ten days, this year would also be spent, and a new, aimless year would once again begin. I gazed over the crescent shoreline from the elevated ground. Tonight, the sea was a degree brighter. The blowing wind was neither warm nor cold. This island was indifferent to the winter season.

*Water in the sky, sky in the water. In the sky of the moon is a shattered sea.*

According to some stories, the reason why the greenery on this island revived was because of a meteor that fell nearby.

After that, a new oceanic world called the Coral of the Moon was born.

Incidentally, my very first grandmother never returned after she stepped into the ocean in the last hours of her life.

They say that after that, the coral glowed on the nights when you could see the moon the best.

*The stars twinkle, the sea ripples. The coral sings for man's love.*

*Like jellyfish, we live day by day, floating, ephemeral.*

“Well now, you seem to be rather lively today.”

The tin man arrived in his little boat.

The trail of light he left behind with his descent reminded me of a shooting star.

I was probably happy because of the full moon. I'd been eating properly lately, and with the opportunity to mull over my thoughts, I felt particularly good tonight. He, on the other hand, seemed slightly off-kilter. When I asked him about it, he explained that his food stores were about to run out.



“Here’s my book. Please take it. In exchange, I’ll accept the shell.”

“Excellent. I’m glad we were able to make the exchange in the end.”

The hull of his boat opened like the lid of a pot. He lifted the book that was bigger than him and slowly got in. I took the opportunity to peer inside. It was connected to a different world, and in the space inside which seemed bigger than my own room, I could see a heap of gold and silver treasure. He placed the book right in the middle of it. I felt a bit embarrassed, but also a bit proud.

“End? Are you not coming back to this island?”

“It’s not the island, but rather this entire side that’s difficult for me to visit. Despite appearances, I’m actually straining myself quite a bit. Earth’s gravity is very heavy for me. This body was even created to be lighter.”

I swallowed my breath.

Like the current year that was about to welcome death, he too would disappear without leaving behind any reminiscences.

It wasn’t anything to lament over in particular. For the current state of humanity, to meet and never meet again was normal. Besides, I have a reputation for being a princess with precious few feelings for others. For me to desperately hold him back would be very unlike—wait, no. Why would I try to follow my ancestor’s footsteps so closely like that? Our conversations may be a little unwieldy, but unlike her, we’re able to talk normally.

“I’ve been pondering something. Do you think you could give me your opinion?”

I spoke up in a challenging tone, and he turned to face me earnestly.

Of course, there wasn’t really anything I was pondering. A number of things popped to mind, and I ended up talking about the marriage proposals I got. About how men would come from the mainland and as per tradition, ask for my hand from behind a bamboo blind. And what he thought about the outlandish quests I would demand of them.



He folded his tiny arms and nodded his head in understanding.

“You are very honest. I know someone just like you. Without compelling proof, you feel that people’s sympathy is just a cover for their deceit. This comes from you prioritizing others’ lives over your own. Your love is very much like a human’s.”

The moon was bright.

I spent many minutes moving my hands around to stop him, as if I were trying to catch a bird or snatch a winged insect out of the air.

“My time’s up. If I let this cycle slip away, I won’t be able to return. Reading and writing are the basis of culture, so please try to remember how to for as long as you can.”

“Yes, I’ll do a much better job next time.”

“Next time?”

“Yes. I’ve decided to write another one. It’ll include some extra interpretations that are missing from the one I just gave you though.”

I meant it. After listening to the voice in that shell, I felt the need to leave behind a new story.

“That’s quite enticing. You’re rather good at bargaining. May I ask what it would cost?”

“Can you bring me a fish from the Moon?”

An impossible task that anyone would turn down. And the man, who surely knew the difficulty of that task not just in theory but in reality, replied,

“By ‘fish’, you mean the life form that used to exist in ancient oceans? Hmm. It would be quite difficult to create an ocean on the Moon. But difficult as it may be, if that is what you wish for in exchange, then I deem it worth the effort.”

The helm appeared from the deck.

He took hold of it and pointed the nose of his ship towards the western sky.

“By the way, did you find out the truth about the coral reef?”

“No. But it looks like my grandmother’s wish came true.”

That story however, I’ll save for the new book.

“That’s great. I’ll be looking forward to it then, as you unravel the mystery.”

He bid me farewell, and the small boat flew off into the emptiness.

Tomorrow night, he would cut across the moon which was just beginning to wane, and descend into the far sky.

Just then, I heard a beautiful voice.

The song within the shell resumed, along with my memory.

It’s been several centuries since then. The two of them had continued their eternal separation.

The flower that blossomed on the Moon had fallen to the Earth and become ordinary, but also left behind many other seeds, in order to carry out what he had taught her. He said that love is a hobby, but sometimes hobbies can grow stronger than primal instincts. That’s how people are able to struggle and live on.

“Ahh...”

So that’s all there was to the mystery of the glowing coral reef.

They were unable to communicate or convey their thoughts to each other until the very end.

A one-directional romance.

Self-satisfied determination.

But both prayed for each other’s happiness.

Though, it's likely that neither he nor she believed that there would be anything remaining.

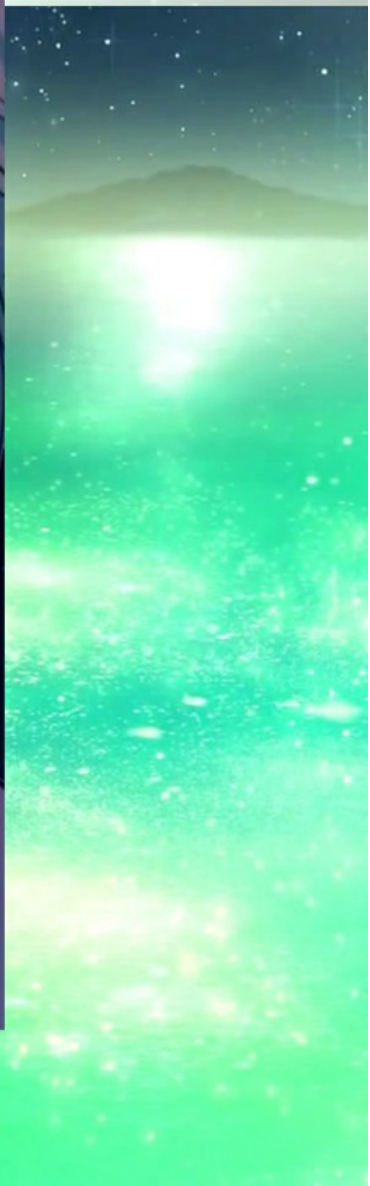
“What happy people.”

I hummed in her voice.

A nostalgic song came to mind.



光る海。謳う珊瑚。  
——今も、貴方に恋をしている。



Even if it can't be touched, there is life at the end of the faraway sky.

*A shining sea, a singing coral.*

*Even now, I still love you.*



