

ASUKA, WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME?

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ASUKA's Notebook: <http://asuka.notebook.eu.org/>

Retooled by Dave Watson (aj153@freenet.carleton.ca), 1999 8 18-21, with
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Version 1.1a.

Okay, I told everyone that "A Tale That Wasn't Right" would be my last
fic for a while. Seems I was wrong! :-) This isn't a darkfic like the
last one, don't worry...but it's a one-shot again. I hope you enjoy
it.

CAPTION: NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

CAPTION 2: Asuka, Will You Dance With Me?

Shinji and Asuka are in a corridor of their school, probably near their
classroom. Shinji seems very uneasy as he clenches and unclenches his
fist.

Shinji : "Errr...Asuka..."

Asuka (sighing) : "Come on, Shinji, I don't have all day!"

Shinji : "Errr...you know...tomorrow..."

Asuka (annoyed now) : "I *don't* *have* *much* *TIME,* you idiot! What
do you want now!?"

Shinji (almost sweating) : "T-the school dance...you know...I wanted to
ask you..." (to himself:) "Damn, she doesn't seem to be in a very good
mood..."

Asuka : "Listen, if you're just going to ask me something stupid and
useless again, don't bother. And it must be something stupid and
useless again. So, I don't want to see you, Shinji. Understood?!
Just because your synchro rate is higher than mine for now, I don't see
why I should talk to you or listen to your stupid question! Now, get
out of my sight! I don't want to see your stupid face today. Got
that!?"

Shinji looks down and slowly turns back before running out of Asuka's sight, exactly as she wished. She then turns back, too, before walking off in the opposite direction.

Asuka (smiling triumphantly, to herself) : "That baka is so dumb! I bet he..."

Her thoughts are interrupted as she hears a distant but very audible *thud*. She turns around and tries to force her way through the crowd at the top of the stairs.

Asuka : "Come on, you idiots, what's going o..."

She sees the bottom of the stairs, and is suddenly lost for words. Shinji is there, lying on the floor, in great pain.

A few hours later, NERV Medical Section. Shinji is sitting on a bed, looking down. Ritsuko, Misato, and Asuka are here as well.

Ritsuko (ironically) : "Good job, Shinji-kun. You've succeeded in fracturing both of your legs at the same time."

Shinji just sits there, frowning, both of his legs in plaster casts.

Misato (calmly) : "Shinji-kun...how did this happen?"

Shinji (still looking down) : "I stumbled. That's all."

Misato : "Really? How unlucky..."

Misato is obviously not convinced by Shinji's words.

Ritsuko : "Well, it could have been worse. You'll be able to walk again in no less than three weeks. You'll have to undergo physical therapy after that, though."

Shinji seems really depressed. Asuka has her arms crossed, and hasn't said a single word since she came here. Which is odd, since she was the one who called Misato and even helped carry poor Shinji on a stretcher...but she finally decides to open her mouth...

Asuka : "Hmph, serves him right!"

And with that last, hateful comment, she disappears into the hallway

next to the room, closing the door behind her.

Misato (frowning, to herself) : "Seems those two argued..."

Ritsuko : "Shinji-kun, we have a wheelchair for you to get around in. I'll show you exactly how it works, okay?"

Shinji (reluctantly) : "Okay..."

Arriving at the apartment building, Misato pushes Shinji's wheelchair towards the elevator and enters it a few moments later. Asuka isn't here, though. She mumbled something about Hikari and the mall before leaving them behind. Inside the elevator, and in the hallway to the apartment, Misato and Shinji were silent. Misato hates silence, so she speaks up.

Misato : "Shinji-kun...I'm sure you're not telling me everything...tell me what's wrong. What made you fall down the stairs at school?"

Shinji (looking down) : "I told you, Misato-san. I just stumbled, and-
-"

Misato (interrupting him) : "Is it because of Asuka?"

Shinji (suddenly flustered) : "No! No, it isn't because of her...I just..."

Misato (smiling) : "So, that's why..."

Shinji : "Oh...I just ran too fast and I didn't see the stairs, that's all!"

Misato : "What were you running away from this time, Shinji-kun?"

Shinji (hesitating) : "F-from nothing! I was just...running, that's it."

Misato (opening the apartment door) : "You're not a very good liar, you know..."

Shinji (looking down again) : "Well..."

Misato (pushing Shinji in) : "Listen. I promise I won't tell anyone else. Just tell me exactly what happened. I am your guardian, after all. I need to know..."

Shinji : "Isn't it just curiosity?"

Misato (narrowing her eyes) : "No...just tell me, okay?"

Shinji : "Well..."

He takes a deep breath before beginning to relate his story.

Shinji (sadly) : "You know, tomorrow...there's a school dance, to celebrate the end of the year...and I didn't know if I should go to it or not...b-but...when I heard that Asuka had decided to go with one of the other guys in the class...I was so mad, Misato-san...like I've never been before! I...I just wanted her...to not go with that guy! And I wanted to ask her...if she would go to the dance with me..."

Misato : "And what did she say?" (to herself:) "I'm sure I can already guess the answer..."

Shinji frowns and seems very angry all of a sudden. Misato is really not used to seeing her roommate like this. She had seen him depressed before, but not like this.

Shinji : "She said she had better things to do! She scorned me again! That full-of-herself little bitch!"

Misato kneels down in front of him. She has a concerned look on her face...

Misato : "Shinji-kun...you must be really tired by now...you should get some rest..."

Misato gets up and begins to push Shinji's wheelchair towards his room.

Shinji (angry) : "I don't need your help, Misato-san! Please leave me alone! Please...!"

Misato : "I will after I get you to your room. But you should get some rest, you know...if you need something, I'll be in the kitchen, okay?"

She slides his door shut and goes to the kitchen. She then violently grabs a beer from the fridge and rips it open, as if she's trying to release all her anger on a certain female Eva pilot.

Misato (frowning, to herself) : "Dammit, Asuka! Why are you so blind!?"

Meanwhile...[Author's note: The spelling mistake is intentional. Private joke to Mygard! :-)]...Hikari and Asuka are sitting on a bench in a park near the apartment.

Hikari : "And both of Ikari's legs are in casts? He won't be able to come to the school dance tomorrow, then?"

Asuka : "What's the problem with that? He has no one to go with!"

Hikari : "He may have asked Ayanami."

Asuka : "Wondergirl? No way! She has better things to do! How could she, *the* Wondergirl, come to a stupid school dance and have fun with her friends, like any other girl would normally do?"

Hikari : "...I don't know..."

Pause.

Hikari : "Maybe he wanted to ask you?"

Asuka (stunned) : "Me!? ME!? He couldn't! He doesn't have enough guts for that, Hikari! And besides, I allowed Saneda to take me to the dance tomorrow."

Hikari : "Saneda-kun? You mean...Koichi Saneda? He's kind of...cute."

[Author's note: Try to guess which game Koichi Saneda comes from...:-)]

Asuka : "Yeah, whatever...I can't bring Kaji-san there tomorrow, so...I had to find someone...reasonably cute."

Hikari : "I see...but, you know, I feel sorry for Ikari-kun. I'm sure he would have liked to take you to the dance tomorrow evening."

Asuka : "I don't see why I should go with that idiot...and, besides, he can't dance now!"

She smiles, almost as if she's glad about this fact.

Hikari : "You're not being very fair to him..."

Asuka (surprised) : "What do you mean?"

Hikari : "I mean, you could have...asked him."

Asuka : "No way! Don't say such silly things, Hikari!"

Asuka tries to hide her face from her friend...

Hikari (giggling, to herself) : "She's hiding something from me..."

The next day. While Shinji stays at home, Misato drives Asuka to school. They are in her car.

Misato : "You seem to have something on your mind, Asuka."

Asuka (pulled out of her thoughts) : "Huh? Yeah...maybe I do."

Misato : "Hey, Asuka..."

Asuka : "What?"

Misato : "What do you think of Shinji?"

The answer comes almost immediately. As if it's obvious...to its owner, at least.

Asuka (flatly) : "Shinji? What do I think of him? He's a jerk, a spineless wimp. That's all."

Misato : "That's all? Really?"

Asuka : "Really."

Misato : "A spineless wimp, huh? Do I have to remind you of what he did when you were sinking in that volcano?"

Asuka : "He just saved me, that's all! It's his duty, right? I bet you just couldn't afford to lose an Eva and its pilot."

Pause.

Misato : "Did you ever thank him for that?"

Asuka (looking down a bit) : "No. I haven't." (regaining her usual disdain:) "Why should I!?"

Misato : "Well, he saved your life."

Asuka : "And? It's natural, between pilots. I would have done the same."

Misato (stopping the car) : "We're here. Have a good day, Asuka."

Asuka (leaving the car) : "Yeah, yeah..."

She walks around the car to get to the school entrance, but is surprised to hear Misato's voice again.

Misato (softly) : "Asuka?"

Asuka turns on her heels and looks down at Misato, who rolls down her window further.

Asuka : "Yeah, what now?"

Misato (with a sad look on her face) : "Maybe you'll hate me when I tell you this, but...in that volcano...Shinji acted against my orders. He had been ordered to not jump in and save you. Now, have a good day, Asuka. And think about that."

With those last words, she starts the car again and heads quickly towards the Geofront. Asuka stands still on the sidewalk for a few minutes before she finally turns around and heads for school, her mind full of thoughts about what Misato just told her...

Later that day. Misato is at Shinji's doorway.

Misato : "Shinji-kun...you sure you don't want me to..."

Shinji is lying on his side on his bed, his wheelchair next to it.

Shinji : "No, thanks, Misato-san..."

Misato : "I'm sorry I have to work tonight, otherwise I'd stay here with you..."

Shinji : "It's okay."

Misato : "Damn, are you sure there isn't anyone who can be here with you?"

From the other end of the apartment, they can hear Asuka.

Asuka : "I'm leaving now!"

This said, the sound of the door sliding closed can be heard. Shinji seems to grab his bed sheets harder, his hands turning into fists. Misato looks down.

Misato : "Rei's with Commander Ikari, and your friends are all at that school dance...are you sure it's gonna be okay with only you here? There's still Pen-pe--"

Shinji (annoyed and angry) : "I *SAID* it was okay!!"

Surprised by such an outburst, Misato simply slides the door of his room closed, and heads towards the front door of the apartment, ready to leave.

Misato (to herself) : "Poor Shinji-kun..."

Back in Shinji's room, we can see that he's frowning deeply...

Shinji : "Asuka...why are you so mean to me?"

Pause.

Shinji : "Why?"

He hits the headboard of his bed hard with his left fist.

Shinji : "WHY!!? WHY!!!!? I'm trying to...and you push me away..."

Pause. Shinji is obviously upset that Asuka is going out...with someone else...

Shinji (frowning) : "You bitch..."

Later that evening. Asuka is wearing a dress, all green except for a white collar, where a yellow bow is fixed. Over her arms and shoulders, there is what looks like a small, light jacket, matched to the dress. She is at the entrance of the school, waiting for her 'date.'

Asuka (to herself) : "The volcano...he jumped in without any protection...that idiot... idiot... why am I calling him an idiot? *I'm* the idiot in all this..."

Hikari : "Hey, it's Asuka!"

Toji : "God, the redheaded devil..."

The two interrupt Asuka's thoughts.

Asuka : "Well, well, well, if it isn't the class representative and the dumb stooge."

Hikari : "Hey, Asuka, Toji's not that bad!"

Hikari is in a pretty white dress, holding Toji's arm.

Toji : "Where's Shinji?"

Asuka : "Shinji? What does he have to do with this?"

Toji (sardonically) : "Well, he told me he was going to ask you out to the dance. And since I saw him alive today, I thought you said yes."

Asuka : "S-Shinji...asking me!?"

Toji : "Of course! Just before he fractured both his legs, he said he was going to ask you out! Didn't you know that?"

Hikari (whispering to Toji) : "Toji, stop that..."

Uncomfortable pause (especially for Asuka).

Asuka : "Well, I'm waiting for my date right now. If you would excuse me..."

Hikari : "Okay, we're going now."

Hikari drags Toji away. Both of them take occasional quick glances at Asuka.

Asuka (waiting, to herself) : "I've got to be the BIGGEST idiot on earth...! Well, it's too late now...I should try to enjoy this dance...I'll have to do something back home, however..."

Koichi : "Did I keep you waiting long?"

A tall boy with short red hair walks out of the shadows, snapping Asuka out of her reverie again.

Asuka (angry) : "Yes, you did! How dare you make me wait like that?"

Asuka takes his arm and walks with him to the gymnasium, where the dance is taking place.

Koichi : "I was just wondering if you would've brought that wimp with you..."

To the surprise of both of them, Asuka drops his arm, steps in front of him and immediately slaps him hard across the face. The boy doesn't move, except to rub his cheek a bit.

Asuka (shouting) : "Shinji's not a wimp!" (to herself:) "Is he? No, he isn't!"

He looks down at her. His foreign origins explained the red hair and the height Japanese boys don't usually have.

Asuka : "YOU'RE the wimp, insulting him while he can't defend himself!"

With those last words, she runs out of the school.

Back in the apartment. Shinji is sitting in front of the TV, crying in his wheelchair, his head bent forward. He doesn't hear the sound of the front door sliding open, however. A panting Asuka steps in. Even with her dress on, she tried her best to walk as fast as possible back to the apartment. She enters the living room, only to see Shinji changing channels on the TV with the remote control.

Asuka (still panting a bit) : "Hey...pfffiu..."

Shinji is startled to hear that voice. That voice he dreads the most now. He doesn't look up at her. He speaks, his voice dripping with hate and anger.

Shinji (coldly) : "Why are you here?"

Asuka (to herself) : "Shinji, angry? Incredible..." (to Shinji:) "Well, I was tired of the dance, so I came back here."

Asuka pauses.

Asuka : "You seem bored. Wanna go out for a walk?"

He didn't need to hear that word now. He looks up and sees that Asuka

is just in front of him, looking down at him. He's frowning, and his eyes are like his voice... charged with anger and hate. But there is a bit of sorrow in them as well. Asuka leans forward in front of him. She has a very peaceful look on her face, as she puts a hand on Shinji's shoulder.

Asuka : "Well? Let's go out for a w...ungggggg!!!"

Asuka is literally thrown as Shinji violently slaps her across the face. She looks up at him in surprise, rubbing her painful cheek.

Shinji (furiously) : "STOP THAT, YOU BITCH! You know I can't 'walk'! You know that, and you make fun of me by reminding me all the time! I CAN'T WALK! Are you happy now!?"

He looks down again with extreme disdain in his eyes. Asuka had never seen Shinji like this... so much hate... and sadness.

Asuka (to herself) : "Shinji... is it me who's causing you so much pain? Why couldn't I see that all this time...?"

She silently stands up and gets behind him. She then takes the handles of the wheelchair in her hands and begins to push the chair towards the front door. Shinji looks behind him, only to see Asuka looking straight ahead, still pushing his wheelchair out of the apartment, and then into the elevator. She pushes the button for the ground floor.

Shinji : "What the hell are you doing!?"

Asuka (with a slight smile) : "I'm taking you out for a bit, you idiot."

Shinji doesn't know what to do, or what to say. He had expected her to hit him back, and was prepared for a fight, even if he couldn't use his legs, which are still hurting him...but he lets it go. After all, he couldn't hurt her. He didn't want to, anyway. In fact, he's now regretting what he just did to her...

Later, in the streets of Tokyo-3. Asuka is pushing Shinji's wheelchair down the quiet streets.

Asuka (to herself) : "Is it because of me...that he's like this?"

She looks down at him, but all she sees is the back of his head, bent down. Both of them were very quiet during their walk. Only the soft

noises coming from the wheelchair could be heard.

Asuka (to herself) : "Why is this torturing my mind so much!? This is insane! This must be..."

She's interrupted by a whisper. Even though it's a soft, one-word question, it has as much impact on her as a shout.

Shinji (whispering) : "Why?"

He's still looking down, as if he's hoping his legs would answer him. Asuka takes her time to reply, and just adds one more word to Shinji's question.

Asuka : "Why what?"

Shinji : "Why are you here, with me...instead of at the dance with that guy?"

Asuka (softly) : "He was a jerk. I smacked him and I came back to the apartment."

Long, uncomfortable pause.

Shinji (sadly and softly) : "I see..."

Asuka : "He insulted you."

Shinji looks up a little, surprised by such words coming from Asuka.

Asuka (softly) : "And I can't stand people who insult someone who's defenseless. That wasn't... fair to you."

Shinji : "W-why?"

Asuka : "Just because! Will you stop asking stupid one-word questions?"

Shinji : "Sorry..."

He bends his head down again.

Asuka : "And besides, I shouldn't have gone with him. You wanted to ask me to that dance, after all, right? And how could I leave you alone at home!?"

Shinji (to himself) : "Is she reading my mind!? How does she...?"

Asuka : "I sort of betrayed you..."

Shinji : "..."

Asuka : "Shinji, why did you jump in that volcano, last time?"

Shinji : "..."

Asuka : "You told me that Misato ordered you to jump. But you went against her orders, didn't you?"

Shinji : "W-well..."

Asuka (softly) : "Why?"

Shinji : "Because..."

Asuka : "Why?"

Shinji : "Because...I didn't want you to die in there..."

Asuka : "Really?"

Shinji : "Yeah...I guess it's because of that."

Long pause.

Asuka : "You're such a baka..."

Shinji : "Why do you call me a baka all the time? It's annoying... but at the same time, it's kind of... pleasant..."

Asuka : "'Pleasant'!? Are you some kind of masochist?"

Shinji : "It's pleasant... because I can hear your voice... talking to me... and it makes me happy."

Pause.

Asuka : "Tell me, Shinji..."

The reply takes some time to come.

Shinji : "Yeah...?"

Asuka : "How many people do I call 'baka' all the time?"

Shinji : "Huh?"

Asuka : "Just tell me!"

Shinji : "Errr... you don't call Toji and Kensuke baka... not Misato-san... or Kaji-san... or Ayanami... or... anyone at NERV..."

Asuka : "That's correct. I only call *you* a baka."

Shinji : "..."

Asuka : "Because you're special... because you mean something more to me than all those other people you've mentioned." (now with a cute little schoolgirl voice:) "Because you're my sweetie baka..."

Shinji suddenly looks back, and sees that Asuka has a very serene look on her face.

Asuka : "We're back home."

Shinji looks ahead again, and sees that the apartment building is in front of them.

Shinji's room. The door to the Third Child's room opens to reveal Asuka and him. She brings the wheelchair up to the bed. Shinji gets out of it and lies down on his bed. He isn't very used to seeing Asuka so peaceful and calm... still, it's better than hearing her shout and scream all the time. He looks at his pajamas on his bed and then at Asuka. She's staring at him, the same calm expression on her face as a few minutes ago.

Shinji : "Asuka... I need to put my pajamas on... could you..."

Asuka (turning around) : "Of course. Who'd want to see you changing, anyway?"

She giggles, and stands still there. Shinji is now facing her back. Seeing that she isn't going to leave his room, and wanting to avoid possible complications due to her usual behaviour when one refuses something to her, he quickly changes clothes.

Asuka (to herself) : "Why am I acting like this?" (crossing her arms over her stomach:) "Why do I feel so warm inside all of a sudden?"

Shinji : "You can look now."

Asuka does so, and sees Shinji already under his covers.

Shinji : "Do you want to tell me something, or...? I... I'm sorry for earlier... when I slapped you... I shouldn't have. I don't know what caused me to do that..."

Asuka : "Not much harm done. In fact, I deserved it."

Shinji : "But--"

Asuka (interrupting him) : "Hey, Shinji..."

She takes one step towards him and bends her head down.

Asuka : "Can you take my interface headsets out of my hair, please?"

Shinji : "W-why?"

Asuka (chuckling) : "Just because!"

Shinji (reluctantly) : "Oh, okay..."

He reaches his arms out and carefully takes off the interface headsets she uses to hold her hair up. Once he does so, some of her red hair falls on her shoulders.

Asuka : "Good. Now let's play a game."

Shinji : "Huh?"

Asuka : "Let's see if you can throw my headsets into that wastebasket over there."

She gestures at the small trashcan next to his closet, just in front of his bed.

Shinji : "Errr...you sure?"

Asuka : "Yeah. If you succeed, you'll get a reward."

Shinji : "And what if I don't?"

Asuka (comically faking anger) : "You'll be my slave forever!"

Shinji (smiling and gulping comically) : "Yes, your highness."

He takes the two red headsets in his hands, and carefully aims at the wastebasket. With a skillful throw, the headsets slowly arc, landing in the can with a clatter.

Shinji : "I guess I succeeded."

Asuka (softly, looking blankly at the wastebasket) : "Yeah. You've succeeded in throwing my pride in the trash. Good job. You know, I just discovered that I couldn't fight in EVA just for honor and pride anymore. There's something else... more important than that. It's so close to me, and I didn't even notice it until just now."

Shinji : "Huh?" (to himself:) "What is she trying to tell me?"

Pause.

Asuka (smiling) : "So, you like to hear my voice, huh?"

Shinji : "Errr. Yeah, I do."

Asuka : "Would you like me to sing to you, before you go to sleep?"

Shinji : "Sing... to me?"

Before he can say more, Asuka puts her left arm under his head and leans closer to him. She then begins to whisper in his ears...

Asuka (whispering):
"Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt,
Denn das ist meine Welt.
Das ist, was soll ich machen, meine Natur,
Ich kann halt lieben nur und sonst gar nichts."

["Falling in love again, I never wanted to,
What am I to do, I can't help it.
Love has always been my game, play it how I may,
I was made that way, I can't help it."]

Shinji doesn't understand the lyrics of the song, but, for some reason, they sound genuine and heartfelt to him.

Asuka (still whispering) :
"Manner umschwirren mich, wie Motten um das Licht
Und wenn sie verbrennen, ja dafur kann ich nichts."

["Men cluster to me like moths around a flame,

And if their wings burn I know I'm not to blame."]

Shinji (to himself) : "Yes...it's calm...and refreshing...it's Asuka's voice..."

Asuka (now softly singing) :

"Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt..."

["Falling in love again, I never wanted to..."]

Shinji feels her voice slowly fading away as he closes his eyes...

Asuka (slowly making her way to his lips) :

"...ich kann halt lieben nur und sonst gar nichts..."

["...what am I to do, I can't help it..."]

Her lips then gently brush his, as he opens his eyes wide. She puts her other hand on his left cheek and softly rubs it, while she continues to kiss him tenderly on the lips... after some time, however, she stops. She then gives him a wink and sits on the bed.

Shinji : "Asuka..."

Asuka (grinning) : "Could you make some room for me there?"

Shinji : "Some... room?"

Asuka : "Oh, forget it, you're hopeless..."

Shinji turns on his left side, making Asuka face his back. Then, slowly, Asuka takes her jacket off, rolls it into a ball, sets it on the bed and lays down beside him, resting her head on his shoulder.

Shinji (trembling) : "Asuka..."

Asuka : "Guess what? This feels good. It's been a long time since I laid down next to someone... so close to someone..."

She cuddles closer to him. This makes Shinji realize what she wants next. He lays down on his back again, and gently puts his right arm around Asuka, softly caressing her auburn hair in the process...

Shinji (to himself) : "It's so soft... and warm... is this a dream...? No way it could be happening... still... it seems so real..."

Asuka rests her head on his shoulder again and puts her right arm around Shinji's stomach, squeezing him gently closer to her. Even though she is still fully dressed, she doesn't mind. They are sharing some warmth, together.

Asuka : "Sweet dreams, *baka* Shinji...oh, and try not to take too much time to heal... I still owe you a dance..."

And with that, they both close their eyes, ready to fall asleep. A peaceful sleep, for once. A sleep full of nice and pleasant dreams, for both of them.

THE END

Author's notes:

Well, I decided to take some holidays, otherwise this fic would have been out earlier. Also, that's why the ASUKA's Notebook updates are so late these days...(laziness, when you're holding us tight... ^_^)

I know some of you *already* know, but I'd like to announce that the #teri-chan channel is operational right now! You can come and chat with people throughout IRC. The usual topics are Evangelion and fanfics. You can reach us via irc.stealth.net or irc.webbnet.net. Also, if you don't have any IRC clients, there is a web IRC applet on ASUKA's Notebook, on the main page. It'll take you directly to the IRC channel, without the need of an IRC program.

Retooler's note:

Axel originally had Asuka singing "Fly Me To the Moon" to Shinji, and he asked his pre-readers if they knew of a German song that might fit better. I remembered "Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt" from, of all things, William S. Burroughs' Dead City Radio album (as a singer, he was a damn good writer dB). I did a bit of digging, and it turns out that it's a song that Marlene Dietrich sang in the movie The Blue Angel. When I got both the German lyrics (by Friedrich Hollander) and the adaptation for the English version ("Falling in Love Again," by Sammy Lerner; no, it's not a literal translation, but it's closer to the mark than, say, Trish Ledoux of Viz's butchery), I thought

they were fitting, and so did Axel. It's probably the biggest liberty I've ever taken in retooling his fanfiction (as I write this, I'm currently doing the definitive retool of "The Child of Love," complete with HTML files, so I can finally leave it alone!), but I hope it grabbed you. Thanks to Jan Hart for replying to my post on alt.music.lyrics with both sets of lyrics. Back to you, Axel.

Well, thanks to all of my pre-readers; without them, my fics wouldn't be the same! :-)

Al-I-Bus ("Imagine Normality")
Alain Gravel (and his famous "The One I Love is...")
Borderline Case ("Reflections in Red")
Cedric Ranson (Co-author of "A Tale That Wasn't Right")
C-mann ("Unrequested Assistance")
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Axel Terizaki

SHINJI, WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME? (a sequel to "Asuka, Will You Dance With Me?")

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-=LIME WARNING=- This fic contains LIME elements. If you don't like that kind of stuff, just stop reading now.

CAPTION: NEON GENESIS EVANGELION CAPTION 2: Shinji, Will You Dance With Me?

Misato's apartment. The clock in the dark hallway reads 6:01 AM. A feminine silhouette with short hair emerges from a door and tiptoes towards the next one...but, suddenly, a hand switches the light on and completely paralyzes the figure in her tracks. She has been caught!

Misato: "I think I deserve a little explanation, don't you?"

Misato is in pajamas next to the light switch. The other girl doesn't dare to move. She has shoulder-length red hair. The girl turns back towards the older woman.

Asuka: "Well, I was going to my room. Any objections?"

Misato: "Why were you in Shinji's room so early in the morning?"

Asuka: "That's none of your business, Misato."

Misato: "I know you've been doing this every morning for a month now. What are you doing in his room?"

Asuka (letting out an exasperated sigh): "I'm sleeping. Isn't that what people usually do during the night?"

Misato: "With Shinji?"

Asuka: "Well, it's his room."

Misato is a bit dumbstuck by that. But she eventually manages a smile at her younger roommate.

Misato: "So you two are getting along better now..."

Asuka doesn't answer. Instead, she enters her room and closes the door behind her. Misato then does the same, wearing a huge grin on her face.

The next day.

Asuka: "Hurry up, baka Shinji! We're going to be late!"

They are in Shinji's room. Asuka's already in her school uniform, while Shinji is finishing putting his on.

Shinji: "But...Asuka...my legs are still a bit weak..."

Asuka: "I don't care, hurry up!"

Shinji: "Oh, well..."

Misato is in the doorway, not yet fully dressed, a can of beer in hand.

Misato: "Asuka, don't be so hard on him. Ritsuko said he would be able to walk today, but that doesn't mean that he has to do it as if his legs were 100% okay..."

Asuka: "Oh, don't be so soft on him! I know he's a wimp, but, still...!"

Shinji gets up.

Shinji: "You see? I can stand up just fine. There's no problem."

Misato: "Stop lying, Shinji. Your legs are shaking."

Asuka looks down at them. They are indeed shaking.

Asuka (glaring at Misato): "I don't care! He's coming with me to school today!"

Misato: "Oh, well...if I can't make you change your mind..."

Asuka: "Okay, time to go!"

She almost pushes Shinji out of his room, and then out of the apartment. On the way out, Asuka looks the calendar in the kitchen. It's June the 6th, 2016.

Misato (calling): "Hey! Did you eat breakfast?"

Asuka (on her way to the elevator): "I packed some extra food for us! We'll eat it on the way!"

The elevator door closes. Misato stands in the doorway, looking very surprised.

Misato (to herself): "Huh? Asuka's cooking now?"

Tokyo-3's streets. Asuka and Shinji are walking side by side.

Shinji: "Asuka...please slow down. I can't follow your pace..."

Asuka: "Oh, sorry."

She slows down her walking speed to match his. Shinji's legs are still a bit weak, and he can't walk too quickly.

Shinji: "Thanks."

Asuka (smiling): "Well...and to think it's all my fault..."

Shinji (chuckling): "Errr...not entirely, but..."

Asuka (honestly elated): "I'm happy that you can walk again!"

Shinji: "But I'm still weak..."

Asuka: "Isn't it better than your wheelchair?"

Shinji: "A bit more tiring...in the wheelchair, I was able to sit down, at least..."

Asuka: "You got lazy, huh?"

Shinji: "Yeah. But when I think about the other morning, when you woke up too late and Misato caught you leaving my room...I have to say, I'm not as lazy as you!"

Asuka (grinning devilishly): "Well, here's the school. Come on, let's hurry up and get to class!"

And with those last words, she starts running towards the school, leaving Shinji behind.

Shinji: "Hey, Asuka! Wait for me!!"

He tries his best to catch up to her, as she is looking back and sticking her tongue out at him...

Class 2-A. Lunch time. Toji and Kensuke are standing at Shinji's desk. They're the only ones here now.

Kensuke: "Wow, you recovered so quickly!"

Toji: "Shinji's an Eva pilot! He's strong, isn't he?"

Kensuke: "Yeah! I wish I could be a pilot too! I'll have to ask Misato-san!"

Shinji: "Well, I need to walk a lot to get my strength back in my legs, but it's really tiring..."

Toji: "But it's better than not being able to at all, right?"

Shinji (sighing): "Yeah..."

Eyes open wide all around as a lunch box suddenly hits his desk. Asuka had just walked up behind Kensuke and Toji and slammed it down there.

Asuka (in her usual disdainful tone): "You forgot your lunch this morning, you stupid idiot!"

Toji: "Oh, no, the red-headed devil strikes again."

Asuka: "I have nothing to say to a moron like you! I'm just trying to graciously give Baka here his lunch."

She then turns around and walks out of the classroom, closely followed by Hikari. They all turn to watch her as Shinji takes the lid off of the bento box.

Shinji (to himself): "W-what? She...I probably didn't hear well..."

Toji: "That looks delicious, Shinji. You should eat it..."

Shinji: "Hm...yeah, of course."

The three began to eat their lunches.

Toji: "By the way, Shinji, did you hear that..."

Outside, on a patch of grass near the school, two girls are peacefully eating their lunches. Until this moment.

Hikari: "YOU'RE *WHAT*!?"

Asuka (covering Hikari's mouth with her hand): "SHHH!! Hikari, not so loud!"

Hikari: "But that's insane! You're barely 14! Have you thought about all the complications?! And what if you..."

Asuka: "I won't, Hikari! I once heard that prolonged contact with the Eva's liquid has an effect on that."

Hikari: "But you don't know that for sure, do you?"

Asuka: "You're right. Well, there's other ways around that."

Hikari (sighing): "Still, what exactly are you thinking? I mean, you're always so hard on him, and now you're telling me...I can't believe it!"

Asuka: "I'm decided to give that piece of me to him...I mean...I'd like to give him something special for his birthday..."

Hikari: "That's not something you just *give* to a boy, Asuka. It's something special, and to just treat it so casually..."

Asuka (standing up): "I'm not treating it casually, Hikari. I've been thinking about it for a long time now."

Hikari: "How long?"

Pause.

Asuka: "I don't remember when I started to."

Her lunch now finished, Asuka starts walking back to her homeroom class. Hikari promptly follows her.

Hikari: "You know, you're cuter with your hair shorter."

Asuka (chuckling): "I don't think everyone likes my hair cut like this."

Hikari: "Then why did you do it?"

Asuka: "I thought Shinji might notice it and like it if I got it done, because I notice how he's always looking at Wondergirl. Of course I wasn't going to get it cut as short as hers. She looks like she belongs in the American army."

Hikari: "That's not a very good reason to get a haircut, Asuka."

Asuka: "I don't care. I did it for him and he told me likes it this way. That's all that matters to me now."

From the window of a classroom on the second floor, three boys were watching the scene. They were focusing on one of the girls. When Asuka went out of their sight, a tall boy with dark brown hair started to talk.

Tenchi: "Is that the girl, Koichi?"

Koichi: "Yeah. That little bitch will pay for humiliating me like that."

A smaller guy joins them.

Shukaido: "Is this really necessary?"

Koichi (nodding): "Absolutely. I can still feel that slap across my face like she just did it. And don't worry, once I'm finished with her, you can have some fun with her as well..."

A wicked smile crosses his face...

Tenchi: "Okay, I'll go see if the other team is ready, then."

Koichi: "Tell them that NERV security is pretty tough."

For the rest of the day, Asuka completely ignored Shinji, except for the times when she insulted him. Nothing out of the usual there, but she seemed to dig into Shinji even harder than she usually did. He was a bit disturbed by that. The girl who was cuddling up to him every night, sharing body warmth with him, seemed meaner than ever before during the day...as if she was switching personalities like masks.

On the way back to school, Asuka sees Shinji, and she goes up to him to talk.

Asuka: "Are your legs okay?"

Shinji (coldly): "Better now, for all you care."

Asuka is a bit shocked by that kind of tone. She reaches over to take his hand in hers, but just as she touches his hand, he yanks it away from her.

Shinji: "Don't touch me!"

Asuka is now even more surprised.

Asuka: "What's wrong?"

Shinji: "'What's wrong'?! Why are you acting like that!?"

Asuka (puzzled): "What?"

Shinji: "When we're alone, you act nice and sweet and all, but when we're around other people you keep putting me down, like you usually do. Don't you know how much that hurts?"

Asuka (looking down a little): "But, Shinji..."

Shinji (angry): "I understand! You're ashamed of me! You don't want others to see you being with me! You're using me! I thought that you wanted me to walk home with me because you were proud or whatever to be with me! How could I be such a damn fool?"

Now Shinji looks down.

Shinji (softer): "You're just using me for your own happiness...you don't care at all...about how I feel..."

He then starts to almost run towards the apartment. Asuka can't believe it. The boy whose legs were so weak this morning...was running. He was running away from her.

Asuka (whispering): "Shinji, you're wrong. *I'm* the fool here."

That evening. Asuka is walking silently down the street, when she passes a bar. She remembers something, turns and walks in, approaching the bartender.

Asuka: "Excuse me, where is the women's washroom?"

Bartender: "On your left, Miss."

Asuka doesn't reply. She just heads there. Once inside, she sees another woman leaving a stall. But that isn't her reason for being there. She spots a vending machine, and drops a 100-yen coin into it. As soon as the item hits the slot at the bottom of the machine, she picks it up and slides it into her schoolbag as fast as she can. The woman, completely speechless, eyes her carefully. Asuka tries to hide her embarrassment from the woman by quickly running out of the place. Once outside, she takes a quick look at the item she just bought and puts it back in her schoolbag.

Asuka: "Prevention is better than cure."

The street is rather empty, which it usually is at this time of the day. As she thinks about the conversation she had with Hikari during lunch, she feels a sudden jolt shoot through her body, and falls to the ground. A pair of hands pick her up by her arms, and another pair grabs her ankles. Before she can realize it, she is being carried into a dark alley. She tries to turn her head, but she finds herself too weak to do so. She can't feel her body anymore...

Tenchi: "Man, that stun gun really does what it's supposed to do."

Koichi: "I knew it'd be worth the risk I took to steal it."

Asuka is completely numb and can't move at all, but she is still conscious...and afraid.

Asuka (to herself): "Where the hell is NERV Security when you need them!!? Please don't let me be..."

Koichi: "Now we're gonna have some fun with you, Sohryu. You're gonna pay for making me look like an idiot in front of everyone at the dance..."

Asuka (to herself): "No...not by this bunch of morons!"

Koichi: "What's wrong, Sohryu? Nothing to say, for once? Ha ha..."

Asuka (frowning and trying to open her mouth): "A....sss...asss... hole..."

Koichi: "What's that? 'Asshole'? You want me to start there? What a little whore you are!"

The anger is rising inside Asuka.

Shukaido: "We'll just wait here until you're done, Koichi."

Koichi: "Fine by me. But don't hold your breath waiting."

He pulls out a flickknife, pops the blade out with a *snick* and shows it to Asuka.

Koichi: "I hate that ribbon around your collar..."

He then slowly proceeds to cut through the ribbon of her school uniform.

Asuka (to herself): "NO!!! This can't be happening! MOVE, dammit! Why won't you move?"

Koichi: "And I really hate those buttons on your blouse..."

He sticks the blade under each button and, with quick slices through the threads, sends them softly clicking to the cement. The blouse front opens, slowly revealing her bare skin and her red cotton bra underneath.

Koichi: "What a beautiful view..."

Asuka: "S...stop...that..."

Koichi: "Yes! Beg me to stop..."

He then opens her blouse a bit wider and slides the straps of her dress off of her shoulders.

Tenchi: "Those are sure big, for a 14-year-old."

Koichi: "Let's see how soft they are..."

He slowly puts one hand on her bra-clad breast, and begins to knead it. Asuka looks up at him, angry, terrified and helpless.

Koichi: "You like it, huh?"

Shinji: "Asuka!"

The three boys turn their heads towards the end of the dark alley and see Shinji standing there, holding Asuka's schoolbag in his hand.

Shinji: "Get your filthy hands off her, you bastard!"

Koichi (taking his (filthy) hand off her): "What do you want, you little prick?"

Shinji (frowning): "I want you to leave her alone!"

Koichi (cracking his knuckles): "Well, that's too damn bad..."

Shukaido: "Err...Koichi..."

Koichi: "What?"

Shukaido: "That boy...it's Ikari Shinji...I remember his face..."

Koichi (a bit scared): "What!? I thought the other team was taking care of him!"

Shinji stands there, smiling, confidently. It's eerie. Koichi starts to get very nervous.

Shinji: "Don't ever underestimate NERV."

Koichi: "Sh-shut up!"

Tenchi: "NERV security's prob'ly right behind him. We better run. Now."

Koichi: "Y-yeah, I think so, too."

The three then turn around and run toward the other end of the alley. Shinji approaches Asuka, who is trying to sit up against the wall.

Shinji: "I'm sorry, Asuka..."

Asuka: "Y...you i...diot..."

Shinji puts down Asuka's schoolbag, takes off his jacket and puts it over Asuka to hide her bare skin from view.

Shinji: "Can you stand up?"

Asuka frowns, and painfully tries to get up. Seeing that she can barely stand up by herself, Shinji slides one of her arms around his shoulder and puts one of his around her waist to support her.

Asuka: "You...stupid...your legs...are still weak..."

Shinji: "They'll find the strength to carry you home, don't worry."

He picks up the schoolbag and stands up, bringing Asuka to her feet. When he looks at her again, he can see that she's crying.

Shinji: "Did those guys hurt you?"

Asuka (weakly wiping her tears): "No...no harm done...they used a stun gun on me...I can hardly move..."

Shinji: "You should be okay soon..."

Asuka (looking down): "I'm useless now..."

Shinji (puzzled): "W-why are you saying that?"

Asuka: "I bet they didn't know I'm an Eva pilot, too! All the things I did...all the efforts I made...to get noticed...to exist...useless!"

Shinji: "Asuka, you're not useless. Not to me, at least...I-I like being around you...and Misato and Hikari like you, too."

Asuka: "It's not enough...!"

Shinji: "Yes, it is. I had to step in and help you because I think you're worth helping. Really. I--"

Asuka: "SHUT UP!!!"

Shinji is surprised by Asuka's sudden outburst.

Asuka (angrily): "Shut up! I don't want your goddamned pity!"

Shinji: "Asuka, please calm down..."

Asuka: "I don't want it! I don't want anything..."

Her voice drops, and her eyes start to tear up again.

Asuka: "I-I feel dirty...I don't feel pure anymore...I've been raped by those guys..."

Shinji: "You *could* have been, if I didn't see your schoolbag on the sidewalk, and didn't hear those guys say your name. But you weren't. You're all right. You're not dirty. It wasn't your fault this hap- pened, right? So don't worry about it...because I still care about you."

Asuka looks up at him, hope starting to shine in her eyes.

Shinji: "I mean, you're beautiful, smart, and all that...but I don't like you just for that. I don't like you like all the other boys do. You're my fellow pilot first, and you're a girl I want to be with... who I want to protect. Do you understand what I mean?"

Asuka (now frowning): "...I told you, I don't want your pity..."

Shinji: "Please stop saying that! Stop it! It's human to accept pity. Pity is love, too! Well, that's what I think..."

Asuka: "I don't know why I still care...if only I'd left you in your damned wheelchair that time...none of this would have happened!"

Shinji: "Don't tell me you regret taking care of me like you did. I don't believe that! Not with everything you said and did afterwards!"

Asuka: "...maybe I'm just lying to myself..."

Shinji: "We all do that sometimes. Life often hurts...and until recently, I was running away from mine. Then you showed me that you cared about me. It showed me that life was worth living. I don't know if what I'm saying really makes sense, but...that's what I think."

Asuka: "Maybe that's what I'm doing. Running away."

Shinji: "Really, there's other things to life than piloting Eva and all."

Asuka: "Maybe you're right."

Shinji (a little more upbeat): "Of course I'm right!" (more serious now:) "But still...why do you keep on ignoring me or insulting me when we're around other people?"

Asuka (sighing): "I'm sorry for treating you so badly. I guess you know how I feel, too..."

Shinji slowly nods.

Asuka: "All those feelings and emotions, I only want you to know them. I don't want to show everyone what I feel for you. I believe that... being nice to you...kissing you...and sleeping by your side are too personal for other people, even Misato, to know about..."

With that, she tenderly kisses his cheek.

Shinji: "I see...and I agree with you, Asuka. I was such an idiot during all this. I couldn't see what you were trying to tell me."

Asuka: "It's all right now."

Shinji: "On my way back from school, I was attacked by four guys... I heard them talking about you and it really scared me...that's when the NERV security agents showed up and took care of them. So I was able to get away and search for you...I was really worried..."

Asuka: "So...that's why there weren't any security agents around at that moment..."

Shinji: "Yeah. The guys who attacked me were probably used to throw them off of what was really happening."

Asuka (sighing): "Don't worry, Shinji. No one will get to see and touch your birthday present but you."

Shinji (surprised): "You...you knew!?"

Asuka (smiling slightly): "Of course, idiot. How could I could forget that?"

Shinji: "It's just that...I've never really gotten a birthday present before..."

Asuka: "I have one for you...but it's only for tonight. Because tonight, I planned something special."

The apartment, a little later. The front door slides open to reveal Asuka with an arm still around Shinji's shoulder.

Asuka: "It's okay...I think I can walk by myself now...I can feel my legs again."

Shinji: "That's nice to hear."

Shinji lets go of Asuka, and she slowly, carefully walks towards the kitchen. She stops at the entranceway and turns around to face Shinji.

Asuka (happily): "You see?"

Shinji (smiling): "Yeah. I'm gonna go lie down on the couch. My legs really hurt."

Asuka: "Okay. I hope they'll be all right later this evening!"

Shinji (to himself): "What?"

Asuka: "But now I'm going to make dinner for tonight."

Shinji: "Really!?"

Asuka: "Why are you so surprised about that? Is something wrong?!"

Shinji (trying to defend himself): "No, no! It's nothing, really! It's just the first time you've ever made dinner for me."

Asuka (rolling up her sleeves): "You'll see what a Sohryu can do!"

Shinji smiles, and, without another word, flops down on the couch and takes a nap.

Some time later...

Asuka: "Shinji...wake up..."

Shinji slowly opens his eyes, to be greeted by a close view of Asuka's face. She's leaning over him.

Shinji: "Asuka? What time is it?"

Asuka: "You slept for nearly three hours..."

Shinji: "Oh..."

As he gets a better look at her, he notices that she's not in her school uniform anymore.

Shinji: "Where did you get that dress?"

Asuka: "Idiot, I have a lot of different dresses in my wardrobe."

Shinji: "I didn't know you had such a nice evening dress."

Indeed, Asuka is wearing a sexy sleeveless red dress.

Shinji: "And why did you turn off all the lights?"

Asuka: "Come into the kitchen, and you'll see..."

He slowly gets up from the couch and follows Asuka's feminine silhouette to the kitchen. There, he is greeted by the sight of a fully-arranged kitchen table, softly lit by two candles.

Asuka: "Take a seat."

Shinji sits down, and Asuka seats herself across from him. He looks down at the food she prepared for him.

Shinji (surprised): "Curry?"

Asuka: "I didn't know what else to make, and I didn't want to try to cook something too difficult, so..."

Shinji: "That's okay..."

Asuka: "Good."

Shinji: "Itadakimasu [I will receive it]."

Shinji picks up his spoon, takes a bit of his curry, and tastes it.

Shinji (gulping): "Your cooking is really nice."

Asuka: "You think so? To tell the truth, I haven't tasted it yet."

Seeing that Shinji seems to be enjoying each bite he's eating, Asuka decided to try herself. As she puts her spoon in her mouth, she twitches a bit and her left eyebrow arches.

Asuka (to herself): "But this...this is TERRIBLE! How can he like this?! What have I cooked!? I'm worse than Misato!"

She then looks at him again. He is indeed enjoying the meal she cooked for him, much to her disbelief...

Asuka (looking down): "Shinji, be honest with me. If you don't want to eat this, don't force yourself. And you can say it: It's awful."

Shinji looks up at her and stops eating.

Shinji: "I think that, since you put a lot of effort into making this, it makes it better than it looks or tastes. To me, everything you'll ever cook will be good, because it's something you did by yourself... it's like you're giving a part of yourself to me."

Asuka is speechless.

Shinji: "Really."

Asuka: "I-if you say so..."

They continue to eat in silence. She still feels uneasy about her cooking, though, and it casts a pall over her face. Shinji reads her look as being about what happened earlier, and

he speaks up.

Shinji: "Asuka...sorry for bringing this up so suddenly now, but... did you know those guys?"

Asuka (looking down a bit): "Oh...yeah...one of them was the guy I dumped for you at the school dance. He wanted to get revenge..."

Shinji: "Damn...if I ever see them again..."

He clenches and unclenches his fist as the anger spreads over his face.

Asuka (with a worried look): "Calm down, Shinji. It's over now. It was terrible, but...I feel better about it now, because you came for me and you stopped them."

Shinji: "Yeah...sorry." (flustered:) "I-I mean, about getting mad just now..."

Asuka (angrily): "Damn, I hate it when you apologize for insignificant things like that!"

Shinji: "Sor--"

Asuka is throwing a death glare at him. Shinji, for some strange reason, bursts out laughing. Asuka's brow furrows in confusion.

Shinji (still laughing a little): "You may like to insult me and all that, but there's something I like to do as well: Make you angry! God, you're so cute when...ha ha ha ha!"

Asuka (realizing): "Wait, you little...!"

Asuka starts to get up out of her chair, then remembers what he just said, settles down and fumes a bit. Shinji laughs again a little, calms down and goes back to his dinner.

Shinji (calming down and finishing eating): "Gochisousama deshita [Thank you for the feast]. That was good, Asuka. Your cooking's not the best, but it's good."

Asuka (standing up): "I still need more practice. Stay there, I'll be right back."

She then turns and walks to a part of the kitchen not lit up by the candles. She comes back with a big platter in her hands and sets it down on the table between them.

Asuka (happily): "Jyaaaaaan!!!"

Shinji is speechless. A huge, luscious, and appetizing chocolate cake is sitting in front of him. On it stand fifteen candles, which Asuka is now lighting with a match.

Shinji: "You...you..."

Asuka (lighting the last candle): "I hope this'll be better than the curry was."

Shinji: "Wow...It looks great! I-I'm impressed!"

Asuka: "Happy birthday, Ikari Shinji!"

Shinji (stunned): "I still can't believe this!"

Asuka (grinning): "Come on, blow the candles out! If you can blow all fifteen of them out at once, you may get a nice reward..."

Shinji: "Okay..."

He takes a deep breath, and, with one long, slow puff, blows out every candle on the cake.

As he closes his eyes and begins to recover, he can hear clapping. He opens his eyes again.

Asuka (applauding): "Congratulations, Shinji." (now grinning:) "I'm sure you'll appreciate the reward very much...but that's for the third part of the evening!"

She giggles.

Shinji: "Really? What is it?"

Asuka (calming down a bit): "It's a surprise. You'll see!"

Asuka pulls the candles out of the cake. She then cuts the cake into eight equal portions with a large knife.

Shinji: "Don't you think this is...a bit too much for just the two of us?"

Asuka grins as she puts a slice on a dessert plate with a spatula and sets it in front of Shinji.

Asuka: "I'm sure you'll want to eat it all..."

Shinji (smiling): "Let's see about that."

He picks up his fork, takes a piece of the cake, pops it into his mouth, and chews it slowly and carefully before swallowing it. And then smiles.

Shinji: "Excellent!"

Asuka (smiling): "Let's see if you're lying or not..."

She takes a bite of her own slice.

Asuka: "Hmmm...you're right! This is great!"

Shinji: "See? You're not as bad as you say you are!"

Shinji quickly finishes his portion. Asuka reaches for the spatula so she can give him another slice, but he gestures and quickly swallows his last bite.

Shinji: "Thanks, but I don't think I can eat any more of this cake. I mean, it's great, but it's just a bit too...rich for me."

Asuka (chuckling): "Oops, I forgot that you have a Japanese stomach!"

Shinji: "Yeah..."

Asuka: "Okay, I won't let you just sit there watching me eat my cake. We can have more later..."

With that, she stands up. Shinji stands up, as well, and takes the hand that Asuka is holding out to him.

Shinji: "So, what's next?"

Asuka: "Are your legs okay?"

Shinji: "I think they are."

Asuka: "Then, let me remind you that I still owe you a dance. And I hate to be in debt to anyone."

Shinji: "Yeah, that's right. I remember. I guess you planned every- thing for that as well."

Asuka: "Of course!"

Shinji follows Asuka into the living room, where she had moved her SoundSpace(tm) audio system from her bedroom. She walks over to the system and pushes the play button of the DAD [Digital Audio Disc] player. Soon, the living room is filled with a soft and slow song. A tune from the late 90's, from what Shinji can remember of his limited knowledge of pop songs.

Asuka (holding out her arms to him): "Shall we dance?"

Shinji is a bit surprised by the sudden change of atmosphere. Especially in Asuka's mood and actions.

Shinji: "Errr...sure."

Shinji approaches Asuka, and before he realizes it, he's lost in her beautiful blue eyes. Those two blue orbs that would cry sometimes, smile sometimes, shine with excitement and rage during Angel battles... the windows to her soul that could keep him busy for ages just looking into them...Asuka puts her hands on his shoulders, and looks right into his own eyes with a smile. Shinji then slowly wraps his arms around Asuka's waist, holding her firmly, but still gently, close to him. They both start to slowly sway and turn to the music.

Asuka (softly): "Well, you're not a bad dancer..."

Shinji: "It's not that difficult, actua--"

Asuka interrupts him by slowly placing a finger on his lips.

Asuka: "Sssshhh...let's just dance now..."

She then gently takes her hands off of Shinji's shoulders, and folds her arms around the back of his neck. She draws closer to him, and finally rests her head on his left shoulder. Shinji brushes some of Asuka's hair off his face, and continues dancing. The tracks from Asuka's DAD player slowly and softly unfold from the speakers, all blurring into one single dimension where things like plaster casts and alleys no longer exist. Before either of them know it, the player reaches track 9, and begins to fill the room with Megumi Hayashibara's "Alchemy Of Love."

Shinji: "It's strange...don't you think this singer's voice sounds like Ayanami's?"

Asuka: "Errr...what?"

Shinji (softly): "Just listen..."

Asuka: "Yeah, you're right. That's funny. I never noticed that before..."

The lights in the room were turned down to the strict minimum, making it hard to distinguish the two silhouettes slowly gliding across the room. It's even harder due to the fact they are so close to each other, one could swear it was only one person dancing, alone...they danced, danced, danced until the DAD player reached track 19. They didn't care how long they danced, how much Shinji's legs were aching, or if Misato was coming back now. For them, time simply ground to a halt...as they hugged each other tightly, Asuka spoke.

Asuka (softly): "Shinji...?"

Shinji: "Yes?"

Asuka: "Let's go to your room. I'm...tired."

Shinji (nodding): "Sure..."

They slowly release each other from their tight embrace, and go to Shinji's room. After Shinji enters the room, Asuka locks the door behind him.

Asuka: "Lay down on the bed, and close your eyes, okay?"

Shinji doesn't really know what she's going to do, but he obeys her.

Asuka: "And keep them closed..."

Shinji does as he was told. Once he lays down on the bed, where he can finally rest his legs a little, he closes his eyes. His curiosity tells him to peek, but his gentlemanly side tells him to keep them closed, as Asuka told him to. But the rustling he hears isn't helping at all. Before long, the rustling stops, and he can feel another weight on the bed. He opens his eyes wide when he then feels a pair of lips against his. Asuka is indeed planting a passionate kiss on his lips...

Shinji (looking down): "A...Asuka!"

Asuka (beginning to gently nibble his neck): "This is my birthday present to you, Shinji..."

As Shinji looks down, he can swear that his heart had just missed a beat or two. Asuka is completely naked, and lying on top of his body with all her weight. He is unable to get away, even if he wants to. When he finally recovers his senses, Asuka had already unbuttoned his shirt, and was now undoing his belt.

Shinji: "Asuka...do you really think that..."

Asuka cuts him off by kissing him passionately again, this time with her tongue forcing its way inside his mouth, and sensually caressing his. She slowly breaks the kiss after a few seconds.

Asuka: "Isn't this a nice present?"

Shinji: "I think we're a bit too young for this..."

Asuka: "There has to be a first time for everything...and this first time...I want it to be with you. I want to love you. I want to prove it..."

Shinji: "You're sure you won't regret it...?"

Asuka: "Oh, no, I won't...I'm sure I won't...Shinji...please..."

With those last words, she plants another short and soft kiss on his lips.

Shinji: "But, what about..."

Asuka reaches for his nightstand, picks something up from it and holds it up. It was the condom she had bought earlier that day. Shinji is surprised, since he knows he never bought one in his life. She did that...for him.

Asuka (softly): "Don't worry about that...I thought about that today." (smiling:) "I mean, there's some risks even *I* won't take."

Shinji: "Well, if we don't have to worry about that...than I really want to show you how much I love you, too. But aren't you a bit scared?"

Asuka: "Scared? Why should I be? I trust you. I know you would never try to hurt me..."

Shinji (whispering into her ear): "I won't. Never."

Shinji starts to nibble Asuka's neck like she had his earlier, and before too long Sohryu Asuka Langley and Ikari Shinji broke through the world of childlike purity and innocence, into a universe of love and ultimate trust. One that was so far away, but so close to them. They were only vaguely familiar with it before, but now that they had led each other there in each other's arms, they knew that they had found something they had never felt before...a sense of belonging. To each other. An English song by a band from the 1980's can be heard from the living room now...

"I'll stop the world and melt with you I've seen some changes but it's getting better all the time There's nothing you and I won't do I'll stop the world and melt with you The future's open wide..."

----- THE END? -----

Author's notes:

I think I'm gonna see a LOT of complaints about the near-rape scene. Sorry about that, but I think it had to be done...

And remember to always use a condom, m'kay? :)

Special thanks goes to Alain Gravel, RG-01, Cedric Ranson, Dave Watson, and EBJ!
Thank you all for the invaluable help in this fic!

And kisses to Deina-chan, Juju/Asuka-chan and Alice-chan! (thanks for the Asuka-in-a-wedding-dress drawing :)) :>

Retooler's notes:

Any similarities between this fic and my Video Girl Ai limefic "Past the Return Date" are purely coincidental. Or so Axel says dB). I'll have to take him at his word here. Whatever the case is, I most definitely did not stick them in to refer to my own work. In fact, I bugged Axel to take out the part about Megumi Hayashibara's singing sounding like one of the characters she voice-acts, but he insisted on keeping it in. So BLAME HIM! dB)

As I retooled the last part of the fic, I was listening to the 4AD Records promo compilation CD _Clipped and Clustered_, and the Modern English song "I Melt With You" was playing. The chorus near the end of the song matched the mood of the ending so well that I couldn't help but include it here. The song is written by Modern English, published by Beggars Banquet Music, and available on the album _After the Snow._ If anybody involved in the above entities are reading this, the lyrics are used without permission, but, for Belldandy's sake, you got proper credit and a plug, no one is making money off this story and Axel and I are so poor it wouldn't be worth the lawyer's fees to sue us, so please don't do an Oasis on us, okay?

Back to Axel's notes:

Now, the usual pre-readers roll call :) : Al-I-Bus Alain Gravel Borderline Case Cedric Ranson C-mann David Templar Dave Watson Disaster EBJ Eva_Pilot00 Godsend777 Greg Thomas Jayson Deare Jeff T. DJ Lesser Juju/Asuka Kaoru Nagisa RG-01 LocutusXX Pheaton X-Ray Readiosys Fisher Sammy Sy Sanderson Leslie Shadow's Madness Shinji the 10 O'clock Assassin Sudhoya'da Sushi Boy Tim Lee Yousef Al-Samshi

Wow, 30 pre-readers already!! I guess this deserves a little celebration...

CAPTION: EPILOGUE CAPTION 2: (yeah, another one :))

Early the next morning. Asuka is back in her red sleeveless evening dress, and is silently leaving Shinji's room. Just as she is going back to her room, she sees Misato slumped on the kitchen table.

Asuka: "Why is she sleeping there?"

She looks closer and sees that there are now only two slices of chocolate cake left on the platter, plus an empty beer can nearby. She then understands what happened.

Asuka (sighing): "Ach, Gott [Oh, god]..."

She walks up to Misato and shakes her by the shoulder.

Asuka: "Misato, wake up!"

Misato (slowly waking up): "Hmmmmmmmmm..."

Asuka: "Wake up, I said!"

Misato looks up at Asuka.

Misato: "What am I doing there?"

Asuka: "You ate most of Shinji's birthday cake, you idiot!!"

Misato: "Oh, it was for Shinji...oops..."

Asuka: "You're going to get fat!"

Misato (giggling): "Well, I couldn't help it. I musta had the beer munchies when I got home, and this just looked so good. Tasted good, too."

She rolls her tongue around inside her mouth and frowns at the combination of beer hangover and chocolate on her breath.

Misato: "Ugh. Doesn't taste so good now, though."

Asuka sweatdrops a little.

Misato (more serious): "What are you doing in that evening dress so early in the (yawn) morning? You sleep with him again?"

Asuka begins to walk towards her room.

Misato: "Why?"

Asuka stops and answers Misato without turning around.

Asuka: "Because I love him, Misato. I love Shinji with all my heart."

Pause. Asuka starts walking towards her room again.

Misato (smiling): "I guess I got the answer I was looking for now. So what are you doing out here? Go back to his room and see how he's doing, okay?"

Asuka stops in her tracks and looks back at her guardian, who smiles and winks knowingly at her. Asuka then smiles warmly and almost runs into Shinji's room, where she undresses as fast as she can, and joins Shinji back under the covers, where she cuddles up to him, as close as she can without waking him up. She lays still like that for five minutes, until she is asleep again, in the arms of the boy she loves.

--- END ---

See you soon! Axel Terizaki

AN AMNESIC ANGEL...

by Axel Terizaki <aterizak@club-internet.fr> ICQ # 34301980

ASUKA's Notebook First Gateway <<http://perso.club-internet.fr/aterizak>>

Second Gateway <<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/borisd>>

Okay, this is my second work in English. I know I had been better with the last chapters of "Child Of Love" but everything's not perfect, and this fic, like any of my creations, doesn't escape this rule.

Now, let's begin the show!

==WARNING: ANY SIMILARITIES OR LIKENESSES WITH AN OTHER FANFIC FROM THE

SAME==

== AUTHOR ARE PURE COINCIDENCE AND TOTALLY UNEXPECTED.

Well, sort

of==

==FIRST MEMORY==

CAPTION: THE FIRST MEMORY

CAPTION 2: The accident

Shinji : "Asuka! Move back!"

Too late, Shinji's shouting didn't make the Second Child react in time. She had been hit by the Angel's energy beam.

Asuka : "NNNNNNNNNNNGG....."

Central Command.

Misato : "Asuka!"

Makoto : "Pilot readings instable!"

Shigeru : "A-10 System not responding!"

Ritsuko : "What's going on!?"

Maya : "Sempai, all the displays are beginning to race!"

Misato : "Ritsuko!"

Ritsuko : "Disable all the neural connections between EVA-02 and its pilot!"

Maya : "We can't! The signal is refused from inside the plug!"

Misato : "Cut the ombilical cable."

The ombilical cable of the EVA-02 was now cut, as ordered.
But that didn't keep Unit 02 from rushing towards the Angel with its progressive knife...

Ritsuko : "...Berserk?!"

Makoto : "Unit-02, 1 minute of power left!"

Shinji, on his side, was horrified by what he was seeing, while Rei was in her natural emotionless state in her Unit 00, looking at what was happening right in front of her eyes.

Shinji : "What...what the...?"

The Angel tried to attack Unit 02 before it could do the same to him, but that was unsuccessful. Unit 02 reached the Angel at an incredible speed and cut it in pieces with the Progressive Knife, disabling its AT Field almost instantaneously, and starting by hitting its Koa repeatedly.

Everyone was amazed by Unit 02's behaviour.

Finally, after one minute of pure fury, Asuka's Unit 02 shut down and peace and silence returned to the

Misato : "Send a recovery team, now!"

Shigeru : "Right away, ma'am."

Maya : "Ejection signal accepted by the Plug. Ejecting now."

The back of Unit 02's neck moved and revealed the Entry Plug. It ejected from the EVA seconds later.

Later... Two young girl's eyes opened slowly in an hospital room.

Asuka, whispering : "What...My head..."

She looked at her right and saw Shinji, on a chair, by her bedside.

Shinji gasped when he saw Asuka's head turn towards him. He feared the worse coming from the usually unpredictable Second Child.

Shinji, standing up : "Hum...err..sorry...I'm leaving now...I was just...just

keeping an eye on you..err...Misato's orders...nothing else, okay? Sorry..."

Asuka : "Hey, what are you apologizing for, young boy?"

These last two words stroke Shinji's mind like a big hammer.

Shinji : "Y...oung boy? Why are you calling me like that, Asuka?"

Asuka : "Asuka? Who's it? I see no one else here."

Shinji was horrified in shock.

Asuka : "Hey, answer me. Baka! It's your name, right? I know you... Baka is your name, right?"

Shinji's feelings were mixed between laughing heavily and running away. However, none of these feelings won the fight in his mind.

Shinji : "Asuka... Are you...are you...?"

Asuka : "Are you *WHAT*? And who is that *Asuka* you're talking about?"

Shinji, to himself : "She must be making fun of me again... Well, I'll get her

into her own game!" <To Asuka> : "Okay, what's your name, young girl?"

Asuka : "What? You think I'm stupid? My name's...is...oh mein gott..."

Shinji : "Then what's your name?"

She sat up from her bed, curled up into a ball, and began to cry.

Shinji : "Sorry, Asuka... I didn't mean making you cry, okay? I was just..."

Asuka : "Damn! I can't remember a thing! Even my name!!! That can't be!
My head! It hurts so bad! Where am I?"

Shinji was now really puzzled...

Shinji : "You...you can't remember a thing?!"

Asuka, still crying : "Just as I said, Baka. Now get out of my room!"

Shinji : "You sure? I mean..."

Asuka : "Get out..."

Shinji then proceeded to the door and opened it. Before he could shut the door, however...

Asuka : "What's your name?"

Shinji, ironically : "You said it yourself, I'm Baka."

Asuka : "No, it's not your name, I'm sure of that. Baka was just the first word that came into my mind when I saw you. What I want to know is your REAL name!"

Shinji : "Shinji. Ikari Shinji."

Asuka : "Shinji...Baka Shinji...Damn! That hurts!!!"

Shinji didn't move from the hospital hallway. He was going to shut the door for good when he heard almost a whisper coming from the redheaded EVA Pilot.

Asuka : "Please... tell...me. What's my name...?"

Shinji approached her hesitantly, leaned over her, and said something softly into her left ear. He had an almost reassuring and comforting voice to her...

Shinji : "Your name is Asuka. Sohryu Asuka Langley, okay? Try not to forget it again."

Asuka : "...Thank you, Baka...err...I mean, Ikari-kun. Sorry."

Shinji was well used at being called 'Ikari-kun' by Rei, but surely not by Asuka.

Shinji : "'Shinji' or 'Baka' will be alright, 'Sohryu-san'."

Asuka : "Then, call me Asuka, if you want me to call you Shinji. And since Asuka is my name, I should get used to it right now..."

Shinji : "Well, I'm coming back with Misato-san, okay?"

Asuka : "Mi...Misato...that sounds familiar... But I can't place any face on that name! What's going on!?! My head hurts!"

Shinji : "I just hope we'll find out... Get some rest, please. I'm coming back soon."

Asuka : "Shinji... I don't know who you are and I kinda wish I could find out by myself, but... thank you."

Shinji smiled and disappeared in the hallway, shutting the door behind him.

Major Katsuragi's Office.

Misato : "She's *WHAT*?"

Shinji : "Yes, Misato-san... I really don't think she's making fun of me like she usually does. Well, that's what I think."

Misato : "Asuka? Amnesic? Our Asuka?"

Shinji : "And that seems very serious. She even didn't recall my name when she saw me. First, she thought that my name was 'Baka'..."

Misato had a wide smile on her face and had to keep herself from laughing.

Misato : "Hmm, it could be a mental contamination with the Eva... I'll ask Ritsuko about this."

Shinji : "It's serious?"

Misato : "In fact, she may NOT be able to climb back into her Unit 02."

Shinji just looked away a little...

Misato : "Okay, we'll go visit her. I'm gonna call Ritsuko."

Back in the hospital room.

Asuka was looking at herself in a mirror when Shinji and Misato entered.

Asuka : "This is... me?"

She put a hand on her cheek.

Asuka : "Yes. This is me..."

Shinji : "...Asuka?"

Asuka : "Y-yes?"

She turned back and saw Shinji and Misato. Asuka gasped when she saw her and tried to move back.

Shinji, smiling : "Don't fear anything, she's a friend."

At those words, Asuka instantaneously calmed down.

Misato : "Asuka... Can you remember something?"

Asuka : "Who are you?"

Misato : "Well, I suppose the answer is 'no'..."

Asuka : "I don't know you, Miss...?"

Misato, smiling : "I'm Katsuragi Misato, Major of Tactical Operations and your guardian."

Asuka : "My... guardian? Haven't I parents? Family? I am... I am..."

Shinji looked down.

Asuka, trembling : "I'm... alone?"

Misato, trying to find something coherent to say : "Asuka, you belong to a military organization. All your data has been erased. You have no parents, no past, nothing left. Only you, me, Shinji, and Rei."

Asuka : "I see... I'm some sort of soldier. A secret agent perhaps?"

Misato giggled : "No, not exactly. Can you stand up? I want to show you something."

Asuka : "Well, I think I have no choice."

Misato : "Good. Come on."

A few moments later, Asuka was following Misato and Shinji throughout the Central Dogma's hallways. They were heading towards EVA-02 cage.

EVA-02 Cage.

Asuka, looking up at her Unit 02 : "Wh...what is *this*?!"

Misato : "This is your Evangelion Unit 02, Asuka."

Asuka : "My... E-vange-what?!"

Misato : "In other words, I'd say you're the designated pilot of this robot."

Asuka : "Me? Piloting this *thing*? You're crazy, Major Katsuragi!"

Misato, smiling : "Call me Misato, Pilot Sohryu."

Asuka : "I can't pilot THIS thing! You must be joking!"

Misato : "But there are the threat of Angels... You have to pilot, or we will all die from these invaders..."

Asuka : "So, let me sum up the whole thing : I'm a pilot, who has to pilot a giant robot, against giant extraterrestrials, with giant weapons, in a giant city, and WITH A GIANT HEADACHE IN MY HEAD!!!?"

Misato, cheerfully : "Brilliant analysis!"

Asuka : "YOU *ARE* JOKING!!! I'm not gonna do it!"

Misato, softly : "Shinji too, is an Eva Pilot, you know."

Asuka, turning her head towards Shinji : "You... we do the same job?"

Shinji : "Y-yes. My Unit-01 is here too."

Asuka : "You can do it? Isn't it hard? Difficult? Are there many things to learn?"

On one hand, Shinji wanted to tell her how painful and hard it was to pilot an Eva, from his point of view, of course. But, on the other hand, he had to help Misato to encourage Asuka to climb back into her own Eva.

Shinji, smiling : "Well, not really. You just have to think at what you want to do, and the Eva will obey... It's as simple as that!"

Asuka : "Really?"

Shinji : "Yes."

Pause.

Asuka : "You are sincere. I can believe you."

She turned back towards Misato.

Asuka, now determined : "Okay. I'll do it. I'll pilot this robot!"

Misato, smiling warmly : "Welcome back on active duty, Asuka!"

Ritsuko just arrived by another door.

Ritsuko : "So... Here's our amnesic pilot."

Asuka, looking at Ritsuko : "Don't tell me anything! Let me guess! You're a doctor, right?"

Ritsuko : "Nice deduction."

Asuka : "And how may I call you, ma'am?"

Ritsuko : "Ritsuko. Ritsuko Akagi. So you're really amnesic... I guess you wouldn't lie to a scientist like me."

Misato <to Shinji> : "You were right..."

Shinji (to Misato> : "Well, I first thought it was a joke."

Misato <to Shinji> : "But it's really worse than a joke, you know..."

Shinji : "I understand."

Misato's car.

Misato was driving Shinji and Asuka home. They were on the back seats.

Asuka : "What is this city? Why are there buildings above us?"

Shinji : "We're in the Geofront, and this is Tokyo-3 you see here."

Asuka : "Why are we living underground? Is there something scary on the surface?"

Shinji : "Well, Tokyo-3's a fortress city designed to intercept Angels."

Asuka, puzzled : "Angels? Major Katsuragi said something about them a few minutes ago but I can't remember well."

Shinji : "We're fighting against them with the help of the Evangelions."

Asuka : "Evangelion... The giant robots I just saw?"

Shinji : "Yes. And *we*, you, Rei and I are protecting this city, and mankind."

Asuka : "Whooooaa! A real science fiction story! I am someone special, if I understand correctly, right?"

Shinji : "Yeah, sort of..."

Asuka : "Tell me, Shinji..."

Shinji : "Y-yes?"

Asuka : "Are we safe in the Evangelion? How it works? Tell me. I'm dying

to know!"

Shinji : "Well, as far as I know, EVAs communicate with your mind and you feel what they feel. If... hum... I mean you imagine yourself walking, then the Eva walks. The scary part is, that when the Eva feels pain, you feel the same thing but your body isn't wounded." <softly to her> "Once I thought my arm had been cut, but that wasn't real... I only THOUGHT it because my Eva had lost his arm too. But my arm was still there... You see?"

Asuka : "It's like a double-edged sword, then..."

Shinji : "In other words, yes."

Asuka : "Shinji..."

Shinji : "You want me to tell you something else?"

Asuka : "...No, that was nothing... We'll see that later."

Arrival at the apartment.

Misato opened the door, and Asuka stepped in.

Asuka : "A familiar place. I can tell that I lived there before."

Misato : "Actually, it's your home, Asuka. It's our home."

Asuka : "Our? I live with you? Oh, that's right. You're my guardian. I understand..."

She lowered her head as if she was disappointed.

Asuka : "And... what about you, Shinji?"

Shinji : "What about what?"

Asuka : "Where do you live?" <to herself> "Not too far, I hope."

Shinji : "Well, this is my home too, you know. We live together like a family."

Asuka's face suddenly (and at Shinji and Misato's big surprise) lit up with joy when she heard that.

Asuka : "Together? Really?"

Pause.

Asuka, happily : "Well, Shinji, will you show me the way to my room?"

Misato, taking a can of beer in hand : "Come on Shinji! Show her round the premises!"

Shinji, looking at Misato : "Okay."

Shinji showed Asuka the way to the bathroom, the kitchen, and finally ended to her own room, obviously labelled "Asuka's Room"

Asuka : "So... *MY* room..."

She put a hand on the doorknob and slowly began to open it. But, when she began to turn the doorknob, she decided not to open the door to her room.

Shinji : "What's going on?"

Asuka : "Damn... My head hurts... No... I can't enter this room. Not now..."

Shinji : "Why?"

Asuka : "I sense... something. I just can't tell. I have a bad feeling about that room. That's all."

Shinji : "You want me to go with you inside?"

Asuka : "You would do that? I know I'm afraid but... Well, I have to overcome my fears! You're right, I'm no coward! And this headache is not too hard to live with, for the moment! Okay, I'm coming in, now!"

She finally opened the door and stepped in.

Asuka : "My room..."

She looked at her bed.

Asuka : "My bed..."

She looked at her desk.

Asuka : "My desk..."

She opened her cupboard.

Asuka : "Here are my clothes... Hmmm... I have good taste!"

Shinji : "I should leave now. This is your privacy."

Asuka : "No... Please stay a little more... I feel better when you're near

me."

Shinji <to himself> : "What?"

She looked on the ground and saw that many of her belongings were lying there.

Asuka : "Boy, what a mess..."

Suddenly, Misato called from the kitchen

Misato : "Asuka, Shinji! Dinner is ready!"

Shinji : "Oh gosh... I forgot that it was Misato's turn to cook!"

Asuka : "Why are you giving me that horrified look? Is there something to fear? Is Ma... hum, Misato not cooking very well?"

Shinji continued to stare at her with the same disgusted look.

Asuka : "Oh... It is **so** bad? And I bet I haven't eaten anything since some hours now..."

Dinner. (Well, **Misato's** dinner.)

Asuka didn't really eat anything. First because Misato's cooking wasn't very attractive, and second because all things considered, she wasn't that hungry.

(note that, according to the circumstances, the second cause may be the consequence of the first...) She then retreated to her room just after that.

Shinji : "...This definitely isn't the Asuka we used to know..."

Misato : "You mean, because she's nice with you?"

Shinji : "Y-yes... in particular for that..."

Misato : "You know, I think it's because she forgot what happened to her when she was small..."

Shinji : "No I won't ask. I bet it's another painful story."

Misato : "You're guessing right..."

Pause.

Misato : "A few minutes ago she seemed happy to have you in this apartment."

Shinji : "I noticed this too... And I made her change her mind about the Eva."

Misato : "You are the first person she saw after her awakening... Please understand her, Shinji-kun. She must feel like a stranger in a strange world, and she knows no one around here... It must be horrible for her."

Shinji : "I think I see what you mean."

Misato : "You must be here for her, Shinji-kun..."

Shinji gave her a puzzled look.

Misato : "No, I didn't mean by 'love'! Let's say, as a friend... We must do anything we can to help her recover her memory, okay?"

Shinji : "Okay..."

Misato : "Tomorrow, you should have had harmonics tests... I'll talk with Ritsuko and she'll cancel them. Thus you'll have plenty of time to show her Tokyo-3, the school, etc, etc. Try to show her photographs we took, too. That may help her..."

Shinji : "I noticed that each time she tried to remember something, she said that her head hurt."

Misato : "Well, forget about the photographs then..."

Shinji : "But I can try."

Misato : "Besides, we don't have much time to train pilots, you know... If she could recover her full memory, it would be better for us all."

Shinji : "Okay."

Later that night...

Shinji wasn't really sleeping well. In fact, he was more thinking than sleeping...

He just sat up from his bed when he heard some strange footsteps in his own room.

Shinji : "Who's there?"

Asuka : "Humm... Damn, I knew it wasn't the right thing to do... Sorry, I'm leaving now... Have a good night."

Asuka was in a nightdress, at Shinji's door.

Shinji noticed that her last words had a bit of a disappointed tone.

Shinji : "No... Stay... I wasn't really sleeping you know. You want to talk?"

Asuka : "Well... y-yes..."

Shinji wasn't really used at the mighty Asuka having problems with words.

Shinji : "Sit down beside me, then."

Asuka : "If you don't mind..."

She then sat down at his side, on the bed.

Shinji : "So what do you want to talk about?"

Asuka : "I don't know where to start..."

Shinji, trying to put her at her ease : "Come on, I'm your friend, aren't I?"

Asuka, smiling : "Shinji... I... I want to ask you a favor."

The girl was visibly nervous.

Shinji : "Hey, don't be so nervous you know... What do you want from me, then?"

Asuka, giving him her best Kawaii look (you know, that one no male on earth can resist to?) : "Can I... can I sleep with you tonight?"

Shinji : "W-what?! SI-sleep with m-me?!"

Now he was the one getting nervous.

Asuka : "Please... I want to be with someone... Not alone. I-I just had a nightmare... Please..."

Shinji <to himself> : "She's like a child seeking for his parent's protection in the night." <to Asuka> "A... nightmare? Care to tell me more about it?"

Asuka : "Well... I was small, and then, I was running and telling everybody around me that I was someone special. That I was chosen to pilot an Eva and... I opened a door... and saw someone hanged to the ceiling... Gosh It was horrible..." <beginning to cry> "I don't know who was that person, but I felt so sad, I wanted to cry and I..."

Seeing that she was on the verge of crying, Shinji stopped her.

Shinji : "That's ok, you're awake now, I'm here, and you're alive... Nothing like that happened, okay?"

Asuka, with a tearful voice : "Thank you, Shinji... You're so sweet with me. And I called you a baka a few hours ago. I feel so shameful..."

Shinji : "There's no problem... I'm used to be called like that you know..."

Asuka : "Really? Who used to scorn you like that!? I'm gonna slap him!"

Shinji hesitated during a second or two to answer.

Shinji : "Actually... It's you who used to call me 'baka' before your...hum, accident."

Asuka, almost horrified : "I did *that* to you? Was I mean to you? Why did I... I must have been crazy to treat you like... like shit! I'll never forgive myself!"

Tears were coming back...

Shinji : "No problem, really. Now, calm down... And come with me, here."

He showed her a place under the sheets.

Asuka, happily : "So, you accept? Oh thank you, Shinji!"

She then rushed up to the place he showed her and put the sheets over her.

Although Shinji felt really uneasy like that with a girl in his bed, he did this for her good, without any other second thoughts... (well, he tried.)

Asuka : "I know that it's not very right for a girl and a boy to sleep in the same bed, but... I just need it, sorry."

Shinji : "There's nothing to apologize for, I understand how you feel."

Shinji turned away from Asuka in order not to face her directly. She wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her body against his back.

Asuka : "Like that... I feel much better... You're warm."

Shinji : "You too."

Asuka : "Tell me, Shinji. Have you...errr...well... I know it isn't really..."

well...have you a girlfriend?"

Shinji, stunned : "A... girlfriend...?"

Asuka : "I mean... It must be the Rei you were talking about a few hours ago?"

She must be a great girl, from the way you're talking about her. I'd like to meet her!"

Shinji : "Well, actually..."

Asuka : "She must be your girlfriend, sorry for asking... I knew I shouldn't have. How embarrassing..."

Shinji : "...she isn't my girlfriend."

Asuka, grinning : "Another one then? A cute boy like you MUST have one! Or... is it me, by any chance?"

Shinji : "I have *no* girlfriend for the moment."

Asuka, happily : "Really!? Then... will you let me be yours?"

Shinji, stunned (again) : "What!?"

Asuka : "Shhh... I just want to. I can't help it. I feel safe when I'm with you. And... I know I can trust you, and only you... in this strange world."

Shinji : "What gave you that idea?"

Asuka : "You're so nice with me... And, you were there, when I awakened. It's a proof of care. It's the proof that you care for me. I'm sorry if this is too much for you to handle. If you can't offer me your support... I'll

just leave, don't worry."

Shinji : "No... That's not what I wanted to say..."

Pause.

Shinji : "If you were to recover your memory, I really don't know how'd you react..."

Asuka : "Why? Why are you saying this?"

Shinji : "The Asuka I knew wasn't so lovely and desirable... when she was with me."

Asuka, chuckling : "Baka... Oops, I said it one more time."

Shinji : "Don't worry for that."

Asuka : "Anta baka... I like to call you like that, but it's not very nice for you."

Shinji : "As I said, if you were to regain your memories... You wouldn't want to be my girlfriend anymore..."

Asuka : "Then I don't want to remember."

Shinji : "What are you saying?"

Asuka : "Too much pain..."

Shinji : "What?"

Asuka : "I feel that my old behaviour was too much pain. And If remembering

everything... were to mean that I couldn't be with you anymore, I don't want to remember, never."

Shinji : "Don't say this, Asuka. You will remember, sooner or later."

Shinji could hear Asuka's soft breathing behind him. He then knew she fell asleep.

Shinji <to himself> : "At least, I now know how is the real Asuka... A cute and kind normal young girl... Don't fear anything Asuka, I'll be there."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Don't miss the next episode : Familiarization

Author's notes:

Well, I was asking myself what could I write after "The Child Of Love"...
Now, I know! :-)

I hope you like this new fic!

I don't know where it'll take me, but I know one thing : It will be shorter than "The Child Of Love"...

Anyways, thanks to all my pre-readers:

Alain Gravel (author of "The One I Love Is...", damn good!), Al-l-Bus (author of "Imagine Normality?"), Borderline Case (author of "Reflections In Red"), EBJ, Eva_Pilot00, Greg Thomas, Kaoru Nagisa (author of "EvaLeSs"), Jon Byram (author of "Holy Knights"), Readiosys Fisher (author of "Unfamilliar

Fearings"), Shinji The 10 O'clock Assassin (author of "Many Fanfics" :-),
Sudhoya'da, Sushi Boy, and Sammy Sy.

Thanks to you all, and thanks to all the people who read my fics!

See ya soon,
Axel Terizaki

-=SECOND MEMORY=-

Background:

What a surprise! After a raging battle against an Angel, Asuka's now amnesic and can't remember anything. When she awakened, she first saw Shinji and is now seeking for protection and comfort. Could you imagine yourself awakening in an hospital room, seeing unknown faces in an unknown place, with giant robots fighting against giant creatures? Asuka doesn't want to remember anything, feeling that her old life was nothing but pain.

But will she succeed in finally forgetting her hard past? Will she fully recover her memory instead? Will Shinji help her? Does anyone know where's that damn Evangelion MP3 CD I'm searching for in my messy room for one week now?

CAPTION: THE SECOND MEMORY

CAPTION 2: Familiarization.

Misato's apartment.

Misato : "Come on, Shinji, get up now! It's time! And there's NO breakfast! I'm hungry! Get up now and cook something, please!!!"

Misato was in the hallway, knocking at Shinji's door.

Misato : "I'm coming in!"

She opened the door, and almost instantaneously, her jaw dropped at the sight in front of her.

Asuka was in Shinji's bed, holding him gently from behind. She was smiling broadly as if she was in the safest place in the world.

Shinji, on his side, was quietly awakening, and saw Misato in front of him.

Misato was speechless for some minutes.

Shinji : "Mi...Misato-san! I can explain! That's not what you..."

Misato, shouting : "WHAT ARE YOU *TWO* DOING IN THE SAME BED!?"

Shinji : "Ssshhh.. You'll wake her up!"

Misato : "But...!"

Too late, Asuka had awakened, thanks to Misato's outburst.

Asuka, opening her eyes, and sitting up : "Ma...M...I'm sorry..."

Misato : "Now tell me, what are you two doing in the same bed!?"

Shinji : "Really, that's not..."

Asuka lowered her head and stood up. She then slowly walked out of the room.

That silenced Misato.

Asuka was now behind her.

Asuka, not even looking at her : "I'm sorry, Major Katsuragi. I was just..."

I was just...I was...oh..."

And with that, she ran to her room and shut the door behind her.

Pause.

Shinji : "Misato-san."

Misato : "I know..."

Shinji : "How could you? She's already afraid of this world and you scold her like that!"

Misato : "Well, I guess that I thought with my Major side... And a pregnant pilot was the worst idea that came into my mind when I saw you two."

Shinji : "Nothing happened, Misato-san. Don't worry for that."

Misato, sighing : "What a relief..."

Shinji left his room without any word and headed towards Asuka's.

Misato, to herself, lowering her head : "Well done, Misato. You really are a complete prat."

Asuka's room.

Shinji entered silently into her room and saw an Asuka curled in a ball on her bed, like the previous day on her hospital one.

Asuka : "She doesn't like me, does she?"

Shinji, sitting beside her : "She loves us both, Asuka. But, you know, Misato-san's a Major. She has responsibilities over us. She has to assure her seniors that nothing would happen to us. Like well... If I had

got you pregnant, I don't know how my father would have reacted..."

[Axel : Heh heh... *I* know how he would have reacted... :-)]

Asuka : "Your father...? You have parents? But you are like me, a pilot. Then why do you have your parents and not me?"

Shinji : "My father... Is the commander of NERV, the organization we belong to."

Asuka : "Oh. I see. And your mother?"

Shinji, lowering his head : "She... disappeared when I was young."

Asuka, sadly : "I'm sorry... I think I understand how you feel, but I can't see why. I feel sorry for asking you this..."

Shinji : "Well, that's not important. I hadn't the time to tell you something I should have a few minutes ago."

Asuka : "What is it?"

He took his time to place himself in front of her face and looked her right into her eyes.

Shinji, softly : "Good morning, Asuka."

Asuka, smiling warmly, a little surprised : "Gutten morgen, Shinji."

And then she immediately began to give him a confused look.

Shinji : "What's wrong?"

Asuka : "Why have I talked to you in German? I'm Japanese, right?"

Shinji : "Well, as far as I know, you come from Germany ."

Asuka : "Deutschland? I... I remember..."

A flash of light stroke Asuka's mind as she saw a glimpse of a door opening.
Her vision then returned to normal. She was looking at the ground.

Shinji : "Asuka. Are you okay?"

Asuka : "Yes... I think..."

Shinji : "You scared me! Your eyes were so empty all of a sudden..."

Asuka : "I feel better now, thanks."

Shinji : "You should go to the bathroom and take a bath now... You'll feel a lot better. And besides, today I'll show you the city. And this afternoon, we'll go to school, okay?"

Asuka, startled : "School?"

She gave him a puzzled look.

Asuka : "SCHOOL!?"

Shinji : "Y-yes, school..."

Asuka : "Wait a sec!. We have to protect mankind, well, that's what I understood, and we have in addition of that to go to school!? We HAVE to go to SCHOOL!!! I can't believe this!"

Shinji, shrugging : "We are normal teens, after all."

Asuka, reluctantly : "Oh god... I think I hate school..."

Asuka then proceeded to the bathroom and took a hot bath.

However, Misato was in the way. Shinji was just behind Asuka when they left her room.

Misato : "Hmmm, well... Asuka, I apologize for having scolded you this morning. I was just hungry and... Well, when I'm hungry, I can't control myself. Sorry, Asuka... And sorry too, Shinji-kun. I think I just lost my temper. I'm leaving now. Have a good day, okay?"

Asuka : "It's my turn to apologize, Major. I just wanted to..."

Misato, smiling and interrupting her : "Hey, Asuka... How many times did I tell you to call me 'Misato', which is my name?"

Asuka : "Sorry about that too, Mi...Misato. I hope I'll get it right soon."

Misato, smiling warmly : "Don't worry for that, Asuka. I have to go now, or Ritsuko will kill me if I'm too late."

Shinji : "You sure you don't want something to eat? I thought you were hungry."

She was about to pass throughout the opened door.

Misato : "Hm, I'll take something on the way to the H.Q. don't worry... I don't have much time to eat now, or I'll be VERY late..."

Shinji : "..."

Misato, winking and grinning at him : "Don't take advantage of her, Shinji-kun..."

Shinji was blushing heavily. That greatly amused Asuka, who giggled. Misato then shut the front door behind her, laughing.

A few minutes later...

Shinji was preparing a breakfast for Asuka in the kitchen.

Asuka, calling out from the bathroom : "Shinjiiii!!!"

Shinji, coming in front of the door : "Yes? What's going on, Asuka? Do you need something?"

The reply took some time to come.

Asuka, with a kawaii voice : "Can you come in and rub my back, please?"

Shinji, stunned : "W-WHAT!? I... I..."

Asuka, seductively : "Yeah... I want you to come in and help me with that soap..."

Shinji : "B-but... But... You..."

Asuka burst out laughing. Shinji couldn't believe his ears.

Asuka : "Ok, sorry, Shinji! I was making fun of you, I'm sorry. I just wish I could have saw your face at that moment, it must have been great!"

Shinji, grinning and doing as if he hadn't heard Asuka : "Okay, I'm coming!"

Shinji then heard a little splash coming from inside the bathroom.

Asuka, frightened : "W-what? You mean... You're gonna do it!? You pervert!
Don't enter this bathroom!"

Shinji, laughing : "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

Asuka, giggling : "Okay, I'm gonna kill you later! Brace yourself!"

From inside the bathroom, Asuka was in her bath, looking at the ceiling.

Asuka : "This Ikari Shinji..."

She smiled.

Asuka : "He's kind and sweet... I think I like him."

After a while, she left the bathroom and headed to her own room in order to get dressed.

She then came into Shinji's room, who was listening to his SDAT.

Asuka : "Shinji!"

Shinji, having heard Asuka's voice, got off his earphones.

Shinji : "Yes?"

Asuka : "May I come in?"

Shinji : "Of course."

She opened the door. She was in her school uniform.

Asuka : "How do I look in this?"

Shinji : "I'd say I find you as cute as usual."

Asuka, smiling : "Thank you."

Pause.

Asuka : "Then, where are we going this morning?"

Shinji : "Well, I think I'm gonna show you the city and how to go to the H.Q. in case of an emergency. And, after that, we'll go to school."

Asuka : "It's ok for me. Well, I think."

Pause.

Asuka : "I'm sorry, when I was taking my bath... I made fun of you..."

Shinji : "Well, that doesn't change very much from your old self."

Asuka : "But I must admit that making fun of you is greatly amusing!"

Shinji : "The old Asuka thought the same, you know..."

Asuka : "I may be beginning to recover my memories, who knows?"

Shinji : "Yeah, maybe..."

The two teens left the apartment.

Shinji showed Asuka the principal places he thought she went before her accident, like the mall, or the gateways to the Geo-front...

Then, the time to go to school finally came.

They were walking side by side.

Asuka : "So, what's the schedule for this afternoon in class?"

Shinji : "Usually, we have history, PE and then back into history..."

Asuka, releasing a slightly frustrated sigh : "Oh... A boring afternoon then?"

Shinji : "You'll see by yourself."

Asuka : "And, have I friends? I mean, at school?"

Shinji : "Oh yes! I'm so stupid that I didn't think about talking of our friends..."

Asuka : "*Our* friends?"

Shinji : "Well, yeah... First there's the Class Representative Hikari Horaki.

It's your best friend. I really think she is, since you always are with her."

Asuka : "Damn, I'm her best friend and I can't remember it, that's so embarrassing..."

Shinji : "And then, there are Toji and Kensuke, my two friends. You're not as close as I am to them. So, try to ignore them, it would be better for everyone."

Asuka : "Why should I ignore them? They may be nice? If they are your friends, they are mine too."

Shinji : "Actually, you really disliked them."

Asuka : "What kind of bitch was I!?"

Shinji, chuckling : "But, you were a true one!"

Asuka, chuckling too : "Baka!"

Asuka took Shinji's hand in hers. That surprised him.

Asuka : "How do you feel?"

Shinji : "How do **I** feel? What do you mean?"

Asuka : "I mean, with my hand in yours..."

Shinji : "It's not very... usual coming from you. I even do think that you never touched me before."

Asuka : "Ah? It's strange that I didn't do this before... It feels nice."

Shinji : "Well, I think I feel the same way."

He then saw that they were in front of their school.

In class, five minutes before the end of lunch time.

Shinji and Asuka were about to enter the class.

Shinji : "Asuka..."

Asuka : "What?"

Shinji : "Could you...?"

We can see that she was still holding his hand tightly.

Asuka : "Could I what?"

Shinji : "...release my hand..."

Asuka : "Why? Is there a problem with us holding hands while entering our class?"

Shinji : "Not at all from my point of view, but the others are gonna think about weird things."

Asuka : "And? I don't care at all about that! Why are you attaching so much importance to what the others may think of you? You... You can't feel shameful because of me?"

Shinji seemed to think a little about it.

Shinji, determined : "No I don't. I don't at all. You're right, Asuka. I'm going with you, hand in hand! Please forgive me for that thought."

Asuka, giggling : "Ah, I'm relieved! You're forgiven, don't worry!"

Pause.

Asuka : "And don't worry, Shinji. If anyone has a problem with me holding your hand, I'll beat the living shiest out of them!!"

Shinji, fearing <to himself> : "The living *what*?"

They entered in the class.

Toji, seeing that Shinji entered the class : "Hi, Shinji! How was the last bat... AAAAAARRRRRR...!!!"

He let out a stifled cry.

Asuka : "What's going on...?"

Shinji, whispering to her : "I told you, about the hand..."

Asuka advanced towards Toji with an angry look on her face, still dragging Shinji with her, in front of an entire speechless class.

Asuka : "And what's the PROBLEM with ME holding SHINJI's hand!?"

Toji, sarcastically : "It's just so unusual coming from the Redheaded Bitch."

Asuka, fuming : "The Redheaded WHAT!!? Watch your words, dickhead!"

Shinji, trying to calm her : "Asuka... It's Toji..."

Asuka, voice full of disdain : "Ha! Now I understand why I dislike THIS damn fool!"

Kensuke : "Huh?"

Asuka : "And you, glasses-boy!? Have you something against ME holding SHINJI's hand perhaps?"

Kensuke, trying desperately to calm her down : "No, not at all..."

Asuka : "Good!"

She then turned back to face Shinji.

Asuka, now calm : "Shinji? Where's my seat?"

Shinji, showing her her seat near the wall : "There."

Asuka : "Thanks."

Kensuke and Toji were speechless, like the rest of the class who saw the scene.

While Asuka was installing herself at her desk, Shinji came near his two friends and talked with them.

Toji : "What happened to her!?"

Kensuke : "And how was your last battle?"

Shinji : "Well... Listen carefully, and try to understand her, please...
She's amnesic."

Toji : "She's *WHAT*?!"

Kensuke : "A-amnesic?!"

Shinji : "SSSSShhhhhh... I have orders from Misato to help her to recover her memories, so, if you could *help* me a little, it would be great. Think that she never saw you two, okay?"

Toji : "Can't be..."

Kensuke, doing the brown-nose to Misato indirectly : "Hey, if it's Misato-san's orders, we'll help you two, don't worry!"

Shinji : "Anyways, where's the class rep'? I wanted Asuka to meet her."

Toji : "She'll be absent today. She was ill when I phoned her home."

Kensuke : "You did *what*? You phoned the class rep' home? Trying to date her

Toji?"

Toji, blushing a little : "Awwww, stop that, you idiot!"

Shinji looked back and saw a pensive Asuka at her desk, probably thinking about what she was doing here in the middle of people she doesn't even know, thought Shinji.

Shinji <to himself> : "How horrible it must be to be amnesic... I pity her."

He then looked at Rei, who was still completely absent, completely out of this world. She even didn't noticed that Asuka had arrived...

Asuka then saw that Shinji was looking at Rei. She sat up and walked towards him.

Asuka : "Is this Rei?"

Shinji, surprised : "Ah? Uh, well... Yeah. She's Ayanami Rei, First Child."

Asuka : "Yeah, I can remember what you told me yesterday, at least..."

Pause.

Asuka : "I'll talk to her now."

Shinji : "W-what?!"

Asuka : "She mustn't be a bad person, despite that cold feeling that emanates from her..."

She advances towards Rei.

Asuka : "Ayanami Rei? You know me, right?"

However, Rei did not look up at her.

Rei : "I've been informed of your current state by Major Katsuragi, pilot Sohryu."

Asuka, a bit troubled by Rei's behaviour : "Well. I don't know how close we were to each other, but know that I'm your friend and that if anything

happens, you can count on me. I'll try to do my best. I'm your fellow pilot, aren't I?"

She held a hand to Rei.

Asuka : "Will we shake hands?"

Rei seemed troubled as well by these last words coming from Asuka's mouth. She then took Asuka's hand and, not knowing what to do, let it shake.

Asuka, smiling : "Good, Rei. We're friends, now!"

A few moments later, the old Sensei arrived. Shinji sat up from his desk and came over him to explain Asuka's situation and to show him NERV papers to attest that she wasn't running at 100% of her capabilities. Well, that was what was written on NERV papers, I don't make up anything... :-)

The Sensei then took the roll and began the calling up.

Sensei : "Sohryu Asuka Langley."

Asuka : "..."

Sensei : "Sohryu Asuka Langley? Missing?"

Asuka, suddenly realizing : "Oh, here!"

Sensei : "Well, manifest yourself please."

Asuka : "I'm sorry, Sensei."

Sensei : "Good."

Toji and Kensuke were mesmerized as they thought of what the ancient Asuka would have said at this time and place... Probably a low 'Yeah I'm here' followed by a 'humph' full of disdain...

The class went almost like any day class, except for the few students doing gossip about Asuka and the various rumours about her state.

The PE finally came.

Shinji was playing basketball, while Asuka was doing gymnastics with the girls in her class. She felt for the least, completely lost... without him.

But fate had decided that Shinji was playing basketball on the sports ground next to Asuka's.

Shinji was staying on the sidelines, while Asuka was just behind him. However, a wire netting separated them.

He didn't know however, that Asuka was just behind him. He was completely focused on his game, ready to receive the ball.

Asuka, calling out : "Hey Shinji!"

Shinji turned back and saw Asuka : "Huh? Asuka?"

Toji : "Hey! SHINJI!!! Watch out!!!"

Shinji was now focused again on his game. Too late, it seemed that the ball hit him hard on the forehead. He fell on the ground.

Asuka : "Oh, Shinji!"

Asuka opened the door between the two sports grounds and came beside Shinji.

She knelt beside him and rested his head on her knees.

Asuka : "Shinji, are you okay?"

Shinji slowly opened his eyes.

Toji, Kensuke and some other curious students were there too.

Everyone was wondering why Asuka was so preoccupied by Shinji... Usually, she doesn't give a damn about him...

Toji : "I'm sorry, Shinji. And when I'm thinking that I've put all my strength in that ball..."

Shinji : "Well, it hurts..."

And with that he closed his eyes...

Asuka : "I'll take you to the infirmary."

She then placed him on her shoulders...

Asuka <to herself> : "Gosh, he's so heavy..."

....and began to run towards the school.

Toji : "How can she run like that while lifting him?"

Kensuke : "Don't know..."

Once in the corridors of the school...

Asuka : "What a fool I am... Shinji's unconscious and I don't even know where's that damn infirmary in this school!"

Then, at a corner, she saw the sign pointing at the door to the said infirmary.

Asuka : "Ha!"

She entered with him. There was no one here. She then saw the bed and put Shinji on it.

Once he was completely resting on the bed, she took a chair and put her school uniform on it. Since she was still in her sport outfit, she had to change. She then did so.

Shinji was awake, and tensed up when he heard the sounds of an Asuka changing clothes just under his nose. He decided to play the gentleman: He didn't do anything and kept his eyes closed.

When he didn't hear anymore noise, Shinji slowly opened his eyes again, only to see Asuka's face.

He tried to get up, but Asuka kept him from doing so by pressing her hand against his chest.

Asuka : "Sshhh... It's my fault if you're hurt. I'm gonna keep an eye on

you."

Shinji : "It's not that terrible, you know. A ball had just hit my head, nothing more..."

Asuka : "Well, if I hadn't called you from the other side of the wire netting you would have caught that ball."

Shinji : "But I..."

She shut him up by tenderly placing a little kiss on his forehead, where the ball had hit him.

Shinji could feel her warm lips making contact with his skin. It was... It was... a wonderful feeling for him.

Asuka : "Sorry... I just... Felt like I had to do this."

Shinji : "It's okay."

Asuka : "Really?"

Shinji : "But something's wrong in all this..."

Asuka, puzzled : "What?"

Shinji : "You... you prepared that, didn't you?"

Asuka : "I..."

Shinji : "I mean, you did that on purpose, right?"

Asuka, looking away : "...You're smarter than I thought..."

Shinji : "I'm not mad at you, don't worry."

Asuka : "Shinji..."

Shinji could sense that her voice was cracking a little.

Asuka : "Shinji... I feel so lost when I'm alone... I'm so scared!"

Shinji : "Asuka, I think I understand how you feel..."

He got up and took her left hand in his. She squeezed it tightly in return.

Shinji : "Can you look at me?"

Asuka then looked back at him.

Shinji saw that she had tears all along her cheeks.

Shinji : "Wait, don't cry..."

Asuka, voice cracking : "But... But... I'm so scared to be far from you!
You can't imagine! I was so *lost* in this classroom, not feeling you close
to me! I was so *lost* on the sport ground, with no one I knew around! There
were so many unknown faces! God, Shinji... I'm so... I'm so scared..
oohh..."

Shinji <to himself> : "Okay Shinji... Now take the situation in hand!" <to

Asuka> : "Hey, I'm here now. Isn't it what you wanted?"

Asuka, slowly recovering : "Y-yes..."

Shinji, smiling : "Then, why not giving me a big hug?"

Asuka, looking up at him and sniffing a little : "Can I?"

Shinji nodded.

She then quickly put her hands around his waist and began to squeeze as tightly as she could, while resting her head against his shoulder. That surprised him a little. He wasn't expecting so much strength coming from Asuka in this hug.

Shinji just put his hands around her and caressed her soft auburn hair in return.

Shinji : "Do you feel better, now?"

Asuka : "Much better... Thank you, for being there for me."

Shinji : "Come on, you'll have to go in class now. I'll join you soon, don't worry."

Asuka : "But..."

Shinji : "Be strong Asuka. Be strong for me, and for yourself, okay?"

Asuka : "...I'll try... You're right, Shinji... I can't live forever on your back!"

Shinji : "That's better... Will you go in class, now?"

Asuka : "Yeah..."

Toji : "We're gonna take her there, Shinji. Don't worry."

The two were very surprised to see Toji and Kensuke at the infirmary's door.

Shinji : "Okay... I'm waiting for the doctor then... I don't think I can't escape the infirmary without his approval..."

Toji : "Yeah, I think I understand how you feel Asuka... And I apologize here for having called you a bitch a few hours ago. We'll take care of her, don't worry, Shinji."

Asuka : "Y-you're forgiven... And thank you... But I'll go alone, if you don't mind..."

She then took her sports clothes, put them in her bag, and walked towards the door.

Asuka : "Later Shinji."

She then left the infirmary.

Toji : "Anyways, I wanted to talk a little with you, Shinji... And now is the moment..."

The classroom.

Asuka entered the classroom. The teacher wasn't here yet, so she calmly put her bag on her desk. A bunch of boy students came towards her.

Tall boy : "Hey Sohryu."

Asuka took her time to get used to her name, but now it seemed that it was okay for her.

Asuka : "Yeah? What do you want?"

Tall boy : "Wanna go out with me somewhere?"

Asuka, crossing her arms : "W-what? I don't see why I should! And it's a bit rude to ask me this in front of your friends."

Ugly boy with glasses : "...So the rumors are true."

Asuka began to fear.

Fat boy : "You're not amnesic! You use that excuse to skip classes. Like any other bitch."

Asuka, trembling : "I...I'm not a bitch. I am not. That's nonsense."

Tall boy : "Yes you are. When you humiliated me four days ago! Only a bitch could do what you've done!"

Asuka, covering her ears with her hands : "NO, NO, NO! I'm NOT a BITCH!! But why are you saying this!?"

Ugly boy with glasses : "Ha! And who could believe that? You flashed us and now you push us away? Only a bitchy tease can do that. You use everyone anyways."

Tall boy : "Yeah, like a bitch."

Asuka, lowering her head : "Nooo.... No I'm not... I don't...use..."

Fat boy : "And where has gone your aggressiveness, Sohryu? Or are you simply afraid? You always brazen it out and show off, but in fact you're nothing but a powerless little bitch!"

Asuka, voice cracking badly : "...not a bitch..."

The boys could hear sniffles and sobs coming out from the redheaded pilot.

Tall boy : "Lost your pride, Sohryu? You're just a tease, a coward... That'll teach you!"

Ugly boy with glasses : "Hmmm... Tenchi..."

Tall boy (Tenchi) : "What?"

The ugly boy with glasses showed Toji, Shinji and Kensuke at the other end of the class, near the classroom's door.

Toji was cracking his knuckles and had a rather angry look on his face, while

Kensuke was recording everything on disc. As for Shinji, he was doing his usual hand tic (you know, the one where he clenches and unclenches his fist...) and had the same angry look than Toji on his face.

Fat boy : "Uh oh... It's Suzuhara and Ikari..."

Asuka didn't look up to see Shinji. She ran towards the door, almost running into Kensuke, incidentally making him lose his balance and fall on his butt.

Toji : "Shinji, go and catch her up. I'm taking care of these fools."

Shinji : "Okay."

He then ran out of the classroom.

Toji : "Well, now let's get on with it!"

Outside, on the schoolyard.

Asuka was curled up on a school bench, head buried in her knees.

Shinji was walking towards her.

Asuka, softly : "Shinji..."

Shinji continued his advance.

Asuka, softly : "Go away."

Shinji : "Asuka... Don't worry for them, they're just a bunch of pathetic little boys."

Asuka, head still buried in her knees : "Shinji. I promised myself that I wouldn't cry in front of anyone, except you... I have to be strong. I can't always depend on you. That wouldn't be fair for you. I have to face my problems alone."

Shinji stayed in front of her.

Shinji : "I'm glad that you consider myself as a friend. And that's what I

want the most, for the moment. And you don't bother me Asuka..."

Asuka : "You think I act as a friend... It's more than that, don't you see!? Can't you SEE!? Can't you see that I... I..."

Shinji : "Well, more than a friend, but I understand how you feel. You're just searching for a shelter. And I'm ready to give it to y..."

Asuka, interrupting and looking up at him : "But I'm taking advantage of you!

I'm using you! They're right! I'm a bitch! Even with you! And... I don't want to be a bitch with you! I must have said and done so much horrible things to you! But I don't want to be a bitch with you! I don't want to! I want to be... to be..." her voice softened and she buried her head in her knees again : "...nice...I want to... I want to be kind to you... But I can't stand you watching me being hurt! I don't want you to pity me! I don't need your pity!"

Obviously, there wasn't very much coherence in her words. Possibly due to her current emotional state, thought Shinji. He also thought of the verb "to use", often associated with "his father" and "himself" in his mind... But it was not the same with Asuka. He was ready to be used by her. He didn't care at all, as long as she was happy.

She stood up and looked at him, tears covering her face.

Shinji : "Asuka, there's no harm in being pitied. It's just to accept other's... well, other's affection and care."

She smacked him, producing a loud *slap*, echoing in the whole schoolyard.

Asuka : "You're lying! You must be lying! I can remember that I did and said horrible things to you! You HAVE to hate me! That can't be possible,

you just have to! I know I've hurt you..."

She then looked at her hand. Another flash of light stroke her mind. She saw images of herself slapping Shinji a few times, calling him baka and scorning him...

Asuka, trembling : "No...No...Nononononononononoooo.... I... What have I done...? Oh noooooo!"

She then fell on her knees, and lowered her head.

Asuka : "I... I've hurt you... I really did... Oh no... Oh Shinji...No..."

This said, the sobs went louder.

Shinji knelt in front of her, his face still covered with a red mark.

Shinji, softly : "Asuka... I didn't feel anything, don't worry." <to himself>

"Well, not really true but..."

Asuka, unconsciously reached out and wrapped her arms around him. She buried her head in his chest. That surprised him. But he was beginning to get used to Asuka's new behaviour.

Asuka, sobbing : "What have I done, Shinji!? I... I've hurt you... Oh Shinji,
Shinji, Shinji... Forgive me... Please..."

Shinji : "I'm used to your slaps, you know."

Poor Shinji... That wasn't really the best answer to her problems...

Asuka : "AND NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT I DID *THAT* BEFORE!? How many times!? How did I!? How could I do that to you...? Why haven't you pushed me away yet, Shinji? Why!? I act so bad with you, and you... You don't care!"

Shinji : "Listen Asuka, I will always endure everything you'll do to me. Because... Because..."

Asuka, between sobs : "Because of what, Shinji?"

Shinji, smiling : "Well... Because I still care about a bitch like you."
<to himself> : "I can't believe I finally told her... The normal Asuka would destroy me completely in a few seconds..."

But Asuka remained silent instead and calmed down.

Shinji : "Asuka? Are you feeling okay?"

Asuka, softly : "...Shinji..."

Shinji : "Hm?"

Asuka, almost whispering : "...baka."

She sniffled a little. Shinji smiled to himself. He gently took her to the bench where she was earlier, and she began to squeeze Shinji tighter.

Asuka : "You don't believe I am amnesic, do you? You're like those boys..."

Shinji : "Don't say that..."

Asuka : "I just act like my old self. I can feel that."

Shinji : "You trust me, right? Then I trust you too. I believe you Asuka. I can believe you. You are really amnesic. Just because the old Asuka would never allow me to hold her like that."

Asuka : "And what if I was faking amnesia?"

Shinji, giggling : "Oh, you couldn't last one minute of being kind with me, you know... So I think you're not faking at all."

Asuka looked down.

Shinji : "And you...? How do you feel?"

Asuka was surprised that he asks her the question herself asked him earlier. But again, the situation was different here.

Asuka : "Shinji... I... I don't know if it's love or something else, but here's how I feel : I think that I can put all my trust into you and that you will never hurt me. But, I know that I'm asking too much from you... I'm always stuck with you and you don't seem to care. Thank you, Shinji... for caring. It's all that I need for now. You're like an elder brother to me..." <now grinning> "But, maybe you're more..."

Shinji : "That's good to hear... But how will you make up for all those slaps, now?"

Asuka : "Hm, then, let me give you something you surely won't receive again if I were to recover completely..."

She looked up at him, and approached her lips to his... And they were soon sharing a soft kiss, on a schoolyard bench, holding each other tightly. Shinji was terrorized... It was his first kiss after all, and maybe Asuka's

too, but soon, he remembered of what he saw in movies, and began to return the kiss with all his strength...

After a while, Asuka broke the kiss and then approached her mouth to Shinji's

left ear. Shinji did the same with her. They were holding themselves tightly, without hurting each other.

Asuka, softly, almost a whisper : "Shinji. If I were not to remember that moment when I would recover all my memories, please... Please remind me of that, okay? That was really nice."

Shinji : "If you remember everything, I don't see how I'll be able to make you feel the same than here. I'll probably die from your slaps before reaching your mouth..."

Asuka giggled.

Asuka : "Was I *so* terrible?"

Shinji : "Oh, you can't imagine. You just possibly can't..."

Misato's apartment.

The front door opened, revealing Asuka and Shinji, in their respective school uniforms.

Shinji : "Tadaima!"

Kaji was in the kitchen : "Ohayo, Shinji-kun!"

Asuka : "I know that voice..."

The two teens entered the kitchen. Asuka's face immediately lit up with joy when she saw Kaji.

Kaji : "Oh, Asuka. You're here too."

Asuka : "W-who are you? I... I know your face, but..."

Kaji : "Ah, how ironic... I forgot that you were amnesic."

Asuka, advancing towards him : "Yeah, but I'm sure that I know you! I'm sure of that! You're someone close to me! I can tell that I like you very much."

Kaji : "That's good that I left this memory of myself in your mind."

Asuka : "Oh, please, tell me your name!"

Kaji, smiling at her : "Kaji. Ryoji Kaji."

Pause. Asuka seemed to think about it for a while.

Asuka, suddenly : "Kaji-san!"

Kaji : "Ha, it seems that you remember me after all."

Asuka : "Unfortunately, I can't remember anything else... I'm sorry."

Kaji : "Don't worry. When I was younger I had a friend who was in the same state. I can understand how you feel."

Asuka : "You're kind. You're just like Shinji."

Kaji grinned inwardly. Shinji chose that moment to speak.

Shinji : "By the way, Kaji-san, where's Misato-san?"

Kaji : "She had some work to do at her office. She gave me the keycard to the apartment so that I could be there at your return... Tomorrow you have all harmonics tests to do, okay?"

Asuka, giving Shinji a puzzled look : "What's an harmonics test?"

Shinji, chuckling : "I'll explain you later, Asuka."

It was now night. Shinji was in his bed, listening to his SDAT, and thinking about the events of the day.

Asuka : "May I...?"

Shinji could hear her voice even throughout his earphones. She was at his door, wearing only her nightdress.

Shinji, smiling at her : "Yeah, you can come here."

Asuka then rushed up under the blankets, with Shinji.

This time they were face to face. The two of them seemed to feel very uneasy.

Asuka : "Sorry... I'm just disturbing..."

Shinji, determined : "Of course not! You don't!"

Asuka, blushing a bit : "You're not mad at me for today?"

Shinji : "I can't be mad at you, Asuka. I don't know why I should be."

Asuka, softly, almost a whisper : "Thank you."

She closed her eyes.

Shinji then decided to turn his back to Asuka, and to go to sleep.

He couldn't face her in his sleep. not now, anyways.

Asuka : "Kaji-san told me that I'll have to climb back in that giant robot tomorrow..."

Shinji : "How do you feel about that?"

Asuka : "I must admit...that I'm afraid."

Shinji : "..."

Asuka : "This thing made me lost all of my memories. What will it do to me tomorrow, Shinji?"

Shinji : "You know, Asuka, Evas aren't always good. Many times, I told myself that I would never climb back again in them. But everytime, I did climb back in my Unit 01. Just because..."

Asuka : "Because of what, Shinji?"

Shinji : "Because I was forced to, because of the Angel attacks. But from now

on I won't run away anymore, because I've found something to do with it..."

Asuka : "..."

Shinji : "I have to protect you Asuka. I have to protect the girl who trusts me the most. And I can't lose that trust you put in me."

Asuka : "...Me too, Shinji. I'll do the same for you... Thank you, I'm more confident about tomorrow now."

Pause.

Shinji : "Good night Asuka."

There was no reply coming from Asuka yet. Instead, Shinji felt a soft pair of lips against his cheek. Asuka lightly kissed him here...

Asuka, softly in Shinji's ear : "That was a good-night kiss. Have sweet dreams, Shinji."

Asuka then soon fell asleep, according to the little snorings and purrings coming from her.

Shinji began to go to dreamland as well. He took his time, however. He first thought about Asuka and what happened today... That day has been so unreal for him, that he first thought it was an illusion, or a dream, or something like the day before the end of the world, just because Asuka was not her usual self... Tomorrow she'll have a synchro test with her Eva Unit 02. We'll see what happens...

Shinji's been woken up in the middle of the night by a cry coming from Asuka.

Asuka : "AAAHHHHH!"

Shinji quickly turned back to face Asuka, and saw that she had her head bent down.

Shinji : "Asuka...? What's going on?"

She then began to sob quietly and buried her head in his chest.

Shinji <to himself> : "I won't be afraid, Asuka... not now!" <to Asuka> :
"Asuka... Tell me what's wrong."

Asuka just continued to sob and squeezed Shinji's nightshirt as much as she could. He then put his arms gently around her, and rested his head on hers.

Shinji : "Asuka, I'm here... I'm holding you... There's nothing to fear.
Now tell me what was that nightmare..."

However, the reply coming from Asuka startled Shinji.

Asuka, sobbing : "...Mama..."

TO BE CONTINUED

Don't miss the next ^Âpisode : "The Source of One's Mind"

Author's notes:

I know, I know... Asuka makes the OOC-o-meter (tm) explode in this fic, but

it's for the plot, don't worry. I know that OOC characters aren't appreciated, because you don't feel that this IS the character you know from the original series, and the fic then has less charm.

Okay the wait was terribly long, but I had to work on the final Child Of Love chapter, and I had decided to take a little break. But I have some good news.

Some fics (by other authors) are at the moment in preparation, and guess what? They feature Teri-chan! You can't imagine how happy I am! I feel like a contented father or something! I hope you'll see them soon! (Teri-chan's a star now! :-)

Well, I have to mention too that my English gateway is now up! Use either one of the three URLs at the top of this document and you'll enter into ASUKA's Notebook. I'm not going to do some advertising for my site, but hey, take a look at it.

Again, special thanks to all of my pre-readers! (the list is just beginning to get bigger and bigger!) :

Al-I-Bus ("Imagine Normality?" (go read the new version! Even better than before!, "Love After Impact", "A New World For Shinji & Asuka")

Alain Gravel ("The One I Love Is..." a must-to read, "Lost Love")

Borderline Case ("Reflections In Red")

David Watson ("Victory" songfic, and thanks for the retoolings!)

EBJ (Thank you too! I just don't know what I could do without you! ^_^)

Eva_Pilot00

Greg Thomas (Webmaster of "Everything's Anime"

<<http://members.xoom.com/cybergig1>>)

DJ Lesser ("Ayanami's Lesson", a side story to the Ninth Month of Asuka's

pregnancy.)

Kaoru Nagisa ("EvaLeSs")

Jon Byram ("Sins Of The Past")

Pheaton

Readiosys Fisher ("Unfamilliar Fearings" and webmaster of RomEmul
<<http://welcome.to/romemul>>)

Sammy Sy

Shinji The 10 o'clock Assassin (Sorry, list too long...)

Sudhoda'ya

Sushi Boy

Thanks to you all, and to all the ones who read my story throughout the
world!!!!!!

See ya soon!

Axel Terizaki

-=THIRD MEMORY=-

Background:

Asuka seems to show some sort of attachment and affection for Shinji. Being amnesic, she seeks for support from someone, and she chooses to trust Shinji, as unbelievable as it seems. In addition of that, her first afternoon at school, just after her accident, has been a big mistake...

What will happen at her first harmonics test since her accident?

Will she synchronize well with her Eva-02? Why have I ended the previous chapter on a cliffhanger? Why do I HAVE to study that bloody Spanish at school!!!!?

CAPTION: THE THIRD MEMORY

CAPTION 2: The Source Of One's Mind

That night had been very long for Shinji, hearing Asuka sob about her mother all night had been a very exhausting experience.

He held her closely but gently in her sleep. After almost one hour of sobbing, she finally fell asleep again, probably tired of crying. Shinji then thought that the right time to fell asleep too had come. However, he woke up again in the early morning, as Asuka had the same nightmare once more...

Misato, who had returned from H.Q. in the middle of the night, was a little worried to hear Asuka's sobbings coming from Shinji's room in the early morning...

Misato <to herself> : "I'm not gonna outburst like yesterday..."

She silently entered the room, and saw a still sobbing Asuka in Shinji's arms. She was burying her head in his chest.

Misato (softly) : "Shinji-kun... What's going on here?"

Shinji : "I think she had really bad nightmares this night... As you can see."

Misato looked down at Asuka. She looked like a fragile and hurt animal, trembling like a leaf. She was holding Shinji by his nightshirt, as if her life depended on that. Apparently, she wasn't aware that Shinji and Misato were talking.

Misato : "Yeah, I see..."

Shinji : "The only thing she said for now is 'mama'..."

Misato immediately shuddered at that word.

Misato : "'Mama'?"

Pause.

Misato : "Oh... That's not very good..."

Shinji : "What's that deal about her mother, Misato-san?"

Misato : "Shinji-kun. I once promised Asuka that I wouldn't tell anyone..."

Shinji, after a short pause : "Then, I'll respect her choice. Sorry for asking."

Misato : "So, I don't think that... she'll be able to do harmonics tests today... will she?"

Shinji : "Yeah. I don't think she'll be able to perform them. And me neither."

Misato, sarcastically : "Perfect. Absolutely perfect. It's wonderful. I'm dead."

In her mind, she saw a furious Ritsuko waiting for her with a double-barelled shotgun at the entrance door of an elevator...

Shinji, sadly : "I'm sorry Misato-san..."

Misato : "Don't say that, it's not your fault. I'll prepare myself some instant food and I'll go back to sleep. I'm really really tired by now..."
<yawn> "If you need something, tell me, okay?"

Shinji just nodded.

Misato, while leaving the room : "Good luck, Shinji-kun."

The door to his room was now closed. A few seconds later, Shinji remembered that Asuka was crying, head buried in his chest.

He looked down at the girl he had in his arms.

Shinji : "Asuka..." <to himself> : "Why seeing you like that makes me feel so much pain and sorrow?"

And, inexplicably, he felt too the urge to cry a little...

Shinji, eyes shedding some tears, slowly but surely : "Why?"

Shinji didn't want to free himself from her grip yet. He continued to hold her gently, comforting her. He tried to caress her hair and her back. It seemed to have the desired effect after some time: it calmed her and she finally, for the third time in ten hours, fell asleep.

Shinji got the reward for his efforts, as she released little by little her grip and as she whispered his name during her sleep...

Shinji fell asleep too when he felt enough relieved that Asuka was looking so peaceful... And, well, he had to make up for his lack of sleep too...

Asuka's dreams.

Asuka was in her red plugsuit and was in front of a woman with a blurred face.

Asuka : "Stop that! That's nonsense! I won't allow you to do anything else!"

Voice/Blurred faced-woman : "You're hurting both of us by trying to take control over your mind and body back. Don't you see that you're happy, now?"

Asuka, angry : "No I'm not! Have you seen how I've acted with baka Shinji!?"

I
won't be able to face him anymore now!"

Voice : "I just tricked them by faking an amnesia, not to make them suspicious about anything."

Asuka : "That's REALLY nonsense!"

Voice : "And? As long as you're happy..."

Asuka : "I'm not! I'm not happy!"

Voice : "Not since that 'accident' with m..."

Asuka, interrupting : "I'M NOT HAPPY, DAMN IT! All the things I wanted to keep from the others, and especially from him... You're all letting them out! You ruined all my efforts..."

Voice : "Look at yourself, Asuka-chan."

Asuka : "Yeah I looked at myself! I'm SLEEPING in that baka's arms! That can't be! I'm gonna go insane!"

Voice : "Haven't you understood yet that this Shinji-boy really cares for you?"

Asuka : "No one cares for me! That's nonsense! What would the invincible Shinji care for, except for himself!? He doesn't give a damn about me! He never took me in his arms! He never tried to protect me! I HATE HIM!!!"

Voice : "He doesn't care about you because you didn't let him have the chance."

Asuka : "Of course I did! Many times!"

Voice : "Tssk... It's bad to lie to me, Asuka-chan. That's no way to behave."

Asuka : "After what you've done to me I don't see WHY I should behave better with you!"

Voice : "This Shinji has a nice butt, you know... You should get more interested in him."

Asuka : "Oh stop that... Of course he's the ONLY good boy over there, but he's only a boy! A pathetic and wimpy little boy! Kaji-san's a man. He's better, isn't he?"

Voice : "But, Asuka-chan... Aren't you still a little girl too?"

That startled Asuka.

Asuka : "No I'm not! I'm not! I'm not a little girl anymore! I'm a woman now! I can take care of myself! I did, I'm doing and I will!"

Voice : "You sure? It seems not. It rather seems that you ACT like a little girl."

Asuka, sighing : "Well, I'm tired of this. Let me see through my own eyes again, now!"

Voice : "If you're thinking that, I won't do anything. And besides, I need to show you something important."

Asuka : "I don't care. I want to destroy him now after what he has told me!"

Voice : "Stop lying to yourself, Asuka-chan... You should accept his love, and give it back to him... And besides, he knows well how to French-kiss, you know..." <giggling> "That's not negligible for a boy..."

Asuka, trembling : "You... NO!!! You made me kiss him!? You made me kiss that jerk!? I can't believe it!!! YOU RUINED MY FIRST KISS WITH THAT BLOODY JERK!!

I'm dead! That's it, I must be dead! I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU! I *HATE*
YOU!!!"

Voice : "Since you're not that convinced, I'll let you be a spectator, this time, okay? Now I have to go and reassure him. He must be very worried by now..." <giggling again> "He'll comfort us both with his warmth... He knows how to love, Asuka-chan. You should do like him."

Asuka : "I'm not baka Shinji! He doesn't care about me! NO HE DOESN'T CARE!"

A flash of light stroke her mind once more. We can see some events from the week when they had to synchronize perfectly with each other.

[When he tried to kiss her in the night but just pulled back when he saw she was crying... A wimpy little boy would not have pulled back. A wimpy little boy would have taken advantage of her with no respect for her pain, would've kissed her despite her tears.

And Shinji did not kiss her. He didn't want to hurt her. He doesn't want. And he never would.]

Asuka, softer : "He doesn't..."

[And after all the things she did and said to him, he could have returned her the insults and the hits. Instead, he didn't.]

Asuka, hysterical : "That's because he's a wimp!! A WIMP!"

[Still, he saved her from falling into the volcano. Would a wimp do that?]

Asuka : "He followed Misato's order to come and rescue me! He wouldn't have done it otherwise!"

[No, he did that without orders from Misato, and possibly against them. By his own will.]

Asuka : "NO HE DIDN'T! He did that because..."

[Because he cares for her.]

Asuka : "No, he doesn't care... How could that baka love me?! After..."

[Still, he saved her from sinking into the volcano. Without thinking about it. Without thinking about himself or anyone else. Just HER.]

Asuka, softly : "...Why?"

[Because he loves her.]

Asuka, almost a whisper : "...He can't..."

[Because he loves her.]

Asuka, shouting desperately : "DAMN YOU, MAMA! GIVE ME BACK MY MIND, NOW!!!"

Another flash of light made Asuka's dream world disappear.

Later, in the real world.

When Shinji finally returned to the real world, he saw that Asuka was sitting on his bed next to him. She had her head buried in her knees and was apparently only breathing.

Shinji, softly : "Asuka, are you okay?"

No answer.

Shinji : "Asuka...?"

Again, no answer came from the redheaded pilot.

Shinji : "I'm sure that you want something to eat. It's already 09:45..."

He slowly got up from his bed and headed to the kitchen. He came back with two sandwiches some minutes later.

Shinji : "Come on, eat something..."

She slowly lifted up her head and took one of the sandwiches in her left hand. She then proceeded to bite into the sandwich. She had a sad look on her face.

Shinji : "Do you like it?"

Asuka, softly : "Hmmm..."

She was chewing the bit of sandwich she had in her mouth. That action was soon followed by a sound of swallowing.

Shinji : "Are you feeling okay?"

Asuka : "...Not really."

Shinji, a little stunned : "C-could you explain me why...?"

Asuka : "I can't Shinji. I'm sorry but I can't."

With that she buried her head in her knees again.

Shinji : "You trust me, right?"

Asuka, hesitantly : "Yes..."

Shinji : "Then, tell me more... I'm your friend, you can tell me..."

Asuka seemed to think about it for a while...

Asuka : "Shinji, I really don't want to share that."

Shinji, seriously : "I think that you have a past, like me, that you'll never like. But we have to forget, Asuka... We mustn't look into the past."

Asuka, sadly : "Oh, that's easy to say for you..."

Shinji : "No, I think it's the same for both of us..."

Asuka : "Anyways, I don't want to share that with anyone. Sorry."

Shinji : "I'll tell you my story. My past. And you'll tell me yours, then, okay? We'll be at the same point then."

Asuka seemed to think about it for a while again.

Asuka : "You're just curious to hear about my past, but I don't feel the same way about you, I'm sorry..."

Shinji thought that she was right this time. He was only listening to his curiosity.

Shinji looked at his feet too, kind of embarrassed.

Shinji : "I've read once that telling someone you trust about something painful for you was a good way to feel less alone, Asuka."

Long pause.

Asuka : "Oh well, if you insist... After all, you're a trustworthy friend, Shinji..." <a little more animated now> : "You're right. I don't see why I should hide things to you!"

Shinji smiled at her, and then began to relate his past to Asuka.

Ritsuko : "I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!!!"

Central Dogma, in the lab used for harmonics tests.

Misato, trying to apologize : "Sorry, Ritsuko..."

Ritsuko : "Misato, really... You don't understand, do you?"

Misato : "Of course I know they HAVE to do these tests, but Asuka just remembered about her mother and she's not in a good condition to pass them."

Ritsuko : "You're no doctor, Misato. You can't say that. And why does Shinji has to skip those tests TOO?"

Misato : "Well, you know... Asuka feels completely lost. and I don't know why, but she feels that only Shinji can be trusted here."

Ritsuko : "Oh, you won't listen to me, will you? I want them here and now! I

already delayed that test for them, but I can't anymore! Otherwise, the Commander will be furious!"

Misato, reluctantly, and preparing herself to leave : "Okay, okay... I'm gonna get them."

Back into the apartment.

Asuka : "Shinji, it hurts too much inside. I can't..."

They were still on his bed, and he had an arm around her shoulder, while she was looking down at her feet.

Shinji : "Don't say anymore, Asuka. I think I understand how you feel now... Well, I think I do."

Asuka : "...Thank you Shinji..."

Shinji : "I regret asking you this, sorry."

She closed her eyes, and rested her head on his shoulder.

Asuka, whispering : "As long as it's for you..."

Shinji : "You seem tired. You want to sleep some more?"

Asuka : "Yes... But, it would be nice, if we could sleep together..."

Shinji : "Hey, that's already two nights that you invaded my bed, so I suppose that we are already sleeping together..."

However, his mind didn't register the fact that 'sleeping together' was perhaps a little too intimate for the two of them.

Asuka : "I mean... Take me in your arms... It feels good..."

Shinji, surprised : "Huh?"

Asuka, smiling : "Come on! I'm waiting!"

He then did as he was told. He slowly took her in his arms and gently put her under the blankets, before joining her under the covers...

Asuka, eyes still closed : "Hey, don't stop..."

Shinji held her closely but gently in his arms and put her on top of him. She was resting her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

Asuka, softly : "Oh... It feels really good, Shinji... I feel so comfortable here..."

Shinji : "Same here, Asuka..." <to himself> "This is so unreal..."

In fact, they weren't the only ones feeling really good... Something inside Shinji's pajamas wanted to be noticed too...

Asuka, giggling : "Hehe..."

Shinji, aware of the situation and a little disturbed by what was happening inside him : "Oh well... Sorry..."

Asuka, giggling again : "I don't mind. It's good to feel loved..."

Shinji took her hand in his and looked very determined.

Shinji, softly : "Asuka... I've decided something. You know that I always was a spineless little boy, but now I'm gonna take a man's decision..."

She looked at him, puzzlement on her face.

Shinji : "Oh, sorry. You can't remember that..."

Asuka, putting her head back in place : "You're not a spineless boy Shinji. Judging of the way you behaved with me this far, you're not. You took my defense, and you were kind to me. A 'spineless' boy couldn't behave like that."

Shinji felt relieved to hear that coming from her.

Suddenly, the door of the apartment opened and Misato stepped in. She went immediately to Shinji's room. She seemed exhausted.

Misato : "Oh, I am interrupting something, sorry..."

Shinji, blushing a bit : "Well, we were resting a little..."

Misato : "I'm sorry for interrupting you two right now, but... Shinji, Asuka... We have to go to headquarters, I couldn't cancel these tests."

Shinji frowned.

Shinji : "Misato-san! Asuka's not ready for that yet. I don't think that it would be wise to make her do these tests!"

Misato : "I told you, Shinji... It's not me... Ritsuko must run these tests on

you, otherwise the commander will be furious."

Shinji then thought about his father and frowned even more.

But at his big surprise, Asuka stood up and walked towards her room.

Asuka, behind Misato : "I'll be ready in a minute. Misato."

Misato, who had not moved at all : "Good, Asuka. I'm sorry to impose you this."

Asuka : "Don't worry. I'll try to do my best."

Shinji felt relieved to hear that. She had the confidence now. She could do it, after all. Even if deep inside, he felt that something would go wrong...

Central Dogma, in the lab used for Evangelion Units activation.

Ritsuko : "Okay, Shinji, Asuka... Rei has already done that test yesterday, so she isn't here, does that disturb you?"

Shinji, throughout the comm display : "No, not at all. But I thought that we had to do harmonics tests?"

Ritsuko : "We'll do them another time. I want to see Asuka in Eva-02 first."

Shinji : "But why am I forced to be in Unit 01 as well?"

Ritsuko, under her breath : "...Just in case..."

And then she closed the comm display.

Maya : "Are you afraid of something, sempai?"

Ritsuko : "No... It must be nothing. Well, I hope it's nothing. We'll see that soon, anyways."

Shinji was in Eva-01 in the cage next to her, while Asuka in her Eva-02 was in front of Ritsuko.

Misato was also here to see what would happen. She was incredibly worried about Asuka, judging of all the precautions Ritsuko seemed to take for this activation test, as if she was fearing something...

Shinji opened a comm channel to the lab.

Shinji : "I'd like to open a private channel to Eva-02. Can I?"

Ritsuko, surprised : "A private channel?"

Shinji : "Well, I know that all of our communications are public for you and that you record them all on disk. For once, I'd like to talk to Asuka personally."

Ritsuko : "Oh well... If you insist."

Shinji : "Thanks... And no cheating, please."

With that, he closed the channel to the lab and opened up a new one to EVA-02.

Misato saw that Ritsuko was monitoring their conversation, even against Shinji's wishes. She decided to do something. She keyed something on the terminal next to her. And a few seconds after, the monitoring of the

'private'
channel was off.

Ritsuko, angry : "Misato!? Why did you cut the camera!?"

Misato : "Have you no shame? They want some privacy here."

Ritsuko, frowning : "It's for the test, Misato..."

Misato, serious : "I don't care. It's for the children that I'm acting, not for science. They are no guinea pigs. They are human beings."

Ritsuko : "Are you aware that I could get you out of this lab just for getting
in the way of those tests Commander Ikari ordered?"

Misato : "So, they are NOT usual harmonics tests after all..."

Ritsuko : "We just want to verify something..."

Inside the two Evas.

Shinji : "Asuka, are you alright?"

Asuka, slowly nodding : "Hmmm, hmmm... This thing horribly smells blood."

Shinji : "Yeah I know that, but you'll get used to it. Do you feel comfortable?"

Asuka : "Except the fact that my head really hurts..."

Shinji, lowering his head : "I'm sorry to impose you this..."

Asuka : "No, you don't... It's my duty as a pilot, right?"

Shinji : "Yes but..."

Asuka : "But what?"

Shinji : "Sometimes Asuka... I wish that we wouldn't be Eva pilots, without all the responsibilities we have right now, and... I'd like... I'd like to come back from school with you, by my side, holding hands, and... and I we would come back home, eat something together, and finally watch something on TV together, on the couch... But I realize... that if you would fully recover your memories, you would never be like that to me, and the way you acted those last days showed me that Sohryu Asuka Langley was actually a really nice girl."

Asuka waited for the end of his speech and giggled a little.

Asuka, still giggling : "Hehe, thanks. Okay I'll try to remember this too if I were to recover, don't worry..."

Ritsuko, throughout a comm channel : "Have you finished?"

Shinji : "Ritsuko-san!! You were listening, weren't you?"

Ritsuko : "Don't worry for that, Shinji-kun. A crazy woman was keeping me from listening to your conversation..."

Shinji <to himself> : "Misato-san..."

Ritsuko : "Okay, Maya. Begin activation of Unit-01 first."

Misato : "Why Unit-01? I thought that we were testing Asuka..."

Ritsuko : "As I said, 'just in case'..."

Misato : "I'm getting suspicious..."

Ritsuko : "Okay. Establish the first connection."

Maya : "First connection established."

Ritsuko : "Connect the main power source."

Maya : "Functionnal voltage has reached the critical limit."

Ritsuko : "Good. Prepare for Phase 2 Configuration."

Maya : "Pilot in symbiosis with Unit 01. Circuits opened. Pulses and harmonics normal. Synchronization ok."

Ritsuko, running her eyes through a screen : "All the nerves have been linked. No problem with the nervous system."

Maya : "Calculations reverifications ok. Check-list acheived at 2-5-5-0, list 6. Borderline in 1.8 , 1.7 , 1.2 , 1.0 , 0.8 , 0.4 , 0.2 , 0.1... Borderline reached and passed successfully."

Ritsuko : "Eva-01 activated."

Misato : "Good..."

Maya : "Unit-01 activated and fonctionnal. Synch rate at 72.4% ."

Ritsuko, to Shinji : "Good, Shinji-kun. You have a good synchronization rate with your Eva. Good job."

Shinji, slightly blushing : "T-thanks..."

Ritsuko : "Maya, proceed with Unit-02."

Maya : "Hai."

Ritsuko : "Connect the main power source."

Maya : "Main power source connected. Activation system operational. Voltage operational. Critical point in 0.5... 0.3... Stage passed."

Ritsuko : "Go on with the second activation phase."

Maya : "The pilot is entering in symbiosis with Unit 02. System start, phase 2. Synapses inserted."

Ritsuko : "Start the connection."

Maya : "Pulses transmitted."

Ritsuko, looking at a screen : "All circuits are ok."

Maya : "Nerve links ok."

Ritsuko : "Transmit the power to the brachial muscles."

Maya : "Nerve links ok. Check-list acheived at 2-5-5-0, list 6."

Ritsuko : "Prepare the third connection."

Maya : "Borderline in... 0.7 , 0.5 , 0.3 , 0.2..."

A machine is suddenly beeping.

Maya : "Asuka's pulses are fluctuating backwards!"

Ritsuko : "What?!"

Inside Unit-02.

Asuka : "What the..."

The unit tries to activate itself, but...

Asuka, screaming : "UURRRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGHHHH!!!!"

Activation Lab.

Maya : "Disturbance in the third phase! Reject from the nervous system!"

Misato : "You were afraid of *WHAT*?!"

Ritsuko : "Yeah, some kind of rejection by Unit 02 of its pilot..."

Maya : "Unit 02 going berserk!"

Ritsuko, horrified : "Again!? Break all contacts, open up to the sixth fuse."

Maya : "Impossible! The signal is denied!"

Outside the lab, in the test cage.

EVA-02 was trying to free itself from the restraints maintaining it.

When it finally succeeded, it began to knock its head on the wall in face of itself.

Inside the lab.

Maya : "Unit 02 out of control!"

Ritsuko : "Stop everything. Cut the umbilical cable!"

Maya : "Sempai! Unit 01 also..."

Maya was interrupted when they saw in bewilderment Unit-01 destroying the wall to the right and entering inside Unit-02 cage.

Misato : "Shinji-kun!"

Outside the lab, in the test cage.

Unit-01 blocked with some difficulty Unit-02 head with its hand, and tried to make Unit-02 entry plug eject.

Maya : "We can't eject the entry plug! Unit 02 is using auxiliary circuits! 35 seconds before de-activation!"

Shinji however, didn't listen. He tried his best to remove the armor at the

back of Unit-02 neck with only one hand. After a few seconds of struggling, he finally succeeded and Unit-02 entry plug was now visible.

But, a few seconds later, the entry plug ejected itself at high speed from Unit-02.

Maya : "Auto-ejection triggered!"

However, Shinji had the reflex of grabbing the Entry plug as soon as it was ejecting.

Maya : "Unit shutdown in ten seconds! 9! 8! 7! 6! ..."

Shinji carefully put Asuka's entry-plug on the cage floor and put both hands in front of Unit-02's head, who began to force its way with more and more strength, to stop its advance.

Inside the lab.

Maya : "3! 2! 1! 0!! Unit-02 is silent."

Misato : "Why has it rejected her?!"

Ritsuko : "I really don't know myself, Misato..."

Back to the cage.

Shinji climbed off his Eva and went in front of Asuka's entry plug. With some strength apparently coming from nowhere, he forced the hatch of the plug to open itself, LCL quickly slipping out of it.

Shinji : "NNnggggggggggg.....!"

When he entered it, he found an Asuka clinging forcefully to the controls, in a little pool of LCL.

Shinji : "Asuka! Are you okay!?"

She slowly opened her eyes and looked up at him. Her vision was still a little blurred, but she could perceive his face, as if it had some sort of feeling of deja vu...

Asuka, weakly : "Sh... Shinji...?"

Shinji, smiling : "Come on, I'll take you to the infirmary."

Asuka was a bit surprised first, but then came back to her senses.

Asuka, smiling warmly : "It's not that terrible you know..."

The two teens giggled.

Later.

A NERV Hospital Room.

Misato, Ritsuko and Shinji were at Asuka's bedside.

Misato : "So..."

Ritsuko : "It's an interesting theory I must say... Two 'personalities'

in the same body. One from her, the other one from her mother. The shock of the two 'blocked' her memories. What a science-fiction story..."

Asuka : "But I can't remember anything yet..."

Shinji : "It's still so unbelievable. And I really thought she was amnesic all the time."

Ritsuko : "She was and still is. That was a consequence of the encounter of two 'souls', even if they weren't really 'souls'."

Kaji chose that moment to come into the hospital room.

Kaji : "Hi. May I join you?"

Misato : "Yeah, yeah, you can..."

He took a chair and sat down in front of Asuka.

Ritsuko : "So, I think we won't get back the old Asuka, will we?"

Asuka : "I'm sorry, Akagi-san. I really can't remember anything..."

Shinji : "I'm sure there's a way..."

Kaji, grinning : "Tell me Shinji, are you really wanting to get the old Asuka back?"

Shinji looked down and blushed a little.

Misato : "Thinking about it, Shinji-kun, I don't think it would be wise... The one we have know is quieter than the old one..."

Asuka was listening with a little smile, almost a grin, on her face.

Shinji : "Yes but..."

Asuka : "Hey, Shinji. I want to go out a little when I'll leave this hospital, will you take me somewhere where we could have fun together?"

Shinji became redder than a little while ago.

Misato, teasing : "Hey hey hey! Way to go, Shinji-kun!"

Kaji chuckled, while Ritsuko stayed her usual serious self.

Shinji, to Asuka : "Y-yeah... I think I'd like to."

Ritsuko, smiling : "Well, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't think you'll have some fun for now. I have to run some other tests on Asuka for now... Why not delaying your 'date' of one or two days?"

Shinji : "Don't do any harm to Asuka, please."

Ritsuko : "Well, I'll try. But you will be able to get home tonight, don't worry. But tomorrow, she'll have to be there, okay?"

The said night, at Misato's apartment.

Shinji was looking at the sky from the balcony of his room.

Asuka : "May I join you?"

Shinji, without looking at her : "Yeah, yeah..."

She advanced towards him and placed herself on the balcony too, next to him.

Asuka : "I really dislike my room. I feel better in yours. I feel more... calm... More... More in peace."

Shinji : "..."

She then looked up at the sky too.

Asuka : "I like to look at the stars, too, you know... We can see many beautiful things, sometimes."

Shinji, nodding : "Hmmm..."

Pause. Shinji suddenly looked down at the street below.

Shinji : "I'm sorry Asuka."

Asuka : "Why do you feel sorry? There is nothing to apologize for!"

Shinji : "If I could have, I would have convinced Misato to not let you do this test..."

Asuka : "Hey, it would have happened sooner or later! Don't say that!"

Shinji : "...You're right..."

Asuka took advantage of the little pause in their conversation to rest her head on his shoulder. Shinji noticed this, and got a little nervous.

Shinji <to himself> : "Why am I trembling like that? I don't have... to hide my feelings from her... Not from *that* Asuka..." <to Asuka> "Asuka. I..."

I... don't know exactly b-but...I think I..."

Asuka : "Yeah? Come on, say what you have in mind."

Shinji : "...I love you, Asuka."

Asuka was a bit shocked to hear that, even if deep inside, she was smiling to herself...

Shinji : "I want to be with you, forever. Please... Don't tell me you don't feel the same way..."

Asuka : "Hey, haven't I told you a few days ago that I trust you? And where am I resting *now*, baka Shinji...?"

She looked him right in the eyes. They could get lost in each others gazes if they weren't careful.

Shinji however, was too busy looking into Asuka's eyes to notice that she called him 'Baka Shinji'...

Shinji, blushing a bit : "I remember... The first time I saw you exiting the bathroom... You were so cute in that towel... It was the last night of our synchronization week."

Asuka heard a little voice in her head.

Voice : "Come on, Asuka-chan, tell him now..."

She thought about it a few moments before looking at Shinji, who was now back to the stars in the Tokyo-3 sky.

Asuka, softly, but still with a little grin on her face : "You know, part of

me hoped that you would have kissed me that night."

Shinji's brain only registred what Asuka had just said a few moments later. He looked back at her. But before he could realize it, she had her two arms around his neck. He wanted to say something, but his lips were too busy to talk as Asuka planted a passionate kiss on them...

Asuka, while kissing Shinji <to herself> : "Thank you, mama..."

END

Author's notes:

I know some of you are gonna be disappointed of the fic ending there, but it had to be done this way. Anyways, I hope you liked it!

One of my pre-readers told me that it was somehow like a trilogy: Introduction, development and conclusion. And when I look back at the two other parts, I think that he's right!

Mega-thanks to Alain Gravel, for all the support he gave me in this part. I asked him many times if some things would fit into the story and he suggested me part of the ending scene.

Now all of my pre-readers:

Al-I-Bus, Alain Gravel, Borderline Case, Cedric Ranson, David Watson, EBJ, Eva_Pilot00, Godsend777, Greg Thomas, Jayson Deare, DJ Lesser, Kaoru Nagisa, Jon Byram, Pheaton, Readiosys Fisher, Sammy Sy, Shinji the 10 O'clock Assassin, Sudhoya'da, Sushi Boy, and Yousef Al-Samshi!

Whoa! What a crew! I'm wondering if I have the biggest number of pre-readers in the fanfic world? :-)

This fic is archived on the following sites:

ASUKA's Notebook (<http://asukanotebook.tsx.org>)

RAAC Archive (<ftp://ftp.cs.ubc.ca/pub/archive/anime-fan-works/Evangelion>)

Everything's Anime -Fanfiction (<http://members.xoom.com/cybergig1>)

In Other Words - A Fanfiction Archive (<http://members.xoom.com/otherwords>)

SDAT - An Evangelion Fanfiction Database (<http://w3.to/superdat>)

And I think that's all (for now!)

Thanks for reading!

See you soon!

Axel Terizaki

Chain Lightning Studios Presents
Battlescars
An Evangelion Fanfiction in three acts
by T.L. Webb

[]=====

How I wish, how I wish you were here.
We're just two lost souls Swimming in a fish bowl,
Year after year, Running over the same old ground.
What have we found?
The same old fears.
Wish you were here.

Pink Floyd

[]=====

Hey Hikari!

Thanks for writing, It's been awhile since I heard from you and the others. Kensuke still won't write normal letters- keeps insisting on all these stupid coded Emails that I can never make heads or tails of. He's being way too paranoid if you ask me, but hey- nothing new there. I'm glad you and the girls are doing well- me'n Mari are adjusting to the new home as quickly as we can.

I dunno what to say about the news- I mean I want to be happy and all (and I am, don't get me wrong) but I just still wish things had worked out better. Having to move halfway across the country isn't easy on a couple- I know- but still. *sigh* I do hope you and this Watanabi guy get along though-- but ya can't blame a guy for being a little jealous y'know?

Well in other news classes start tomorrow and I have no idea how to deal with that. I mean- we got all these new identities and stuff, but when people ask you where you were during the war its kind of hard not to blink for a moment when it all flashes back to you. I hate remembering what we all went through back then- Mari still limps on her left side... and well my problems? Lets not even get started.

But its a new start for us here- dad's got a good job at the research lab and if all goes well we can make a good home for ourselves here.

Give my love to your sisters and your dad.

Still missing ya

Touji Takashi (lame, huh? At least you got stuck with a cool new last name)

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Act One: Reunion

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At seventeen, Touji was still taller than most of the kids in his class. He still looked more or less the same as he had the day he'd moved out of Tokyo Three. He'd gone with all the suggestions the protection agency had given except he refused to change his hairstyle- even if it was a lighter brown now.

It was going to be another one of *those* days- he'd known that right off when he'd gotten up, and as he made his way to his desk it became more painfully obvious. His leg was hurting again, and he hoped he'd have a chance to adjust the prosthetic without anyone noticing. It had been a lot simpler to do things like that when he could get away with wearing sweats to class. The uniform they'd crammed him in just made it all that more difficult.

He knew a couple of the kids already, they'd met at the tour the school had provided the previous week. It was a new school and a new town really- one of the first major reconstruction's since the disaster back in 2016 when things had come so close to the brink. Everyone seemed to avoid talking about what had happened that day- which was fine by Touji, he didn't want anyone to know the tiny part he'd played in the Angel War.

Everyone seemed so eager to push forward nowadays. It was easy to pass off his amputations as injuries from the war- so many people carried scars of some kind.

The day passed quickly- the teachers took most of it to get to know the students and letting everyone get aquatinted. Around noon, however, an aid came to the door and after a quick discussion with the teacher, Touji was called to the front.

"Mr. Takashi, You've been asked to go to the principals office," the teacher explained- using Touji's pseudonym, "now, I don't believe its an emergency, so don't try to strain yourself."

On the outside, Touji bowed politely and took his crutch- giving the impression that he was planing to make his way to the office at a leisurely pace. However inside, he was fuming. He hated it when people started making allowances for his missing arm and leg. He knew he'd have to take it slow-- the teacher knew this, the comment had been unnecessary. The worst part was that he hadn't meant it as an insult- the man thought he was being helpful and was probably mentally making a checkmark in his 'good karma' notebook.

So when Touji reached the principal's office, he wasn't in the best of moods. His leg still hurt and his back and arm were edging past his comfort zone as well. Which was why he didn't really pay attention to the person in the second chair as the older man behind the desk greeted him and asked him to sit down.

"Mr. Takashi," the principal said, "first off, I'm fully aware of the circumstances behind your enrolment here and of your somewhat colorful past. That taken into account I've decided you needed to be made aware of a recent change in the school roster.

Touji glanced to the other chair. There was a young lady sitting there staring at her lap. Her black hair hid most of her face, but there was something familiar about her that he couldn't quite place.

"This young lady is enrolling in our school while her father will be working nearby- with your own in fact. I've been told that she suffered an extreme shock during the third impact incident, and will need someone to be with her during classes to look after her. You'll be required only to take her to classes and place the paperwork and laptop on her desk- it seems she'll do the rest once it's been prepared for her. She's spent the last few years since the Nerv incident in extensive therapy, but they've hit a wall and apparently they're hoping you might be able to positively influence her condition. It appears to be a

pathological case of apathy, but I don't know the specifics"

"Um," Touji blinked as he glanced back to the girl, "sure, I mean, of course sir!" he turned to the girl who still stared at her lap. She seemed completely oblivious to their conversation. Touji did notice about then that there was a long white scar running along her arm.

"Very well then, " the principal said as he rose from his seat, "there are some papers I'll need you to sign concerning the schools liability and so on. I'll leave you to here to get reacquainted while I get them."

"Re... reacquainted? Huh? Touji stammered as the older man walked out the door. He looked after him for a moment before settling back in his seat and turning to the familiar girl in the other chair.

"Um, Hi," he said, "I'm-"

His voice trailed off as the girl looked up at him and he saw her eyes. One of them was milky white and didn't seem to focus at all- but the other. He knew that color. He'd seen the matched set. There was no mistaking the shocked look on her face either.

"Asuka?" he whispered as she looked at one another in stunned surprise.

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She either wouldn't, or couldn't speak.

It was frustrating as hell, Touji thought, that someone who he'd never heard shut up when he'd known her would be so silent now that he *wanted* her to talk. Once that moment of mutual surprise had passed, Asuka had turned back to the floor and had utterly ignored all his attempts to converse. Eventually the principal had come back and had given him the papers to sign.

That taken care of, he'd been told to give her a tour of the campus and take her back for the final class of the day. She followed him silently- holding her school bag in front of her in both hands. He wasn't sure if she heard a thing he said but she stopped when he did and sure *seemed* to be listening. He babbled on all the little jokes that the tour guide had given him the day he'd arrived, but from the quick glances back- nothing seemed to phase her.

The principal hadn't said what had caused this- but Touji had a pretty good idea. After his little 'adventures' with the Evangelions he knew all too well what kind of toll they could take on the pilots. And some of the stories about what had happened at Tokyo Three that last fateful day... well if even half of them were true he was amazed that Asuka was even alive.

"I didn't recognize you at first with the black hair and all," he said as they stopped by the water fountain, "I couldn't believe it was you, I mean, everyone thinks you and Shinji are-"

"Don't say his name," she hissed suddenly, startling him, "you just *shut up* about him!"

"What?" he said turning to face her in full- trying to see past her bangs to discover if her eye was as clear as her voice.

"Don't... don't.. No," she whispered as she pulled her arms around herself and backed

away.

"Asuka?" he pleaded, "hold on, what did I-"

"No, it's his fault!" she screamed suddenly, "he made me say it! He always made me say those things!"

She turned and ran as he stood there dazed for a moment. Then he shook his head to clear the cobwebs and tried to follow as fast as he safely could.

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He caught up to her on front steps. She was curled up into a shuddering ball, sobbing. Touji slowly and carefully made his way down the steps, and lowered himself down beside the grief-stricken German girl.

"You going to talk this time or are you going to make me pull my leg out of joint again chasing you."

"Shut up Touji," she spat from behind her arms.

"You recognize me then?" He asked- a little pleased.

"I..." she trailed off as she looked up- seemingly shocked at the sight of him sitting there, "Touji?" She whispered as if she was seeing him for the first time in years.

"Yeah, but I don't go by Suzuhara anymore," he grinned, "the protection program changed it to 'Takashi' when dad turned states evidence."

"Shiese," she muttered as she leaned forward- he could see her face a little now, and she seemed so lost... he didn't know what to say so he resorted to a time honored tradition between them- verbal sparing

"Good to see you again too," he chuckled.

"Why the hell are you here?" she demanded half heartedly.

"Y'got me," he said, "near as I could tell your doc figured a familiar face might shock you out of the uberfunk you were in."

"You're pronouncing it wrong," she sighed exasperatedly, "its '*ooober*' not '*uh-beer*' you sound like you're asking for booze when you say it."

"And it looks like it worked," Touji grinned, "I hate to admit this, demon, but it's good to see you again- I thought you were dead or worse."

"Don't-" she said, her face paling suddenly, "don't... please. You don't have the slightest idea of what 'worse' can be."

"Maybe," he shrugged, "tell y'what- I'll stop pretending I understand what's going on in your head if you promise not to go running off like that- my damn leg is raw like you wouldn't believe"

"No one asked you to follow me," she smirked as she leaned back on the steps- resting on her elbows.

"Yeah that was pretty dumb of me."

"I'm glad you did though," she added, "it is good to see a familiar face."

"So was all that just an act to jerk my chain or what?"

"I-I don't know," she sighed, "its all fuzzy. I just wanted people to leave me the hell alone- I do remember that. I tried ignoring them, but that didn't work. Then I tried doing as little of what they wanted- and *that* didn't work. Next thing I know someone mentions *him* and you're standing there like an idiot.

"Well you seem to have it more or less figured out for someone who was all but catatonic for most of the day," Touji blinked.

"When you don't talk to anyone for awhile you get to know yourself a little," she shrugged.

"Well, no one ever accused you of having a human psyche," he smirked as she punched him in the arm.

"**OW!**" she yelped as she realized she'd hit the prosthetic, "since when did you have a lead arm to match that skull of yours?"

"I dunno," he laughed, "since when did you say more than three civil words to me at a time?"

She frowned for a moment, a puzzled expression crossing her face, "hell if I know," she said as she got up and dusted her uniform off.

"What?" he said as she looked down at him expectantly.

"You want to finish this tour or do you *prefer* to get us both in detention?"

"Naw," he chuckled as he struggled to his feet, "better not press my luck- I'm already stuck here with you- detention on top of that would be like the uh-beer suck."

"Dumkoff," she said as she tossed her hair off her shoulder and headed up the stairs. He watcher her for a moment- wondering several things ranging from if he could get a peek at her underwear from where he stood to what had happened to her three years back to make someone like *her* draw away from reality.

"Gonna be interesting finding out," he smiled as he began climbing the stairs after her

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Yo Kensuke!

First off- you'd better answer this Email or I'll catch a train up there and kick your butt!

I got your message, and even managed to decode half of it, but sorry- I'm not gonna fork over the cash for time in a love hotel just so you can send something by a secure connection-- whatever the hell that means. Y'ask me you're getting even more paranoid than you used to be. Funny, I didn't think that was possible.

Speaking of things which I never thought would happen- you're gonna flip when you hear this! About a week ago we got a new student, and who does it turn out to be? The Evil Who's Name We Dare Not Speak! I kid you not!

Turns out my dad did work not to dissimilar from her's back in the 'old days' and they're working at the same research facility in town. They stuck her in my class 'cause someone in the protection plan realized I was there.

Its strange- even a year ago I'd have resented being in the same city with her, but with all of us living so far away now... well I was getting lonely, and it's nice to see someone from back then- even if it is **HER**. Oh, and check this out- they made her dye her hair black! I didn't even recognize her at first.

Hey, one thing before I go- could you try to see if you can dig up anything on what happened to our old bud? The press never did release anything and I have the feeling that the demon knows more than she's telling. It may be nothing... but then again maybe it's not.

Well I gotta get off to class- hope you're not too bored at that tech school they put you in.

Later m'man

Touji

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Act Two: Revelation

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Three weeks had passed with the breakneck pace that school took when it wasn't moving at that of a snail. Somewhat to Touji's disappointment, Asuka's emergence from catatonia seemed to be permanent. His disappointment wasn't so much that she was talking and participating with the rest of the world, it was mostly founded in the fact that she wouldn't be requiring his assistance as he'd originally been asked to give. It wasn't that he wanted to dote on her or anything... it was just that now he didn't have a really good excuse to talk to her.

Touji would be the first to admit he wasn't exactly the swiftest on the uptake there was- but even so it soon became annoyingly obvious that the teacher was actively avoiding pairing them up for projects as lab partners and so on. It didn't take too much of a leap to realize why either- Asuka had so little use of her right hand, and he didn't even have a left one.

Scratching the edge of his prosthetic where the skin always seemed to chaff, Touji frowned as he watched the class gather their things after class. He often wondered what everyone else saw that day when the world was on the brink. He remembered a vision of having both his arm and leg back for a split second before things got muddled, and then he- like so many others- woke up to find themselves laying on the floor in various states of undress.

Something huge had happened that day. Something beyond his ability to comprehend. Most people had repressed the memory- no one spoke of it and he had the feeling Kensuke was right about the government suppressing information about what had really happened. Kensuke might have become something of a nut, but he had a surprising amount of accurate information about some things.

He was getting ready to go when Asuka walked up and dropped herself in the chair in front of him- leaning back against the desk and facing him. He stared at her for a moment before she pulled an envelope out of her schoolbag and flicked it over to his desk.

"What's this?" He asked as he picked it up by the edge, "you challenging me to a deathmatch?"

"Its directions," she explained, "Dad wants you to stop by so he can cook you dinner. Apparently you're the hero of the moment."

"I'm the what?" Touji blinked.

"You think everything you do happens in a vacuum?" Asuka sighed, "I refused to live with him for the better part of five years, then when I came back I didn't speak for three. Now he's so happy... well, he cried when I came home that day, and he hadn't done that for eight years."

"So I get you talking then I gotta go hang at your place?" Touji smirked, "is this a punishment or reward?"

"I'll tell you when I figure that out myself." she returned with an identical grin.

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Touji wasn't sure what to think about Asuka's dad. It wasn't that he wasn't a nice guy- he was. It was just that there was this air about the fella that reminded Touji of a dog that had been kicked too much. His neighbor had had a dog like that back when he was a kid. The poor thing whimpered whenever anyone came near or even thought of reaching in its direction. The one time Touji had tried to pet the poor creature it had curled up in a ball and shaken the whole time.

Asuka's dad wasn't quite that bad, but he had that same look in his eyes that the dog had. That look that said that too many bad things had happened in his life for him to ever be okay again. A lot of people had that look for a long time after the last battle of Tokyo Three. In several cases they said it was like they'd been offered their fondest wish and then had it snatched away.

Frowning, Touji scratched his leg and adjusted his prosthetic. He didn't know much about Asuka. What little Hikari had relayed had concerned what had then been current events. The more he thought about it, he didn't remember anyone ever talking about her life before Tokyo Three. Not that he'd been all that interested at the time- she'd been a pain in the ass more than anything else in his mind back then.

"More rice Mr. Takashi?" Dr. Langley asked as he offered the bowl. Touji scooped a little more into his own bowl as he glanced over at Asuka who was putting her dishes away. She'd been silent most of the night- in fact unless Touji was mistaken she seemed a little embarrassed by the entire thing. He'd realized pretty quickly that her father didn't have a clue who he really was so when Asuka hadn't corrected him, Touji had decided to go with the flow. Asuka had eventually disappeared into the house somewhere and Touji was starting to think he should have made his escape then as well.

"She was always so happy, you know," Langley said, "back when she was a child."

Touji nodded, not sure what he should say.

"And so smart too! We knew we had a genius on our hands rather quickly. She skipped grades as fast as she could take the placement tests- by the time she was ten she'd already enrolled in a university."

"Really?" Touji said, still not sure if he should mention his time in Tokyo Three with her.

"Oh yes," Dr. Langley said, "of course she'd already stopped speaking with me by then,

but I was still so proud. I knew she'd go on to do great things... I just didn't know what toll they'd take on our family."

"I'm sorry," Touji said politely.

Dr. Langley's face seemed to falter for a moment as his nervous smile twitched, "yes, so was I," he said, "it's a sad thing when events happen so vast in scope that one can never hope to prevent them. Especially when your family is caught in the crossfire of them."

Touji could only nod, and hope the man got to a point sometime soon.

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"Out here," Asuka whispered an hour later as her father left the room. She was standing at the curtain that led to the balcony and was gesturing for him to make haste over to it.

After two hours of listening to Dr. Langley ramble about how smart and sweet Asuka had been as a child, Touji was more than happy to be offered a method of escape. He hobbled to his feet and tried not to trip as he shuffled over to the glass door. Asuka closed it behind him after drawing the curtain. That done, she leaned back on the door and let out a long sigh as she slid down to the floor.

"Isn't that a bit cold?" Touji asked, wondering what her father would think when he came back and saw him gone.

"You mean you want to listen to the same twelve stories told over and over again?" Asuka asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Is he always like that then?"

"No... sometimes he can be somewhat normal as long as the topics of Evas or my step mom leaving after the war doesn't come up," she said, "but he's such a bundle of nerves. That day after school when we spoke? I thought he was going to pass out! He refuses to acknowledge anything either- especially how he acted after mom-"

She paled as she trailed off, and Touji leaned back against the rail to take some of the pressure off his leg. They stayed there for several minutes, watching the sunset over the mountains in the distance.

"Y'ever wonder what we did in our past lives to deserve this?" he asked.

"Deserve what?" she laughed, "Being stuck here with you?"

"Naw, I know exactly what I did for that one," he chuckled, "I mean us being kicked by life like we were."

"I don't think it works like that," she said, "no one points a finger at some poor guy and says 'the universe is now going to become one huge cosmic practical joke on him'. Things happen is all. Sometimes some poor slob gets caught in the way when they do."

"Deep thoughts by the red demon," Touji said.

"And here I was almost forgetting who I was talking to," she sighed.

"Sorry," he chuckled, "old habits and all. Hey, you going on the class trip next month?"

"I hadn't thought about it much," she replied, "I didn't even know there was one until a

week ago."

"Say- that reminds me, what did Hikari get you when we got back from the one back then? She never would tell us."

"Huh? Oh," Asuka smiled, "it was stupid."

"Come on, what was it?" Touji pressed, "now I'm really curious."

"You remember that they were having a festival there in Okinawa when you all went?"

"Yeah..."

"She got me a kimono."

Touji blinked, "that's it?"

"More or less."

"Why wouldn't she want us to know about that?"

"That was the stupid part."

"Okay, I know I'm a little slow here, but why with the big secret? Most of the girls I know have kimono's in their wardrobe somewhere."

"Okay, you do remember that I wasn't born here- right?"

"Hmmm I'd buy that if it wasn't for the big secret thing."

"It was a dumb reason."

"Which you're going to make me guess?"

"No, we'd be here all year, " she laughed, "there was a guy I had a crush on and I wanted to wear something nice for him. I never did get the chance."

Touji frowned.

"What?" Asuka demanded.

"Sorry, it's just that you seemed to totally despise all things male when I knew you back then. The idea of you with a crush is a little... whoa, you mean the dude with the ponytail? From the aircraft carrier?"

"Score one for the jock," Asuka laughed as her cheeks reddened.

"Well I guess I can't fault you too much- I did my fair share of drooling after Major Katsuragi m'self."

"Yes but you were interested in her butt, "she said as she placed a hand to her breast and spoke in a mock- snooty voice, "my desire was born of his sophistication, charm, and maturity."

"Sophistication and maturity, huh? This *is* the same guy who was making melon puns at Misato for the whole promotion party, right?"

"Okay, well at least he had charm," Asuka said as she stuck her tongue out at him.

"I miss everyone," Touji sighed, "did I tell you Hikari's got a boyfriend?"

"No way!"

"Yeah, some guy in the senior class at her school in New Nagasaki."

"And she was always ribbing me about chasing older men," Asuka laughed.

"Well, there's just like a three month difference or something," Touji pointed out.

"What about Kensuke?" she asked.

"Him?" Touji laughed, "he's married to his computer. From what he tells me he's working on a new game that's supposed to blow all the military simulators out of the water."

"Somehow that doesn't surprise me," Asuka smiled.

"I just wish I knew where Shinji was," Touji sighed as Asuka's smile vanished into a look of horror which he missed, "I never did get the chance to tell him it wasn't his fault what happened to me."

Asuka lowered her head, hiding her face with her bangs. Several seconds passed before Touji realized something was off.

"Hey Asuka... you okay?"

"No." she said.

"What is it?"

"It's Shinji," she said as her voice cracked. Touji realized she was crying.

"You know where he is?"

"Yes."

"Well?" he asked exasperatedly, "where is he?"

"He's dead," she sniffed.

"Oh no..." Touji whispered, "do... do you know how it happened?"

"Yes," she said, turning to look at him as a line of tears streamed out of her good eye. The pain and horror on her face seemed to be etched in.

"I killed him."

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Touji,

I'm glad you finally agreed to this secure line. There's a lot of stuff I've been wanting to tell you but I didn't want it going out over an unsecured network connection-- you have no idea how huge a chunk the Magi can monitor out of the net.

Okay, here's what I've been able to find- first off the medical records of both pilots from just after the third impact. Asuka suffered massive neurological damage from whatever those spears that hit her Eva. Those scars you see carried over somehow through the bond that the pilot shared. I don't know how that's even possible but they're there. There are nine total wounds ranging from the seven less serious piercings to the one that ruined her eye and the one that damn near split her arm in half. There was also a huge chunk of less serious damage from when they tried to eat her Eva, I think they'd shut down the nerve

connections or something by then. But even so- this is some wild stuff my friend- its amazing that she even survived.

Shinji got by with a lot less, but I don't see anything to back up what Soryu told you- at the time these were made he seemed to be in relatively good physical health. I wasn't able to get into some of the files though, so whatever happened after he was initially checked into of the hospital is a big fat unknown.

Finally, I've attached an AVI file to this Email, but before you open it be aware it will erase itself as soon as it finishes playing, so you'd better pay attention.

As for the rest- well you heard about Hikari of course. Sorry there, but sometimes life just pulls people apart.

Anyway, I hope everything's okay with you.

Keep your head down,

Ken.

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Act Three: Reconciliation

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The file ended with a fuzzy shot of the MP Eva's falling to earth. Once it finished, Touji reached up to the laptop with a shaking hand as the attachment file deleted itself. He closed down the connection, unplugged the computer and placed it back in his bag. In silence he left the room at the love hotel and caught a cab to the airport where he'd be meeting the other's in his class for the school trip.

His face was hollow. Watching the buzzard-like Eva's tear Unit Two to pieces had brought back memories. Memories of the purple and black fist smashing through his hear and ripping pieces out of his chest. Of feeling each blow and being unable to scream. He rubbed his forehead as the sensations flooded back to him. The rending and ripping of flesh that had haunted his nightmares for over a year. The vivid memory of being trapped in a steel coffin- his shattered arm and leg leaving him in silent pain for over an hour before he finally passed out.

Had Asuka felt that pain as the Evas bit into Unit Two? Had it been more? Less? That shot of the spear cleaving the Eva's arm down the middle was gruesome enough without knowing that she had a matching scar running down her own.

And then there had been third impact on top of it. God only knew what that had been like for her. What had she seen, he wondered. And what had happened afterwards?

The cab pulled up to the airport and he hurried through the terminal to find his classmates. Security gave him a hard time about his limb's and by the time he got to the gate they were getting ready to board.

"Ah, Mr. Takashi, "the teacher said, "glad you were able to make it."

Touji frowned as the teacher began unfolding a wheelchair that had been sitting beside the row, "um yeah, right."

He looked up and down the line of students and frowned further, "have you seen Asuka?"

"I'm afraid she elected not to join us," the teacher said, "now if you'll give me one moment I'll have this ready and we can board."

Touji was already walking off when the teacher got the wheels locked in place, and took much satisfaction in the puzzled look on the man's face that he could see in a security mirror.

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"May I help you?" Dr. Langley asked as he opened the door

"Yes sir, I'd like to speak with Asuka?"

"Oh, just a moment then," the older man replied as he nodded nervously and shut the door.

A couple of minutes later, Asuka peeked through sleepily, "what do you want?" she muttered, "and why are you even here? I thought you'd be halfway to the islands by now."

"The islands are overrated," Touji grinned, "now get your things- we've got a bus to catch."

"Bus?" Asuka blinked, "what are you talking about?"

"We're going to the beach."

"What's this 'we' stuff?"

"Just get your things before I say something embarrassing in front of your dad."

"You wouldn't dare," she hissed.

"You bet your ass I would," Touji grinned evilly, "now you've got five minutes to get your beach stuff or your dad gets to hear about how every boy in our class had picture of you in their locker."

"Shiestkoff!" she growled as the door closed.

"You know me so well," he called after her as he checked his watch.

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Four minutes and fifty seconds later, the door opened again and Asuka emerged wearing a sundress and carrying a matching handbag. The wide brim hat was a little much in Touji's opinion, but as long as she was coming he wasn't going to complain.

"So what the hell did I do to deserve this torment?" she growled as she adjusted her sunglasses and followed him down the hall.

"Skipping out on the trip is a good starting place," he said.

"Humph," she snorted, "I'll have you know I had a perfectly good reason for not wanting to go. You on the other hand had better have a more believable excuse than pity for me."

"Like you'd let that slide," he chuckled, "naw the truth is that I don't like it when people worry about my prosthetics, and the teach would have made a big deal about it the whole time. When I walked off he was about to put me in a wheelchair fer' crying out loud."

"I didn't know they bothered you that much," she said as they got into the elevator, "you

never said anything about it in class."

"That's the frustrating part," Touji sighed, "I don't think he realizes he's being a jerk about the whole thing. I can get around okay, I've still got my good hand and it's not like this is one of those claws people used to be stuck with," he flexed his false hand as he said this, "I'm not some helpless cripple- but people see the limbs and they end up thinking so anyway."

"Well," Asuka sighed, "at least its not just me that he drives up the wall."

"I figured that might be the case," Touji nodded as they got off the elevator, "I've never mentioned it to anyone else y'know."

"Don't I feel special."

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They caught the train uptown and then took the bus out to the seashore. It was a popular stretch of sand, and lots of vacationers were out enjoying the remaining warmth of the year. The seasons had begun creeping back since Third Impact, and the experts said that in a decade or so things might be back to normal. The water levels were still out of control, but year by year they receded, and Touji figured by the time he was an old geezer people might start forgetting what things had been like in the early 21st century.

Asuka had rented a beach umbrella and had settled down into a spot as soon as they'd arrived, and pretty much refused to move. When pressed she told him in no uncertain terms that she'd let him drag her out there, but no way was she going to let everyone stare at her scars all morning.

Rolling his eyes at her stubbornness, he set up his own spot and began removing his prosthetics.

"What are you doing," she whispered from her shade.

"I'm getting ready to get a tan," he replied.

"But..."

"You have any idea how uncomfortable hot metal and plastic is when it's strapped to your skin?" he asked as he wrapped the false arm in a extra towel and set it by the duffel bag he'd brought.

"But people are staring," she insisted as she pulled her hat lower on her head.

"Let 'em," Touji said.

Asuka's comfort level dropped even further when he pulled his shirt off. It wasn't the lack of clothing that did it, but the jagged and twisted scar that ran up and down his side.

"Oh mien Gott," she whispered.

"Oh..." he shrugged as he saw her staring, "yeah, the entry plug kinda chewed me up pretty good when it got squished."

"I can't believe you survived that," she softly.

"Well, you didn't exactly have an easy time of it either," he said as he turned over and

stretched out on the beach towel.

She was silent for several moments and Touji thought she'd dozed off when he heard a rustling sound. A shadow passed by and he turned to see a towel flutter down a couple of feet next to him. Seconds later, Asuka sat down and pulled her sundress off to reveal a rose colored two-piece bathing suit. Silently, she stretched out on her towel and readjusted her sunglasses.

With all the thought that he'd given them that morning, Touji couldn't help but notice the scars, and think about the video showing their origins. She'd been reaching up to the sky when the spear had struck. Her Eva's arm had seemed to peel back as it hit. He envied the fact that she'd been able to keep it after whatever had happened inside the Entry Plug had recreated the wound. On the other hand, she'd lost an eye in that horror... and he wasn't sure whether he'd want to trade places.

"Will you stop?" she said softly- almost so that he couldn't hear.

"Huh?" he blinked.

"Stop starting at them," she said.

"I wasn't looking at your boobs," he said quickly, "really!"

An almost comical look came over her face- visible even through the sunglasses, and she began to laugh- really laugh- for the first time since he'd known her. She sat up and her shoulder shook from the giggles as she covered her mouth.

"I, I was talking about the scars," she said when she caught her breath.

"Oh," he grinned, " in hindsight I don't know why I was looking at those- the boobs are much more interesting."

"I should hit you for that, but people are already staring, "she said with a snort as they both settled back to the towels with near identical grins on their faces.

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While they hadn't spent all of it in the sun, they'd stayed the whole day at the beach. They swam a little, talked a lot and mostly spent the time catching up on what had happened over the past few years. One topic they did avoid, and that was Third Impact.

Finally the sun went down and as the moon came out from hiding, Touji watched the red-streaked sphere brighten in the evening sky. As he set up a small spit over their little campfire to cook the rice he'd brought, he finally said what he'd brought her out to the beach to say.

"I.. I saw the footage," he told her, "of how you got them- the scars I mean."

She seemed to freeze in place as a lock of hair slid off her shoulder.

"We shouldn't have had to go through all of that," he said- his voice harshening from years of pent up frustration and anger, "we were just kids! Half the adults I know would have snapped if they had to sit in that plug for even ten seconds while it got torn apart around them. And I hear these morons on the TV talking about how we were like kids with big toys out there on the battlefield- they don't know shit. They don't know what's its like to listen as your best friend screams for the killing to stop while some overblown murder

machine tears you to pieces."

"Or having your mind torn inside out," Asuka whispered, "leaving you so hollow and violated you can't see a simple kindness when it's right in front of you even though you need it so very badly."

He sat up, holding himself aloft by his one good arm as he looked at her. She was fighting back tears and looking out at the setting sun shining over the ocean.

"We woke up at the edge of the water," she said, "I don't know how. My arm was bandaged and so was my eye. The first thing I remember was hands on my throat just like they'd been in the dream. I don't... I don't know just what made me do it, but as I saw his face come into focus, all I could think was that he'd done it. He'd pulled through and done it on his own after all- without my help. I... I reached up and touched him and he just fell apart right there. He was still crying when they found us."

Touji listened in awed silence. Shinji had tried to strangle her?

"Things get a little fuzzy after that, but I remember the hospital and them re bandaging my wounds. They told us that Misato was dead, and that they'd found the commander too late. Ritsuko and so many others never made it. Then, about a day later, he came to see me."

"Shinji?"

"Yes. He said he wanted to talk. He seemed so happy to see me, but I'd just been allowed a mirror and...well, I hadn't taken the news of everyone very well- and then there was what my eye looked like... and, well, I lashed out at him. I called him a weakling and a coward.

"He was confused," she continued, "he asked why I'd touched his cheek on the beach of I hated him so much, and I laughed in his face. I told him I'd be damned if I'd be killed by the likes of him. He ran out of the room... oh Gott I remember the look on his face, it was like I'd just shattered the last happy moment he had in his whole life! When I realized that I'd hurt him as badly as I had, I called the desk to find his room number and went to apologize... but... when I got there..."

She paused as she swallowed and wiped a tear from her eye, "when I got there... the door was cracked and the light was out. I went in, and he was just... laying there on the bed with his eyes open. I... called his name- and he didn't answer, so I went up and shook him- and he didn't move. I shook him harder- I thought he was joking or something. It wasn't until they came and saw him that I knew."

"later they said that it was an air bubble in his blood, he must have found a syringe and..." she trailed off and was silent for a moment.

Finally, she looked up at Touji with a panicked expression, "I Killed him Touji! He came to me for kindness and I as good as put a knife in his chest! I always hurt him, and I finally killed him!"

It wasn't easy getting over to Asuka with only one arm and leg, but somehow Touji managed and put a hand on her shoulder.

"The first day I met Shinji," he said, "I punched the hell out of him because I blamed him

for what happened to my sister in the first battle. I hit him twice and felt pretty smug about it too. Later that day we were attacked and me and Kensuke ended up caught in the crossfire. Misato got us into the entry plug just in time to watch Shinji try to kill himself by charging the Angel. Does the fact that he succeeded make what you did any worse than what I did? We didn't know Asuka. You didn't know he'd do it. There was no way you could have know that he was that close to the brink."

"I should have known!" she sobbed, "all I ever did was tease him and lash out at him."

"Well you know what?" Touji said, "that might make you a callous person, and it might even make you a unfeeling bitch! But it doesn't make you a killer!"

"He came to me for help and all I did was spit in his face," she said as she shook her head, "how can I not blame myself?"

"Did you give him the needle?" Touji said, raising his voice a little, "did you put it in his arm? No! Do you think I'd tell you these things if I thought for a second you really killed him? He was one of my best friends, Asuka! But he was so hurt on the inside..." Touji shook his head, "shit, why am I pretending I know what I'm talking about? I mean, I was his friend and even I didn't know him that well- he hardly let *ANYONE* in."

"I just wish I could have told him I was sorry," she sniffed as she leaned on Touji's shoulder and cried. Off in the distance, the sun slipped beneath the waves.

"I know," Touji said as he held her, "believe me, I know."

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Hey Shinji,

Sorry I took so long in writing, but I didn't know your address- y'know? Anyway- I've never done one of these so please bear with me here.

First off- what happened in that fight with Unit Three was *NOT* your fault. I could hear the whole thing over the com link. You did everything you could, and if anyone's to blame its your dad for not trying to think of something other than kicking my ass all over the rice fields. I never did meet the guy, but if he's like he was there all the time then... well it kind of explains a lot.

I'm being refitted for brand new limbs next week- this set is supposed to be even more flexible so maybe I'll be able to go an hour without itching like crazy. If nothing else- think of it as a sign that all the tech from the E project wasn't evil, since a good bit went into bionics design.

You might not believe this, but I've been hanging with Asuka lately... and that's got to rank in the weirdest things in my life. I mean- you'll remember we more or less hated each other from the moment we met! Heh, then again it wasn't exactly the most stellar first impression in the history of impressions. She was just teasing me about that whole 'here's your change' thing the other day actually.

She wants me to tell you she's sorry, even if she won't come out and say it aloud. Believe me I know what its like for your ego to get in the way of what you really want to tell someone. I think she'll get over the guilt someday, but its going to take time. You won't believe this- but her doctors didn't realize the reason she went catatonic! They thought it

had to do with her mom- and that's a whole other story entirely, my friend. Now that they understand, she's getting some good therapy- even if I do have to twist her arm to go. Not literally mind you--she is fully capable of kicking my ass and doesn't give a shit that I'm missing a wing or two.

Oh- get this! You'll be very happy to know that Mari is doing WAY better than me in the physical fitness department. One more surgery and the doctors say she won't even have a hint of a limp! She says she wishes she could have met you. She and Asuka seem to be getting along- in fact I think Asuka's doing better for having met the runt. She never had any siblings or anything, so its a new thing for her to have Mari practically adopt her as one.

And now for the hard part...

If I could just have seen you before you... I don't really understand why you did it. I mean I understand why, but I don't see how you could just do that. God that sounds dumb. I don't know, I always sucked at this kind of thing. I just wish it had been possible for one of us.. Well for anyone to have been there for you. We all got shafted by the war- Asuka, me, you, Rei... none of us deserved what happened. But Asuka said something, and it kind of stuck with me. Sometimes bad things happen, and we just got caught in the crossfire is all.

Well I better finish this before I end up sounding any sappier than I already do.

I miss you Shinji. You were a good friend, no matter what you may have thought.

I hope you're happier than you were here.

Touji

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The structure had started out as a monument to those who'd died in the Third Impact War. But then the courts had found the truth thanks to several of the surviving Nerv employee's testimonies and evidence provided by the sub commander. When that truth had come to light, the monument had been in its early design phase and they'd made some alterations.

What it had become was a huge stone circle around the ruins of Tokyo Three. It seemed to float over the waters of the bay- chalk white against blood red. Lining the walkway that ran along the circle were small plaques which held the names of those who'd died in the battle against the Angels. Some of these plaques held the remains of their namesakes inside, others were empty. Most had been placed there with no fanfare to prevent scandal and protest during the time when Nerv had been demonized- before the truth had come to light.

Setting the envelope down on the plaque holding the name of his lost friend, Touji gripped his crutch and pulled himself back to his feet. The sun was beginning to come out from behind the clouds, and Touji stretched as he got his balance leveled. Something blue caught his eye as he turned to go, and he paused, turning back slowly. Nothing was there. He frowned. For the briefest moments he could have sworn he saw someone standing a few feet away smiling at him. Someone who looked sorta familiar.

Shrugging he decided that he'd just been tired and made his way to where someone was waiting.

"Weren't you going to leave anything?" Touji asked as he met Asuka at the edge of the walkway back to land.

"Not yet," she said as they walked down the path, "maybe someday when... when I feel I have the right."

"Any more of that and I'll start asking stuff like 'what did your doctor say about that kind if talk'," he said.

"And then I'll have to tell your sister about your little Hentai RPG obsession," she returned with an evil smirk.

"Hey! I've never even played one of those!" he protested.

"Yeah, but who's she going to believe?"

"Have I told you lately that you're evil?" he sighed as they walked out the gates.

They left the cemetery, and the sun finally broke free of the cloud cover. Something on the distant shore caught the light as it spread across the red waters. There, hanging from a wooden post in a small, semi hidden, alcove- a silver cross shone brightly in the sun.

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The End

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Authors Incoherent Babbling

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Most of you are probably wondering "**WHAT THE F**K WAS HE THINKING!?!?!?!?**" about this point. Well, I'll tell you what I was thinking. Back when I started [TWS](#), a large part of the appeal was that I was in uncharted territory. The only two fics dealing with a Shinji and Hikari match had been shorter than the prologue that I put at the beginning (this was combined) and I was having a blast writing a tale that no one had done to date. The other fics I'd written- [Moonlight Sonata](#) and [Wake](#) had been written due to a dissatisfaction in the genres. With Wake I'd become frustrated at the views people had taken of a post 3rd impact world, and with Moonlight it was a total annoyance at the fact there had been only a scant handful of good pilot ACCs out there.

So why the hell did I write this you ask? To prove it could be done. Ever since I jokingly hinted at a match between Asuka and Touji, there have been some naysayers claiming that I 'ruined' the story by doing that- they say that such a match could never happen. Well they can bite me ^_^ while the future might be open for such- you'll notice there wasn't much more than a hint of romance here ^_^ just friendship and comradary.

Now, one last thing before I go- and that's to answer a question that I didn't have a chance to within the story. Asuka was the only person Shinji had left to turn to after EoE. Misato was blown up, Rei was a big dissolving head (and/or ghostly spirit thingie), his Dad was bleeding to death in terminal dogma, Kaji- gone, Ritsuko- belly up in LCL, Hikari, Kensuke, and Touji- scattered to the winds, Yui- somewhere in outer space. He gets back from 3I and everyone he came back to see is gone... everyone but Asuka. When she lashed out at him with such bitterness, he lost what little hope he'd been clinging to. Not a pretty story, not a happy one, but not one that's outside the realms of possibility.

Well that's my little story, hope y'all enjoyed it

later

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Chain Lightning Studios Presents
A Neon Genesis Evangelion Fanfiction
Unreal
by T. L. Webb

[]=====

Do you remember me?
How we used to be?
Do you think we should be closer?
Pink Floyd, the final cut

[]=====

Tokyo Three University, 2020 AD

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The factory fresh monorail pulled up to the station with a whine of brakes and a hissing of hydraulics. As the doors opened with a much softer hissing sound, the massive group of travelers began emerging in practiced unison. In the center of this phalanx of people, one stood out from the others. The young woman was easily distinguished from the other hundred Japanese due to her brilliant red hair- starkly contrasting the other train-goers.

Humming a cheerful tune, Asuka Langley Soryu stepped off the train and walked down the stairs of the University Monorail Station. After a short walk across the campus, she checked a map and headed towards the registration office.

At eighteen she was a stunning beauty that turned heads and caused boys to stop in their tracks as she passed. Her burning red hair was most of the reason-- it being a rarity in Japan-- while her figure was the rest. She smiled at the reactions she caused and made a point to put a swing in her walk. She liked the attention, and figured it would help to have people talking about her already when it came time to start making friends around campus.

Her first stop was to the administration building to collect her class and living assignments. The clerk was a little annoying twit who didn't seem to even understand what her job was, and Asuka had to point out at least three errors on the forms before she finally got everything straightened out and was able to go to her new home.

As she walked past one of the girls dorms, she paused suddenly. She didn't know why, but the hairs on the back of her neck were standing on end. Turning, she caught a glimpse of a girl about her age entering the dorm. She blinked for a moment and frowned. Something about that girl bothered her, but she couldn't put her finger on just what had her feeling that way. From the quick glance she had she could tell that the other girl's hair had been cut to frame her face and had been brown, but that had been the only real detail Asuka had been able to note.

Shrugging it off, she finished her trek to the office and proceeded to fill out the last of her transfer papers. Having graduated from about every worthwhile school in Germany, Asuka had forgone her entry into her mothers work to put a final shine on her already well-polished education. She was a prodigy, she'd graduated from her first university at thirteen and had spent the last five years embarrassing teachers at two other schools. She'd heard that the staff at this school was considered the best in the world, and she felt that if *they* were unable to actually teach her anything then she was truly ready to begin

her career.

After receiving her dorm assignment, she called the shipping company and told them where to send her luggage. Having accomplished that, and having an hour before they arrived she decided to explore her dorm and meet her roommate.

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"Hello?" Asuka called from the open doorway, "anyone here?"

A moment passed and as she tuned out the noise from the hall, she heard a low humming noise. Curious, Asuka stepped in from the hall and looked round the corner to find a girl laying on one of the two beds that dominated the single room. It was the same brunette that she'd glimpsed earlier. She was wearing a white tunic and shorts on a figure that Asuka almost envied. Her eyes were closed and she was humming along to a tune playing on an old SDAT. As Asuka stepped closer she recognized the tune- Beethoven's symphony number Nine.

When the tune ended, the girl's blue eyes opened and went wide as she saw Asuka standing in the room. She let out a short yelp and sat up- yanking the earphones out in the process. It took a couple seconds of juggling, but she managed to keep the player from falling to the floor. When she looked up she shrugged and smiled sheepishly.

"Can I help you?" she asked cheerfully, "Sorry if I missed your knocking but I was kinda caught up in the tune."

"It's alright," Asuka replied, "are you Rei Ikari?"

"The one and only," Rei said with a giggle, "what can I do ya for?"

"Well, actually I'm your new roommate. I'm Asuka, Asuka Langley Soryu."

"Oh cool! They said someone was coming this week, have your things arrived yet? Need any help?"

"No, I think it's gonna be a hour or so before they arrive."

"Well, this is pretty much the place," Rei said gesturing around them, "sink's right there, we can split my fridge if you don't have one and the shower's down the hall-- just don't streak back and forth- the evil bitch-monster of death'll get ya."

"Rewind and repeat?" Asuka said with a cocked eyebrow.

"Sorry, that's what we call our dorm monitor when she's out of earshot- she's always riding my case, so I invent a half dozen unpleasant names a month and spread 'em around to repay the favor."

"Oh, really?" Asuka said- unsure if Rei was kidding or not.

"Yep-yep, sad part is that she can be really nice when she tries- just don't get anywhere near her when she's on duty. So tell me- where are you from? Where did you get that sundress? What classes are you taking? Is your hair really that color? Do you have a boyfriend?"

"Um... Germany, Paris, majoring in biometaphysics and minoring in cybernetics, yes, and no."

"Well fix that last one quick- especially with that hair of yours- you'll have to barricade the door by the time we're done"

"Um, screeching halt there Rei- I just got here. Let me at least get my class assignment before you start betrothing me. By the way, are you related to Dr. Ikari?"

"Both of them actually, they're my parents"

"Wow, " Asuka said with a surprised blink, "that's... impressive. They used one of your mom's papers as test material at my old school"

"Wait... you mean the one about decoding nerve connections into electronic circuits?"

"Yeah, it was one of the reason I came out here."

"But that was like three years ago... whoa, hold on, what year are you in?"

"I've been taking courses since I was eleven."

"Holy... eleven?"

"Yep, I'm a prodigy, genius, blah, blah, blah. Now that you know- please try to forget it, okay? I'm tired of having people treat me like some other species. I've been getting that since I could walk."

"I'm not freaked, Asuka- just impressed."

"Well, I suppose I could allow that," Asuka said with a grin, " so what do you do for fun around here?"

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That night, Asuka lay in her bed and stared at the ceiling. She had an early class, but she just couldn't get to sleep. She'd had a fun day. Rei was a nut, and seemed to know a thousand and one ways to have a good time. They'd spent most of the day touring the campus, and afterwards had gone to see a band Rei liked play at a small on-campus nightspot.

The place had been called 'the cage' and it had been pretty cool for a campus club. To Asuka's disappointment, they didn't serve alcohol, but the band had been good and Rei'd introduced her to them afterwards. The lead guitarist- a guy named Shigru- was a student, and the TA in Professor Kaji's philosophy course. After that, they'd been too tired for anything else and had unpacked Asuka's things.

Once they'd gotten back, Asuka had used her long distance phonecard and called her mom back in Germany to give her the room number. After an hour and a half of gossip and I love yous, she'd hung up and gotten ready for bed.

An hour later, laying in the unfamiliar room and slowly dozing off, she looked over at where her roommate was snoring softly. Other than the fact that Rei seemed to operate on a constant caffeine and sugar rush, she was fairly cool, and Asuka had been stuck with worse roommates in the past.

Eventually her exhaustion won out, and Asuka finally fell asleep, and regretted it.

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When the view before me clears, I find myself looking out over a small town from hundreds of feet in the air. There are some odd perceptual changes as I look around- its almost as if I were watching it all through a television or something. It has the same slightly grainy look that even the most high definition televisions can't shake.

Suddenly, a small box appears beside me, and I am shocked to see Rei's face appear within. To my further surprise, it doesn't look exactly like Rei. The face is the same, but she seem too young... and there is something much more startling amiss. She looks as if she has never been outdoors in her life. Her hair is pale as is her skin, and her eyes- wait, hold on, are her eyes... red?

She's saying something that I can't make out and as I glance down I find that my arm was encased in a odd fabric. A moment's confusion later I realize it covers me from neck to toe. It is like an odd wetsuit with plastic at the joints- and while comfortable, I find it a little too skin tight for my taste.

*I look around again, and as I do I notice that the air has an odd coppery taste to it, and feels awful thick. Unfortunately- or perhaps fortunately- I do not have time to ponder this, because off to my left, I can see some... **thing** walking towards me out of the sunset.*

Whatever it is, it's huge and vaguely human shaped... only the arms are far, far too long. It walks with slow, purposeful steps and as I choke back a scream I can hear a young boy shout something out. Another box pops up beside me and suddenly I see the owner of the voice. For a brief moment, I think it is Rei again.... then I realize I am mistaken The eyes and skin are the right colors, but the hair- while brown, is far too short. It is definitely a boy... but I do not think I've ever seen him before.

Even so, he does seem familiar, and it isn't just the passing resemblance to Rei. Something about him is... I can not find the word for it. He seems panicked about something and is arguing with a gruff, unfriendly voice coming from somewhere else.

Off to my side, the shape looms closer, and I feel and see myself swing around in midair to face it. I can hear myself shout in a high pitched- no, a younger- voice... I seem to be addressing the boy.

*"You mean you **still** don't know? The pilot is-"*

Suddenly the shape was in my face. Its a dark vision of my worst fears and nightmares given birth. I see a horrible red and black mouth open, and roar that shakes my very bones tears past me- drowning my own shriek of terror.

Suddenly my view is swung around and downwards, and as I violently slam into a highway below, I am jarred from the dream. Sitting right up in bed, I looked around in fright- covered in sweat and shaking.

Once my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I breathe a sigh of relief. I'm still in my dorm room. Rei is snoring lightly over in her bed and other than that, all is quiet. I'm safe.

There are no monsters here.

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"Now, before we close," Professor Fuyutski said as he closed his notebook, "I'd like to remind all of you that I'll be gone next week to focus on our project. Miss Ibuki will be

lecturing for me, I don't expect you all to pay attention, but at least try to show her more respect than you show me."

Near as Asuka could tell, this was the professor's idea of a joke with his students. She'd rarely seen such admiration from a class, and couldn't imagine him having meant the comment seriously.

She was rather impressed, herself. Most of the reason she'd traveled to the university had been to learn Quantum theory under him, and if this class had been any indication, she hadn't made a mistake. She was so ecstatic to have finally found a teacher that seemed to care more about teaching than his own reputation that she almost missed hearing him call her name.

"Yes professor?" she asked as she put the last of her notes in her bag.

"I just wanted to welcome you to our school while I had the chance," he told her as he offered his hand. Asuka was more than a little grateful- Japanese usually greeted her with a bow. She was a quarter Japanese herself, but had just never gotten the hang of the whole bowing thing. She always bent too far at the waist. Shaking his hand, she wondered if he was being polite to the foreign student or if he'd spent time abroad.

"Thank you sir, I'm glad to be here, and I was very impressed with your lecture."

"Well, after the tests I'm not sure how happy you'll still be to see me, but thank you nonetheless. Incidentally, there is something I wanted to ask you. That paper you did on the Dirac theorem... how did you work out the entropy problem?"

So this *wasn't* just a friendly greeting- he was testing her.

"Well, naturally I had trouble with maintaining energy flow at first. The field would require an unholy amount of power- it would probably blackout a small country if you tried to use traditional methods. Even if you *could* keep the flow of power regulated, you'd still have to worry about how much it would cost. I was almost ready to throw in the towel when I was digging through a science journal one day and ran across one of Katsuragi's solenoid theories. It looked like they were only a few years away from being feasible at the time, with that kind of energy backing it, I don't see a reason why a Dirac field couldn't be maintained indefinitely."

"What would you say if I told you we were only a few weeks from the test activation of an S2 unit?"

"Well, my first reaction would be that I wouldn't believe you, then I'd come to my senses and ask to see it... then once I was convinced that what I was seeing was real, I'd ask when you wanted me to get to work on the field projector since you wouldn't be talking about this if you didn't intend for me to put my theories to the test."

"And how old were you when you wrote this?" Professor Fuyutski asked in amused awe.

"I was three weeks from my sixteenth birthday when I turned the paper in."

"Well miss Soryu, I'm glad to find that my recommendations you be accepted here were not in error. I'd read about this deductive talent of yours, and I'm impressed to find the reports were accurate. Tell me, why do your other teachers outside the physics instructor dismiss it in their notes?"

"To be honest, sir, I was never very happy with the response it tends to provoke. I've had a few people get angry when I point out things they think I shouldn't know, so I tend to keep my observations to myself outside of my work."

"Well, I don't want you ever to feel you have to hide it with me. We need all the deductive reasoning we can get. Sorry... the dean isn't very happy with the project to begin with and we can use any edge we can find."

"Why wouldn't he be? Wouldn't a solenoid engine produce nearly limitless power? You're about to solve the world's energy needs!"

"True, but that doesn't stop him from finding problems with the program. I only mention this because when you start your lab, you will be facing budget cuts and other nuisances by way of being related to our own project."

Asuka nodded and made a mental note to find out why dean Ikari would object to such an important discovery.

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Asuka made her second friend in Yui Ikari's cybernetics course. Hikari Horaki was taking the class because she wanted design prosthetics. Ironically enough, she turned out to be the very girl Rei had such a mad-on for.

"My boyfriend lost an arm a couple of years back," Hikari explained after Asuka asked why she was taking the subject, "and we were both getting really annoyed at how inefficient some of the limbs they make are. I think that if I could apply some of the work Dr. Ikari is doing here I might make a breakthrough in the market."

"That's a pretty noble cause," Asuka noted as they had lunch. It was her third day on campus, and she was enjoying the company of the other girl- she couldn't see how Rei'd formed such a unpleasant opinion. Actually it felt to Asuka as if they'd known each other for years.

"How'd he lose the arm?" she asked after taking another bite of the so-called-food the cafeteria sold.

"Well, remember when that N2 mine went off in 2015? He and his sister were there and he was trying to cover her when a bunch of rubble fell on them. He nearly lost his leg too- he's probably going to limp for the rest of his life."

"Man that sucks... so do you think that my mom's VR technology is really a key?"

"Well, maybe. You said it yourself in class, Asuka- a full cybernetic interface with the nervous system is ready to work. All we really have to do is decode the last of the nerve impulses and apply the technology. The stuff your mom's doing is all related to interpreting the electric signals and simulating them... all I want to do is reverse the process so that instead of making the mind think the body's moving, we take the signal from the brain and send it to the prosthetic limb. Eventually I could probably put sensors in the fingers to send something like a sense of touch... there are a lot of possibilities, and the stuff your mom's doing is a large part of it."

"Well, when I start in with her I promise to keep in touch with you. The money to be made there is more than enough to help fund something like what you're doing."

"I don't think words are enough to properly thank you for that kind of help," Hikari said with a smile, "so I hear you're rooming with the wild child."

"You mean Rei?"

"Yeah, don't get me wrong, she's a good person to know... but as much trouble as she gets in?"

"Trouble? She'd mentioned you and her had some kind of thing, but I figured it was your private thing and didn't press."

"Well, admittedly most of it is because her dad's so strict. You haven't met him yet, but some of the stories I've heard about him are scary."

"I knew she was hyper... but while we're on the subject, what do you mean by getting into trouble?"

"Well, about three weeks ago she rigged the school PA system to play a recording of Mr. Ikari singing in the shower. It was some old lounge song about the moon and flying or something like that."

Asuka couldn't help but giggle.

"Then there was the whole incident with the boy's locker room and the webcam, the time she replaced all the lightbulbs on our floor with ultraviolet ones. oh, and I can't forget the one incident where she locked me in the shower while the room filled with soapsuds up to my neck ."

"Well, if nothing else she'll make an interesting roommate."

"Interesting isn't the word. I just wish she'd realize I'm only doing my job... its not like I get onto her to spite her or anything. Its just that I have to or I get in trouble. I think every school gets kids like her... they've been sheltered for so long that when they get a taste of freedom they can't handle it and go overboard. But it's more with Rei because both of her parents are here. Its... its like she's trying to prove they can't control her... like she's trying to prove she isn't anyone's puppet."

"More like anyone's doll," Asuka said absently- before realizing she'd spoken.

"Sorry?"

Asuka frowned and tried to remember why she'd corrected Hikari. After a few moments of coming up with nothing to explain it, she shrugged and changed subjects. She did, however, make a note to try and figure it out later. She wasn't sure why, but something told her it was important.

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For the fifth time in two weeks, Asuka sat bolt upright in bed and stifled a scream. The dreams were getting worse every time. This one had been about her mom... and Asuka tried to forget it as fast as she could. She got out of bed, put on a robe and wandered down to the girls lounge. There were a couple of students dozing and studying here and there, but it was empty enough to get some privacy and Asuka needed that to think.

She was having a hell of a time figuring these dreams out. They didn't seem to mean anything that she could reasonably connect to her daily life. The people were there, but

the details were confusing her.

Why was everyone so much younger? Was she missing her childhood at the German university? As happy as she'd been back there she didn't think so.

Why was Rei an albino? Was her subconscious trying to tell her something? Did Rei's personality have some relation to the pale version of her in the dreams?

Did the robots have something to do with Dr. Ikari's class?

What was the deal with the boy? For some reason he bothered her the most. She had gone over and over her journals and diaries and yet couldn't find anything about ever meeting someone like him. Hell, the only full blooded Japanese she'd know in Germany had been older guest lecturers. She just couldn't place his face. It was driving her nuts, because she felt like she *ought* to know him. He seemed so familiar to her... and there was a weird sensation each time she saw him that she still couldn't identify. It was like she was fond of him... but furious at him both at the same time

She sank into one of the couches and pulled her knees up to her chest. It just didn't make any sense, and it was annoying the hell out of her. She'd considered asking the school nurse about it for about three seconds. She *really* didn't need anything like this on her transcripts.

"You look like you could use a good stiff drink even more than me- were such a thing possible," came an unfamiliar voice from just behind Asuka. It was followed by a more familiar giggle.

Asuka turned and saw that Hikari was sitting with one of the teachers- apparently the speaker, and one she'd seen before in passing named Misato Katsuragi. Misato was wearing a rather tight dress that had to be as expensive as it was indecent and her hair was made up exquisitely. Asuka got up and joined the two on the couch. Asuka was further surprised to find that she didn't smell the usual stench of alcohol that was reputed to follow the older woman wherever she went

"Just didn't sleep well," Asuka said.

"I know the feeling," Misato said, "so how are you getting by here Asuka?"

For some reason, the Asuka felt entirely comfortable talking to Katsuragi. She found that Misato had been talking with Hikari about the pet that she'd recently taken in. Hikari had agreed to feed it when Misato had to be away due to the course she taught, and they were discussing it's diet. Now that Asuka had arrived, the conversation turned to her slow integration into Japanese university life.

"It took a few days to get the hang of the local accents," Asuka told her, "and I still blank on the kanji every now and again, but I'm getting the hang if it. Thanks for asking."

"Well I know how hard it is to be a stranger in a strange land," Misato said, "did you know that I went to your university in Germany for a couple of years?"

"You're kidding!"

"Not at all, in fact, your louse of a philosophy teacher and I met there."

"Stood you up, huh?" Asuka said- noting Misato's state of dress and a dozen other little

details that were telling her the whole story. Hikari's response to this was a series of giggles that were poorly hidden behind her hands. Misato's was a blush followed by a chuckle.

"Is it that obvious?"

"Sorry," Asuka said, "I didn't mean to embarrass you, it just occurred to me- honest"

"Well, aside from planning his imminent demise, I needed to get some other work done around here anyway- plus there's the whole getting to chat with you thing to consider before calling the night a complete loss."

"What kind of work?" Asuka asked

"Weeeeell... promise you won't tell anyone?"

"Cross my heart."

"I teach a tactics and strategy course over at the JSSDF's ROTC."

"No kidding? I didn't even know we had an officers training course."

"It's kinda new, Ikari just opened the funds a year ago to house it. I guess it was either my test scores or the way I used to keep you vixens in line that impressed him."

Asuka stared blankly at that for a moment before realizing the connection. Hikari was dorm monitor, and Misato had just summed up part of the job description... had she been the monitor once?

Hikari shortly answered Asuka's silent question by explaining that Misato had in fact been the monitor, and they'd become friends when Hikari had sought her out to ask for advice earlier in the year.

"How's the program coming along?" Asuka asked Misato

"It's still small, but there is this one kid named Aida who shows promise. Anyway, I do need to be going, I have a certain Mr. Kaji to rake over the coals and I'm gonna need some sleep so I don't get sidetracked by his smooth talk."

The girls wished her goodnight, and Misato left the dorm. A few moments after she was gone, Asuka turned to Hikari.

"... can I ask you something?"

"Anything, we're friends aren't we?"

"You ever get repeat performances in your nightmares?"

"You mean a reoccurring one? Can't say I have... is that why you were having trouble sleeping?"

"It's no big, I was just wondering."

"I get a few now and then," Hikari said as she got to her feet, "but not repeating ones... if it gets too bad you might want to go ahead and see Dr Akagi."

"Will do"

Hikari stifled a yawn and said goodnight, leaving Asuka alone with the thoughts. She was

growing more and more unnerved by these dreams, and meeting Misato had made things even worse. Asuka hadn't thought much of it, but she remembered a woman in one dream that looked an awful lot like Misato did. She curled up on the couch and looked out the window at the campus. If she didn't start getting more sleep, she'd start falling behind in classes... and she didn't want that. Maybe she'd go see Dr. Akagi later that week- if she had another dream.

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A few days later the project was finally approved and Professor Fuyutski took her to her new workspace. It was a larger room than she'd expected, but she was disappointed to learn that she would be dealing with wiring problems and other nuances.

"I'd understand why Ikari would shortchange this if it was unfeasible," Asuka grumbled as she and the professor examined the outlet box, "but I'm working with proven technology here!"

"Don't feel too bad, back when our department first started tinkering with quantum physics we had a hell of a time with the administration of the day. Its difficult to explain how a new discovery can cause what was considered an established law of nature to become obsolete."

"I guess...hey! Maybe I should get him a collection of Hugh Everett books for a gift?"

Fuyutski smiled and shook his head, "I don't think he'd get the joke, Asuka... he isn't well known for his sense of humor."

As they finished doing an innovatory of the room and changes they'd have to make, Asuka wondered just what Ikari's problem was? They'd allowed her to come to this university primarily because of the project she'd proposed. Why anyone would try to block it at this juncture was beyond her. She'd have to ask Ikari just what his problem was when or if she ever met him. She'd been a major hothead back as a kid, and she grinned as she considered unloading on someone again. It had been a few years since anyone had actually pissed her off.

The idea was rather appealing... but at the same time, something at the back of her mind was bothered by it. She wasn't sure why...

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The party at The Cage was impromptu, but between Rei's talent for mayhem and Hikari's cool head for order things proceeded as if they'd had months to plan. The occasion was that Shiguru's band had been signed to a major label. This would be their last concert for the campus until they returned from recording, and they couldn't have asked for a better crowd.

Asuka had watched all of this from a table to the side with a couple of her classmates. Hikari and her boyfriend were with her, as was an older guy named Hyuuga and another foreign student named Josh. They listened to the band and talked between songs as thr party raved around them.

"You seem to be doing a better job of assimilating than I am Asuka," Josh told her with a slightly drunken grin. The alcohol was courtesy of Rei and her aforementioned talent at mischief.

"Well, I do have a couple of advantages you don't," she said with a bit of a beer induced slur in her own voice.

"And what might those be?" he asked.

"Hey, I see Maya, so I'll let you for flirt in peace," Hyuuga announced as he left the table.

"You still haven't told him, huh?" Touji asked Hikari.

"I don't have the heart," Hikari said with a blush.

"Tell him what?" Asuka and Josh managed to ask at the same time- much to their drunken amusement.

"Um... lets just say that it's seriously doubtful that Maya would be interested in Hyuuga," Hikari said as her blush deepened.

"Or any other guy," Touji said with a chuckle. This earned him a punch to the arm- which hurt Hikari a lot more than it hurt him, as she chose is prosthetic arm to punch. Asuka and Josh blinked for a moment before Touji's meaning sunk in- whereupon they both burst into giggles. Hikari's hand was stinging, and she and Touji left to get some ice- leaving Asuka alone with Josh.

After a moments awkwardness, Asuka spoke up, "so you're from the states huh?"

"S'right, Colorado," Josh said with a smile, "worked my ass off all through school and decided I was getting tired of the scene, so I started shopping around. Got in here through the skin of m'teeth I'm telling you. I hear they actually invited you here to study- gotta say I'm impressed."

"Well, don't tell anyone, but I'm just as amazed as anyone- its not like the stuff I came up with was impossible."

"Just what exactly is this Dirac thing people keep talking about? My area of study is programming."

"Not too far from being related as things stand," Asuka replied with a grin, "you remember when electronics hit the wall back in the teens?"

"Right, everyone was freaked until they moved everything to molecular circuitry."

"That's quantum physics in action. What I'm doing isn't that unrelated to what you use to write programs on every day. The Dirac theories were all available, the molecular circuits had been predicted sine the twentieth, and the S2 engine was theorized at the turn of the century. For the life of me I don't see how, but apparently I was the first person to look at those things and a few others here and there, add it all together and spell duh."

"Okay, but what does it *do*?"

"Well," Asuka said with a giggle, "I've never tried to explain this drunk, so bear with me. The Dirac theory talks about how to access a null space between dimensions. A plane where nothing exists. They actually proved it back a dozen years or so, but they didn't have the power to maintain it for more than a microsecond. The computers they used didn't have time to even blink before the field winked out of existence, and the ones that recorded anything at all nearly fried themselves trying to understand it. They got their funding cut off at the knees too, I mean, yeah- its somewhere else, but there wasn't

anyone around to come up with a good idea of how to make money off of it. Soooo, what I'm trying to do is apply professor Fuyutski's S2 engine to the power problem, use the molecular computers to process the information we get back, and open another field into Diracspace. If all this works, the bigwigs will be happy to hear that it theoretically should be possible to open *another* gate within Diracspace to somewhere else. The transportation possibilities alone should keep the fundraiser's drooling for centuries, and that's not even touching upon the whole parallel universe theories."

"Right," Josh said- nodding sagely.

"You didn't understand a word I said, did you?"

"I was with you till you got to the part about null spaces and Dirac somethings."

"Ask me again when we're not drunk, maybe we'll do better then."

"Absolutely."

From there they discussed various frivolous things through the night. The band finally gave their last set, and as the crowd began to disperse, Asuka found herself walking with Josh through the commons area.

They paused besides a tree and Asuka leaned in close to whisper in Josh's ear.

"Thanks for hanging with me tonight," she said, " I do appreciate it."

"Hey, we gajin gotta stick together, even if I barely understood half of what you were saying when talking shop," he said with a chuckle. As he turned to speak, they found themselves face to face. A moment passed as their mouths drew closer, and she could feel his breath on her lips. Apparently he could feel the same because he spoke up in a whisper.

"You know you're breath kinda tickles."

As she heard those words, something inside of Asuka's mind flashed! She suddenly saw another face overlapping Josh's- it looked... it looked like the boy from her dream! It *was* the boy from her dream! She stumbled backwards in shock- giving a small yelp and falling on her rear in the grass.

When she opened her eyes again, she saw Josh kneeling beside her with a look of concern. She looked closely, but there was no sign of the boy in Josh's face any longer- it must have all been in her mind.

She shivered as she reached up for Josh's outstretched hand. These dreams were getting out of hand! Lack of sleep she could deal with, but if this was invading her waking hours it was time to see a doctor.

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"And how long has this been going on?" Dr Akagi asked Asuka the following afternoon.

"Since just after I arrived. At first I thought it was just me being at a new place and all... but it's starting to get weird."

"I see, and you haven't been taking any other medication?"

"Not really, and before you ask I haven't had enough alcohol to induce a hangover in the

entire time I've been here."

"I'll be honest with you Asuka," the doctor said as she finished making notes, "there isn't much I can do for you that you'd appreciate."

"I don't understand."

"The first problem is that I'm a medical doctor, and this isn't really my field. The second problem is that from what I've read dreams aren't exactly well understood even by the experts. You can backtrack people trying to understand them for centuries and no one's really come close to a definitive explanation. The official scientific line is that dreams are the mind putting information together that is sent during random synapse activity during sleep. The mind takes this random information and tries to reconstruct it in a way that makes sense. What we don't know is why this happens."

"I could prescribe you a few medications that have been shown to interrupt the dream cycle, but I seriously doubt you'd stay with them, nor would I recommend you take them in the first place."

"How come?" Asuka wanted to know.

"Well, first off, you need to understand that one of the few things we DO know about dreams is that the body needs them. Something about dreaming recharges the mind in the same way sleeping recharges the rest of the body. If that cycle were interrupted for any length of time you'd start to experience a number of unpleasant side effects. Since most of what you're doing here is basically thinking really hard, I doubt you'd want to interfere with your mental processes."

"Is there anything you can do at all?"

"I told you- there are several methods of treating this, the questions are; would I advise prescribing them, and would you stick to them. I'd avoid prescribing any medication, but there are other methods that you might find useful. For example, many people find that keeping a dream journal helps them understand their dreams. There are also some methods of meditation that some say help them control their dreams. I'm not suggesting that these methods work all the time, but some have been able to make considerable progress with them."

"You sound like you deal with this kind of thing a lot."

"Yes, but usually occurs closer to finals."

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Exerpts from Asuka's dream journal:

Okay, the doc says that this might help, so I'm going to give it a shot before I break down and try anything more drastic.

Dream 19

It was the one with the little Rei and the elevator again. This is the second time I think. It always starts the same, I'm tapping my foot at the entrance as I wait for the elevator to arrive. I can feel a royally unpleasant ache inside of me and I'm guessing that it's my time of the month.

I can hear myself mumbling and griping about a doll and someone winning and humiliating me again and again. What's odd is that even though I can hear the words, and I'm saying them, I can't seem to make them out.

Finally, the elevator doors open and I flinch as I see the occupant. It's the blue haired Rei. I still don't know if it's supposed to symbolize anything, but guessing from looks in a mirror in other dreams I think that we're both about fourteen-- or did I mention that above? I still don't understand why all of this is so consistent.

My fists clench, and I feel my nails bite into my palms as I enter the elevator. There is the seriously long stretch where neither of us speak. When one of us finally does, it's her. She tells me that if I don't open my heart, Eva will not move. I think she's referring to the big monster robots that we drive around and fight in, but I don't have time to ponder it because almost immediately I'm snapping back at her, belittling her and insulting her skills... was I ever that unpleasant at that age?

I tell her that she'd do anything if she was ordered to, that she'd even kill herself... to my shock she admits it.

This next part is hard to write, but I think I should keep it honest here. The younger me hauls off and slaps Rei as the door opens. I have to say the 'younger me' at this point because I can't see me ever doing that to someone for something that trivial. It's like she's loosing her handle on her life or something... like she's lost everything that matters?

I storm out of the elevator and as the door shuts I see Rei's cheek growing red from where the blow landed. I scream at her that I hate her, that I hate everything and as the dream ends I'm left with the question... why did she hate Rei so much? What did Rei do to enrage her so much? I don't understand these things and its frustrating because I think it's important somehow.

*There's one other thing. That boy who looks like Rei in the dreams. I finally have a name for him- its weird but in the dreams I'm **his** roommate too. The younger me finally shouted at him and I caught his name in between the insults.*

I think his name is Shinji.

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"I really don't want to do this Asuka," Rei said as the two exited the train and walked down the street towards the restaurant, " but thanks for coming with me."

Rei had been worried about this night all week. She apparently was very apprehensive about spending any time with her father. From what little Asuka knew about him it seemed well deserved. The dinner was apparently just a routine communication for Rei- one that she dreaded. Asuka had offered to go as moral support- and also for a personal reason. She wanted to know just who this Ikari thought he was. Her project could have been off the ground weeks back and yet he'd delayed it. She wanted to know why.

"Hey, its no big," Asuka said cheerfully, "I don't get along with my dad either."

"Yeah, but your dad isn't...."

"Isn't what? A control freak? You don't know my dad- or most others- apparently. I think that its just something that men feel they have to do with their daughters. In his mind

you're still his sweet little baby girl, not the crazed party animal you really are."

"Um... thanks, I think."

"Think nothing of it, "Asuka said with a grin as they arrived at the restaurant.

It was a nice place. Asuka hadn't had much of a chance while on campus to sample *real* Japanese cuisine. The boxed lunches they survived in the cafeteria didn't count and the rest of the time she'd stuck to the chain restaurants. The smells from the kitchen were making her mouth water from the moment she walked into the door, but she put that aside. Her prime goal of this night was to get to know Rei's family. She wanted to meet Yui Ikari mainly because it was the first time she had the chance to actually speak with her. Before and after class the woman was almost impossible to get ahold of and Asuka had some interesting ideas she wanted to discuss.

They were greeted at the door by a waitress who took them to the table. Yui was already there and she rose to greet them.

"Miss Soryu, it is a pleasure to see you," she said with a smile that made Asuka realize just how much she resembled her daughter, "I don't think I've had an opportunity to tell you what an honor it is to have you in my class."

"Thanks miss Ikari, but I need to say that its an even greater honor to learn from you."

"So where's dad?" Rei asked as she sat down.

"He had to make a call," you replied as she and Asuka joined her daughter at the table, "but he should be along any moment."

"He can take his time, " Rei mumbled as the waitress appeared to take their drink orders.

They talked of class and school life for the next few moments and Asuka found herself warming to Yui quickly. She was amazed that Rei was so rebellious when her mother seemed such a gentle soul. A few minutes of conversation passed when suddenly Rei stiffened up. Asuka caught it out of the corner of her eye and she turned to her friend to find that suddenly her bouncy, outgoing and somewhat crazy roommate seem... meek?

She turned to follow the line of Rei's gaze and saw the source of her unease. Asuka's breath caught in her throat as she recognized the figure. How she did she couldn't understand. As she look up at the bearded man standing at the end of the table, Asuka was filled with an inexplicable nervousness. A feeling that the term *deja vu* didn't do justice.

Standing at the end of the table, was Gendou Ikari. And Asuka didn't know why, but his presence filled her with dread.

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"Good evening Rei," Gendou said, and Asuka was stuck again with a feeling of being in two places at once. One was there at the table- reality. The other... the other was something that she didn't understand. She heard his voice, and she was reminded of her dreams again. She'd heard this voice before. She'd heard it in her dreams and it didn't make sense that she knew it before ever meeting or even hearing this man speak, "it's been awhile."

She was so stunned from the feeling that she almost missed his introduction.

"And you must be the Miss Soryu that I have heard so much about from professor Fuyutski."

Asuka broke out of her stunned state just quickly enough so that she didn't seem an idiot, "oh, yes sir. And I might add that I am very grateful that you are doing so much to help further our research."

"It is only money- and government money at that. Hence it is of little consequence where it is spent. Had it remained in their hands it would have been squandered. I can only hope it will be better wasted in Professor Fuyutski's hands."

"Darling, please at least try to appear cheerful?" Yui quipped with a grin, and to Asuka's surprise, Gendou Ikari smiled.

"My apologies miss Soryu, " he said with a chuckle that seemed completely out of character for what Rei had prepared Asuka for, "I sometimes forget that I am not dealing with administrators and other time wasters, and I allow my annoyance with them to get the better of me. "

Asuka didn't know quite how to react to the shift in demeanor. She was still thrown from the first impression and this change was shaking her further. Fortunately for her, the rest of the dinner was light conversation. "What has Fuyutski been using as reference material? Oh that? I thought he was using..." and so forth. There was little of the oppressive air that Rei had dreaded or that Asuka had sense upon his arrival. In fact, Asuka was beginning to enjoy the conversation until she noticed that Rei still hadn't said a word.

During the ride back, she asked about it.

And Rei had practically exploded.

"Don't ask me what's wrong Asuka! I know you saw it! You saw how he really was when he sat down! What I don't know is this-- how could you ignore it? How could you?" Rei was shaking and Asuka realized that she'd never seen her roommate get this emotional about *anything*. It had always been her happy-go-lucky attitude that Asuka had seen before, not this haunted girl.

"He can't possibly be like that all the time," Asuka said, "not around family- your mom would have left him years ago if that were the case."

"He's good isn't he? From hiding it from her I mean," Rei said as she wiped the tears from her eyes, " then again, maybe mom just refuses to see the bad parts. I don't know... he's always like that with me-- cold, judgmental, and distant. It wouldn't have been soo bad if I didn't *know* that he isn't always like that. He used to treat me like I guess most parents do... but about the time I turned fourteen he... he started acting weird. It doesn't make sense because I can't think why he'd do it. And then after awhile it wasn't enough to just hope he'd change... and I started acting like a shit just to piss him off," she caught Asuka's expression as she said that and laughed, "oh yes, I know how much trouble I cause, and how loony I seem... and I don't care. At first I did it to piss him off, but it didn't work, and I don't know if it had just become too much fun or if I'd gone to far- because after awhile I just stopped caring what I acted like. I guess this all sounds pretty childish huh?"

"No... for some reason it makes perfect sense to me," Asuka said. But what remained unsaid was that she only understood it because that was almost exactly how the younger Asuka behaved in her dreams.

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From Asuka's dream journal.

So what if this isn't some psychosis?

It's almost maddening to think about but I'm starting to wonder if maybe these aren't dreams in the traditional sense. I mean, didn't ancient peoples think that messages were sent in dreams? We laugh at them but some of those ancient peoples invented perfect calendars and designed steam engines back before the rest of the world had written languages. I don't know, the whole thing is messing up my head.

Here's the kicker. I'm studying and preparing to take all the old and disputed alternate earth theories and possibly make them fact... so why am I balking at the idea that maybe I'm seeing an alternate earth in my dreams? Its such a ridiculous idea on the surface, but there are so many discrepancies in the things that have happened that I can't help but consider the possibility.

The fact of the mater is that I knew Gendou Ikari before I ever met him. I knew his voice, I knew his looks, and I even knew that damn annoying habit of pushing his glasses up on his nose that he does. There is no way I could have known these things prior to last night.

That's right, no damn way.

Why?

*Simple. There aren't any photos of the man. This in itself is amazing to me, but it's true. Ikari is a top ranking administrator at one of the world's most prestigious collages. How the hell did he skip out from having his picture ever taken? How the hell did he keep from being interviewed? It just doesn't make any sense. Then there's the fact that he's **still** messing with my project.*

Holy shit this sounds paranoid. But its the only thing that puts any kind of reason to this rhyme.

I need to sleep, I'm afraid to, but I need it- I've been awake all day working on the power transformer for the S2 engine. I just wish that these dreams weren't so real.

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As the final stages of Asuka's project were put into effect, she began to become more and more curious about the odd parallels between her dreams and the people she knew from school.

She'd had dreams with Hikari in them, and even the boyfriend from photos that her friend has shared. Oddly enough Touji wasn't hurt in the dreams. Katsuragi was in them, and she seemed to be some type of mother figure as well as some military thing that Asuka hadn't figured out. Interesting that she was in charge of the ROTC in reality. Even one of the guys *in* the ROTC looked like one of the kids from her dreams. It was weird, and yet the parallels and contrasts made a bizarre sort of sense. As the dreams went on and the day of the first test of her project grew closer, a theory began to take shape in her mind.

Finally, a day before the activation, she broke down and decided to test that theory.

"Hey Rei?" she asked one evening as they prepared for bed, "got a question."

"I got an answer," Rei quipped, "lets see if they match."

"The name Shinji mean anything to you?"

Rei stood bolt upright from her desk and whirled to face Asuka. Her face was a combination of horrified, stunned, and completely confused.

"W-where did you hear that name?" Rei asked hesitantly.

"I'm really not sure," Asuka said honestly, "why are you wiggling out?"

"I... Asuka?" Rei looked at her as if she were some Chinese puzzle box- tantalizingly tempting to open, but dangerous at the same time.

"I'm sorry, it was a silly question," Asuka said as she turned back to brushing her hair.

"No, its okay," Rei said, "its just that- that name... its..."

"You don't have to tell me if its something bad," Asuka said- terrified that Rei would take her advice.

"No... its just that, well, I would have been a twin... but he died at birth... his name would have... it would have been Shinji."

Asuka dropped her brush. This was what she'd dreaded- prayed- feared- hoped that Rei would say. Rei had just confirmed something that rocked Asuka's equilibrium to the floor. She'd played with her theories off and on for weeks now, but she'd never really believed them. Not even when she'd met Rei's father, not even when the dreams got more and more detailed and realistic.

The truth was, even though she'd thought it would be amusing, she didn't want her theories to be true. It was ridiculous she couldn't be dreaming about some other world. It was silly- impossible... but how else could she have known that name? "Asuka?" Rei asked as she stood and walked over, " what is it?" her own problems were forgotten and she rushed to her roommates side.

Asuka held up a hand to let Rei know she was okay and she took several deep breaths. She was being hasty. All she had were hints. No proof. She didn't need to be so dramatic. Even after the activation, the project wouldn't be ready for anything more than testing for some time. And even then there was no way of knowing for sure it would work in the first place.

But what if it did? Would that mean her dreams were true? Maybe not here, but somewhere?

Or was she simply loosing her mind?

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"Thank you all for being here so early," Asuka said to the several students and teachers that had arrived to watch the first tests of her project, "the reason we're starting at such an early hour is that if we're successful, there will be an ungodly amount of testing to do. Now, many of you have been asking me about the project and what it means exactly.

That's a little hard to explain. It's been said that no one truly understands quantum physics, and I believe that statement is a result of insufficient information. This test is an effort to gain some of that information."

She paused and looked at the back of the crowd where Ikari's glasses reflected a glint of light at her. She was a little nervous at having him-- and most of the people-- there. This was, after all, just a test. They weren't absolutely sure whether it would work yet, just mostly sure.

'What the hell,' she thought, 'it's still better than playing video games with Mama back in Germany.'

"Well, I'm not much for speeches, really, but I'll try to sum this up. It's been theorized for years that Dirac's theories about dimensional space could be thoroughly proven if enough power was available. With Professor Fuyutski's recent development of the Super Solenoid Engine we now have the output needed to test Dirac's theories and my own. What we're doing here is distorting an area to widen a breach in quantum foam. If successful, we might just be able to open another breach to somewhere else. Now, if you'll excuse me, we're ready to begin."

As the men and women gathered about watched in interest, Asuka and Fuyutski finished aligning the wave emitters and began building the charge. To her amazement, the energy was steady and stable. She'd expected at least *some* glitches in the S2 at first, this was amazing! Finally, the charge was sufficient and the two slabs began to hum. The platform she'd set up was about ten by ten feet, and on each side a seven foot tall slabs of ebony metal was beginning to vibrate subtly. As the charge grew, the vibration became more pronounced, and slowly, a distortion began to build between the monoliths. While the rippling distortion widened, Asuka activated another device, and the computer began scrolling data faster than she could follow. Finally, a hole appeared in the center of the distortion. It was five feet wide and seemed to be a gap in... in everything. As she watched awes silence, the monitor stopped scrolling and a line of text appeared:

Experiment Successful, awaiting further instructions.

Asuka walked around the platform and stared into the hole of nothingness before her. She couldn't believe they'd actually done it. She was looking into a null space. A place that did not exist in her reality-- or if she was right, nowhere else.

A Sea of Dirac.

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Asuka's dream journal

Its been about a week since the last entry, but I'm back here again. I thought for awhile that I might be actually done with these, but I had another one last night. I'm thankful I at least had a break before they started back up.

Thank Gott this one wasn't one of the frightening ones... but for some reason I'm still feeling uneasy. It was another one about Shinji, and I'm really starting to wonder what the hell is wrong with this younger me. After the one at the pool I actually thought there was something between her and the kid... but then I changed my mind after I saw... well I didn't even record it then and I don't really feel like thinking about it now. Suffice it to

say that it wasn't pretty.

This one seemed to be taking place at a hot spring or something- I think I recognized the embroidery on the robes. My younger self is sitting on her bed while Misato is drying her hair. They're talking about something involving a volcano I think. I'm not too clear on the details though.

Misato asks her why she hasn't thanked Shinji yet and the other Asuka seems to kind of jump in surprise. She starts trying to make some excuse about it and Misato cuts her off. She says something like "Shinji risked more than you seem to realize jumping in there after you."

Whereupon the young Asuka snorts "right, like Nerv can't afford to clean a little lava off their precious Unit One."

Then Misato wraps her hair up in the towel and twirls around on the stool to face her.

"You do realize I ordered him not to go in there, right?" Misato asks.

Young me sits there with a stunned expression on her face as Misato continues.

"In fact, we had quite a heated argument over a private channel just before he switched off and leapt into the lava after you. I had to chew him out in the locker rooms afterwards and I'm pretty sure he'll hate me for at least a week. I didn't really care to do it since he managed to save your ass in the process, but regulations required me to discipline him somehow."

"Why are you telling me this?" the other Asuka asks quietly.

"Because I can't apologize to him right now and not seem like the worlds biggest hypocrite. If I tried to, he'd hate forever instead of just for a little while. You, on the other hand, haven't even so much as blinked at him beyond ordering him to deliver soap at the spring. He did save your life, so I don't think it'd kill you to tell him 'thank you'... and besides, it'll probably keep him from moping for the rest of the trip."

"I... I'll talk to him," the other Asuka says kind of shyly. She and Misato turn out their lights and for a while she sits there in the darkness before I start hearing Misato snoring.

She sneaks out of the room and steps just down the hall to one of the other doors. There's a crack of light shining under the door and with a deep breath, she knocks. A moment passes and I hear soft footfalls before the door opens. Shinji's standing at the door with a confused expression on his face. I'm expecting the other Asuka to start browbeating the kid again when I realize she's actually at a loss for words... this is the only time I think that's ever happened in any of my dreams, incidentally. Shinji greets her after an awkward silence and she nods back. Looks like she's worse at bowing than I am, heh.

*Anyway, she finally speaks and I'm a little impressed that she actually managed to display a **little** tact. "I just... um, I wanted you to know that even if you just showing off back there... that I'm glad you helped out. Um... thanks."*

With that said, she spins around on her heel- whipping the kid in the face with her hair (I wonder if it was intentional or not) and... well... she kind of sashes back to her room.

I had that one dream at the swimming pool where I'm fairly certain she was flirting with him, so at this point I gotta wonder just how she felt about the kid. I still don't know what

his connection to my dreams is. Its something I need to do some more thinking on before I commit it to paper... maybe next entry I'll have come up with something.

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"Okay, lets see what this baby can do," Asuka said as Fuyutski began charging the machine. They'd finished the final phase of it's construction, and now the large platform featured twelve monolithic slabs of metal in a circle. While they only needed two to actually generate a field, her theory called for several more to push the limits of it's design.

As the rift in to Dirac space opened, Asuka began to pay close attention to the monitors they'd set up. As the other monoliths began to hum, a distinct change began to take place within Dirac space. It started as a twist in the air-- not unlike a heat mirage. It began intensifying quickly, however, and soon, it widened.

Asuka's heart skipped a beat as she saw what was on the monitor. It was like looking through a window. She could see something in the Dirac rift. Something that looked an awfully lot like a building sticking up out of a lot of water.

"Tell me you're recording this," Fuyutski said as he watched in awe.

"On twelve disks and fifteen terminals," Asuka reassured him, "Mein Gott... we really did it. We *did* it!" She shouted triumphantly. She jumped back from the monitor and did a silly little victory dance as the professor looked on and laughed.

"You did it actually," he said, "but lets calm down a bit and try to figure out what it is you've done."

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"I'm pleased to report that the entire experiment has met with total success," Asuka told the school board later that day. It was everything she could do to remain calm and not start dancing again. She was almost as amazed as she was happy that it had worked. It was such a radical idea and there was so much about the hows and whys that she didn't understand yet-- but they were still filtering through the information they were getting, and Asuka was pretty sure it would be a long time before anyone figured out everything.

"At ten am this morning, Professor Fuyutski and myself achieved a second Dirac field within the first. This opened up into somewhere that we've yet to identify. It shouldn't take long for us to adjust the controls so that we can move the location of the second field and take a look around at what we've found."

"And what do you think you've found?" one of the board members asked. Asuka couldn't help but notice the nervous glance he took at Ikari before he'd spoken up.

"Quite simply we think we've found away to access a reality on a separate timeline to our own. Not only that, but if this data is correct there are an almost infinite number left to uncover."

"What makes you think that?" Ikari asked.

"This," Asuka said as she set a photo down, "we were able to use one of the monitors and zoom in on the building. We found this written on the side."

There was a scribbled graffiti written there that said; 'This world died on September 13 2000, may god have mercy on our souls.'

"I don't know anything that happened on that date to be worth this kind of apocalyptic dogma. Also, the tense is significant because most doom crying is done in the future tense- if it were a warning it would say that the world would die, not that it already had."

"This is very interesting Miss Soryu," Ikari said, "but I'm afraid your success in this mater has forced to ask you to do something you might not care to do."

"...what's that?"

"The implications of what you've done here are staggering. We need time to get a reaction from some of the people who make larger decisions than us. Until that time we need to place your project on hiatus."

Asuka paled upon hearing that. She didn't understand. Her project was a success! The S2 was a success! Why were they stopping her? Why?

"Thank you for your time, we'll be in touch as things progress."

As the men filed out, Asuka stood at her chair in shock. Why would he do this? Why had he been slowing her the entire time? To what end? It didn't make sense!

"This isn't fair," she whispered to the empty room.

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Asuka walked back to the lab in silence. She was trying very hard not to cry, or to scream, or to hit something. In her angry confusion, she didn't notice that Fuyutski and one of the other students that had been assisting were crowded around the monitors until she was about to switch off the main switch.

"Hey Asuka," Hyuuga called down to her from the monitor platform, "you gotta come check this out!"

"Hrmn?" she muttered as she looked up to him and the professor.

"We got the new program working," Fuyutski told her as she walked up the steps, "we can change the position of the inner portal."

For a moment, Asuka forgot the earlier news in a rush of scientific curiosity. She rushed up the rest of the way and looked into the monitor. It was now showing an empty city, "what's this?" she asked.

"Looks like Tokyo Two," Hyuuga said, "and you should see some of the crazy stuff we found earlier!"

He pressed a series of switches and the second monitor began a playback of its recording. There were a bunch of shots of a big black sphere and then, something that made Asuka almost scream in fright.

"Wait, go back to that!" she shouted, causing Hyuuga to nearly leap out of his skin. A second later the image backed up to show a twisted and battered hulk of red and brown. Asuka had to squint her eyes to be sure, but now that she could see it clearly there was no question. She had them print out the image and grabbed a marker.

As the other two looked on in confusion, Asuka began to trace an outline on the ruined mass. It only took a few seconds for a humanoid shape to take form. As she finished the shoulder fins and added the extra eyes on the outline she dropped the pen. Her hands were shaking to badly for her to continue.

"This isn't possible, " she whispered, "It was just a dream."

"What is that Asuka," Fuyutski asked-- obviously confused and concerned.

"Its... its Evangelion Unit Two," she told him in a small, frightened voice, "and I've seen it before."

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They spent the rest of the night following her instructions and manipulating the portal to find landmark after landmark. By the end of the night, both Fuyutski and Hyuuga were convinced. She'd been there, she'd seen these things. Her dreams... were somehow real. They found the ruins where the children had fought Unit Three. They found the hot springs. They found that Tokyo three had been obliterated for miles around the black sphere.

Hyuuga and Fuyutski both looked at her with more than a little awe after that. It made no sense, and she'd had to go get her journal to finally prove she hadn't been making fools of them somehow.

"I still don't know how this is happening, but it is," Asuka said with a sigh when they'd reached the last entry, "until we saw Unit Two back there I honestly thought I'd been loosing my mind."

"I'm not going to pretend I understand this any more than you do, Asuka," Fuyutski said as he closed her journal, "it completely blows all the theories I had out of the ocean. What puzzles me is that you seem to be remembering a childhood that happened four or five years ago-- in this other world. What we need to do is figure out how you were able to access these memories."

"But what then?" Asuka demanded, "they've shut us down just as we made the breakthrough! How are we ever going to convince anyone this is real if we can't show them?"

"I don't know," Fuyutski told her gently, "but there are other universities. I'll promise you this-- our research will not end here. You should go home and try and get some sleep. I'll try and think of some way to block the committee."

Asuka nodded glumly and reluctantly, they shut down the projector.

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Asuka's Dream Journal

That night I had the clearest dream out of all of them.

I think it was in the early evening because both me and Shinji were still up despite the fact it was night outside. I was sitting at the kitchen table while he was over in the doorway to the living room when suddenly the younger Asuka speaks up... and here's the weird thing, despite everything that happened that night, I can hear a little hesitation and

nervousness in her voice- I think she'd been working up her courage to ask for awhile.

*Anyway, Shinji's sitting there listening to his headphones when she up and asks if he wants to **kiss** her. I don't know who was more surprised to hear it- me or him. He yanks out the headphones and asks what she just said- and she repeats it a little sarcastically- asking if he even knew what kissing was or something to that effect.*

The kid is blushing like crazy at this point, and after a round of teasing, he finally agrees- standing up and firmly telling her that he's ready and she better pucker up.

They kiss, and while she held his nose to keep his breath from tickling her, it was kind of nice. I like the kid, he seems like a sweetie- I don't know why the other Asuka keeps riding him like she does. Granted he is a little whipped, but the way she acts I can kind of understand it a little.

After the kiss, she freaks out though- running to the bathroom and gargling like crazy and making excuses like crazy. I don't know why she did that... I really don't. As I said, it was a rather nice kiss, really. If it was a matter of saving face, I think that she went a bit overboard... but that Asuka seems to excel at that.

*I realized something when I woke up, however. I don't know why it never came to me before, but now it's a lot clearer. I think I know a little of why I'm having these dreams and why it's just me. You see, if my theory here is right, I was the only one in an entry plug other than Shinji when it all went to hell there in the end. Unit Zero had already exploded, so Rei was out, and so were the other crew members... so what if being in the Eva when whatever happened- happened is why? Well for starters it brings up a **very** interesting set of questions that I intend to ask one Mr. Gendou Ikari.*

Fuyutsuki can argue with the committee all he wants, but I'm starting to see a pattern here, and it all points to Ikari.

I'll be paying him a visit in the morning, and if he does know something about this, he's in very deep shit.

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When Rei came back from classes that day, Asuka initiated phase one of her plan.

"Hey roomie, can I ask you something?"

"Grundlmurmph" Rei replied as she flopped down face-first on her bed.

"Oh right, Kaji-sensei had his test today, didn't he?"

"Murmph."

"So my question is this," Asuka said, "if I wanted to get into your dad's office without anyone knowing, how would I go about that?"

Rei's head rose from the mattress with a grin spreading from ear to ear, "when do we start?"

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He rarely turned the light on. According to Rei, it wasn't that he enjoyed the darkness, rather that he'd never found the time to alter the lighting fixture to one that didn't hurt his

eyes after half an hour. Also his room was so bare of furniture and decoration there wasn't much to trip over. So, when Gendou Ikari entered his office, as a habit he never flipped the switch.

This gave Asuka the element of surprise she was banking so very much on. As he approached, she collected her thoughts, and just as she saw his dim reflection reach for the chair, she spun it around.

"Who?" he gasped as he stepped back.

"A question, Mr. Ikari," she said as she leaned forward on her knees, "do you prefer the poster over there, or the full ceiling etching of the Tree of Life?"

"How did you know abo-" he froze in mid sentence, his face contorting in anger.

"Just so we understand one another," she told him, "I know most of it. I remember most of it."

"The dreams," he muttered, "I should have had Akagi press you for details."

"Moot now, isn't it?" Asuka frowned, "but, we have an interesting dilemma here. You've let too much slip, I know the dreams are real. I know the world exists because I've seen it through the Dirac effect. You know it as well. How?"

"Don't insult us both with the puppet master routine, Soryu" Gendou smirked, "it's beneath you."

"Oh? Then is this going to be a civil revelation then?"

"I don't see why not," Gendou shrugged, "there really isn't much you can do about it at this point. If you'll relocate yourself to the other chair we'll see what I decide you need to know."

Asuka thought for a moment, and decided that if he needed the big chair to feel important then there was no reason not to let him have it. She got to her feet and walked over to the guest chair.

"So you've remembered most of the events then? The Evas and the war?"

"Pretty much, and what I didn't remember then is coming back to me the more I concentrate on it."

"I see, then you've most likely deduced that it was your enclosure in the Evangelion that allowed you this retention of memory?"

"That was my current theory, yes."

"So other than the assertion of your sanity, what do you hope to learn with this little stunt?"

"For one thing what you did."

"You assume the current state of being is my fault," Gendou said, "Third impact would have happened regardless of my actions. The true question was always how it happened and who was in control. Seele wanted to initiate Third Impact using Unit One and the Unit Five series. There were so many things that could have gone wrong, but fortunately Rei and I were able to supercede their actions. We initiated a controlled version before

they could begin their planned apocalyptic destruction of all humanity."

"What makes you think you could do a better job?" Asuka asked, her voice betraying the stunned state of mind this revelation was leaving her in.

"Because I know exactly what Kiel wanted. He believed that mankind was at an evolutionary dead end. That unless he could jump start us to a new path we'd destroy ourselves and one another. His belief in this was at a fanatical level- it was unshakable. I assure you that his instrumentality would have merged all mankind into a group mind that would share its consciousness as one."

"And what did you do here that's so much more noble?" "I merely crafted this reality to end some of our more troublesome traits as a species," he stood, linking his hands behind his back and looked out the window, "You may remember something from the other reality called a 'nuclear bomb' for example. They don't exist here. I managed to make several little improvements when I moved everything to this reality. There was only one little detail of it all that didn't translate over to here."

"I was wondering when you'd bring that up," Asuka growled. As Gendou turned for the window to face her, he was struck in the chin by a rather skillfully thrown right cross.

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"How the *fuck* could you do that to him?" Asuka screamed at Gendou as he lay sprawled on the floor. He slowly got to his feet and rubbed his jaw as she glowered at him.

"Soryu," he said as he sat at his desk, "if you do not calm yourself I *will* call campus security."

She was almost insulted that he'd treated her accusations as if they had been nothing important. Then she realized he was trying to fluster her and forced herself to stay as calm as the situation would allow.

"I will not call down until you tell me what made you think you had the right to do that!"

"I will not justify your tantrum by pretending that I have done anything wrong."

"Stop acting innocent you bastard! What did Shinji *ever* do to deserve being abandoned for a second time?"

"Listen to yourself Soryu. Just stop for a moment and think. What do you care for him anyway? Why is he so important to you?"

"What? Shut *up* this isn't about me."

"Really? In these memories you claim to have, did you ever once show him any warmth? Did you care for him? Did you even *like* him, Soryu?"

"I... that's not... stop it!"

"Now who's running from the truth? You never cared for him Soryu. He was an annoyance to you. You in fact envied and despised him."

"That is such bullshit! She even let him kiss her!"

"A kiss you held his nose for."

"I..." Asuka trailed off, she hadn't considered that until Gendou had said it aloud. And now that he had she had to fight off the blush that her shame was trying to force its way across her features. The only thing keeping her from breaking off was the anger at knowing how much Gendou had spied on them back then.

"So even when you got that close you were still so far." "Its closer than I ever let any other boy get to my heart," she growled, "even here in this place."

"Really? Just how close would you say Shinji was to your inner heart? I understand that you feel some... empathy for the boy, but how much did he ever really care for you Soryu?"

"Are you asking if he loved her?"

"If it helps to use that word, then yes."

"Ikari, he and my other self were too young to even begin to understand what that means. You keep trying to put words in my mouth and I don't appreciate it. Did Shinji like her? Well, he might not have cared for that Asuka as a person, but he obviously respected her. He put up with more crap than I've ever seen anyone take- and he still tried to reach out to her."

"Really, and how do you explain his violating you shortly before the end?" Asuka'd known this question had been coming soon, and had prepared as best she could. It had been one of the worst dreams, and one of the only ones that had resulted in her taking the pills Dr Akagi had given her the following evening.

"Let me ask you this. You seemed to go out of your way to alienate, humiliate and generally break the kid, and you expect anyone to act shocked when he actually starts to fracture? Damnit, that world's Asuka almost didn't make it and despite her faults she was *much* stronger. That world's Rei almost died! and you expect someone to go through all that unwillingly and still be sane?"

"Soryu, none of this changes the fact that you have yet to provide one scrap of proof that the continuation of your project is worth risking reality itself to satisfy this whim of yours- and I assure you that each time you breach the barrier you are doing just that. While I applaud your deducing the connection between the two, and that I had something to do with it- impressive to say the least- I *will* be shutting the project down regardless."

"It isn't a whim you black hearted son of a bitch" she spat- privately cheering. She was still cracking his defenses. He wasn't answered or argued, just changed subjects. She was close- she knew it, "and I know why you really don't want me to continue with that project."

"Really, Soryu- threats now?"

"Oh, this isn't a threat," Asuka said through a shark-like smile, "Its just a promise. You see, I just figured out a few things about you. They were relatively simple deductions, really. All I had to do is ask myself what is here that wasn't in the original reality and separate what's there that isn't here... then ask 'why' that was so."

"I am calling this audience to an end, I expect you to have your things packed by noon. You are hereby expelled."

"So I'm right. I wonder what your wife would say if I were to tell her that you'd risk sacrificing the whole human race for her- did exactly that in a sense- but you wouldn't raise a single finger to save her child. The very child who made all of this possible."

"Leave this place and never return" Gendou growled.

"You're more pathetic a coward than your *son* ever was," Asuka spat as she stormed out of his office.

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Asuka's Dream Journal

This will probably be the final entry.

I had to spend about an hour talking Rei down from the hysteric fit she threw when she overheard me and her father talking from the air vent. It was my own fault, really, I should have made sure she left like I asked. I don't think even after reading this she understands... but she's beginning to- and I think she believes me. The... wrongness in Gendou Ikari has a better explanation through my notes here than it does elsewhere.

She wants to see me off, and I was hesitant about that, but then I gave in. It was the look on her face that did it. She was so scared, and I don't know if it was her resemblance to Shinji or some form of guilt over how I treated her in the past that made me finally agree with her pleading, but I did. She's watching the portal right now. Considering what we've found, I understand- I'd be there myself if I didn't have some computer work to finish up and this journal to complete.

To anyone who reads this- I don't know what will happen once I cross the barrier. If I can be found using the device myself and Professor Fuyutski created, or a proximity thereof, and if I am alive and well? Then you have a decision to make. See, I don't know if I'll be able to come back, but if I am, then the portal goes both ways, and you have to decide for yourselves if you want to live in a happy lie, or the harsh reality that we were taken from against our wills.

Momma, I love you... and I'll miss you... but I have to do this. I knew what I was doing before I set down pen to paper, and what I saw- what we're seeing now through the Dirac Field makes it impossible for me not to try this. I owe him my life. I have to at least try.

Wish me luck.

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"well," Asuka said as she stepped down the staircase, "that's everything."

"Asuka," Rei said nervously, "I... I don't know what I'm supposed to do or say here."

"Well, tell you what," Asuka replied, "if I make it through okay- start cheering like there's no tomorrow. If I don't, I want you to throw the biggest damn party this schools ever seen."

Rei nodded as she handed over a bento box, "I asked Hikari to make this while you were packing- I can't cook for crap you know."

"Tell her thanks," Asuka smiled as she shouldered her backpack.

"Do you really have to do this?" Rei whispered as they stepped toward the Dirac portal.

"Your dad'll be pulling the plug in less than a hour," Asuka sighed, "its now or never."

"But..."

"You saw what I saw, Rei," Asuka turned and took the other girl's arm, "I screwed up too much last time. If I can make that right, maybe I can live with knowing it really happened."

Rei threw her arms around the redhead, crying, "I'll miss you!"

"Thanks, Rei," Asuka smiled, "if your dad changes his mind, look in on me- okay?"

Rei nodded and stepped back as Asuka turned back to the portal. In front of her- beyond the shimmering distortion of time and space- was a massive piece of Unit Two's ruined head. She climbed the step. And stood at the brink for a few moments before taking one deep breath.

Then she jumped.

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"Ouch!" she yelped as she fell two feet and stumbled forward- off balance from her pack. She tripped forward and crashed into the rusting head of the Eva- ending up in a heap at in the grass.

"Wonderful," she sighed as she climbed unsteadily to her feet, "that's one small step for man, one massively stupid step for Asuka Langley Soryu."

She looked around, hoping to find the portal, but as she had theorized, it was nowhere to be seen- its dimensional formation not tangible from the current perspective. If she had a powerful enough microscope she might be able to make out the minute distortion in space, but she neither had the gear or the time to perform such an examination. "I just hope I didn't loose any time in the jaunt," she muttered as she hurried around the huge giant's corpse. It took a minute to finally get to the spot she'd been watching before she reset the location of the portal, and thankfully it didn't seem as if her trip had taken more than a nanosecond. A few yards away, under a young and growing tree, a slender figure was knelt down on the grass.

"Wonderful," she sighed, "now what?"

It wasn't as if she could just run over and hug him- he'd been alone in this world for years now, and who knows what the shock would do to him. Likewise if she just shouted out he might think she was a ghost or something.

What she finally decided was more subtle.

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As Shinji Ikari rose from the stone he'd set up to commemorate a lost friend, he heard something hit the ground a few yards away. Time had changed him physically. He was still tall and lean-- he'd always been slender for his age- but the leanness was toned with rope-like muscle. Five years of fighting the land for his life had resulted in that. His face was clean-shaven in contrast to his wild hair and torn clothing.

Grabbing the rifle that he'd taken to keeping nearby for stray animals, he whirled to shoot, but found no one around- no, wait! what was that over by the Eva's shoulder fin?

Frowning, he scanned the landscape, no one was visible in the bushes or tall grass- not that he'd ever seen anyone since the horror. Now confused further, he walked over to the shape on the grass, growing even further perplexed as he did so.

"Red hair?" he gasped as his mind tried to refute the possibility.

Dropping the gun he ran over to where the now visibly female shape was laying in the grass, sprawled facedown. She was wearing khaki pants and a blue sweater as well as a backpack,

Confused, he knelt beside the girl, and tested her pulse as best as he could through the sweater sleeve. To his surprise there was a strong one.

"Miss?" he said softly, "miss? I'm going to turn you over now."

At first he assumed there wasn't a response, but as he touched her shoulder she began to roll of her own accord. The moment that he saw her face, Shinji let out a yelp of surprise and began a rapid crab-walk backwards.

'No it can't it can't it can't it wouldn't she couldn't but it is how could it be I don't understand,' his mind raced trying to accept what his eyes were telling him. It wasn't possible- she'd been gone for years- everyone had been gone for years! But, as she climbed to a sitting position and looked at him with a small smile, the impossible became possible and the shock was almost too much. But when he realized what she said?

"You've grown a little, haven't you?"

That was when the breath he'd been holding caught up to him and he passed out.

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Some time later, as he came back to consciousness, Shinji let out a little groan.

"Careful," Asuka said as she cradled his head in her lap, "you nicked a rock when you fell back- lemme finish cleaning it before you start freaking out again."

"Can't be you," he muttered.

"Oh?" she smiled, "why not?"

"Haven't called me an idiot yet," he smiled weakly up at her.

"Keep that up and I'll fall into the habit," she smiled as she finished applying the bandage.

"Asuka?" he whispered, still obviously confused.

"Its me, Shinji" she assured him.

"But how?" he sat up slowly as he turned to face her. The sun was setting and a small campfire was starting to burn a few feet away.

"Your father," she sighed, "it happened when we were fighting the white Evas. He took us- everyone- somewhere else."

"Oh god... I remember- the thing, that huge thing that looked like Rei!"

"Calm down," Asuka said, "I call no freaking out."

Shinji sat back and put a hand up to his face- supporting himself with the other, "it was all so jumbled, it asked me to go- offered me everything I'd wanted since I lost mom, but then when I saw my father all I could do was scream and run..."

"Well in your defense he is a twisted bastard."

"Where did you come from?" he asked- looking at her from between his fingers.

"You know how it asked you to go with it?" she sighed, "well I didn't get an option."

"Hello?" a voice called from off toward the Eva, "Asuka? Where the hell are you?"

"Oh shit," Asuka said, "she didn't!"

"Who is that?" Shinji asked as Asuka got to her feet, "what's going on?"

"Someone is about to get her ass kicked," Asuka growled as a shape came out of the shadows toward the firelight. She turned back to the person and yelled, "what the **HELL** are you doing here?"

"There you are!" Rei said as she jogged over, "you won't believe what's- holy **SHIT!**"

"Rei?" Shinji gasped as he fell back to the ground from where he'd started to climb to his feet.

"I asked you a question!" Asuka yelled, "what do you think you're doing here?"

"This is the strangest day of my life," Shinji sighed.

"Oh, that- dad came charging in about twenty minutes ago and had half the police on the planet with him- I sort of freaked and ran after you."

"This changes everything," Asuka groaned.

"What do you mean?" Rei asked as she turned back to stare at Shinji- still trying to believe her eyes.

"If it was just me? Gendou would have just shrugged and shut the program down," Asuka explained tiredly, "now he'll move heaven and earth to get you back."

"Dad?" Shinji looked from Rei to Asuka, "what about dad?"

"Why would he want me back? All he's done for the last five years is treat me like a stranger."

"He might not give a rat's ass-- but Yui will."

"Mom?" Shinji jumped to his feet, "moms alive?"

"Yeah but that's if he tells her," Rei sighed.

"There's not much chance of him not," Asuka told her, "that computer work I was doing before I left mostly consisted of E- mailing all the research and test results to every college hooked up to the net. The whole world will know about the Dirac effect by morning."

"Why..." Rei trailed off.

"This is our world," Asuka said, "its a mess but its ours. That little paper reality Gendou took us to is just a plaything for a would-be God."

"Even though it hurts sometimes," Shinji said- speaking in a pained but knowing voice, "at least here you know its real."

Asuka nodded as she reached over- helping him to his feet, "exactly."

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They passed the night talking. Shinji didn't quite know what to make of them- especially Rei. They were so different from what he'd known in 2015, but at the same time, he explained, he'd been so lonely over the past few years that even if they'd arrived cursing his existence he'd have been happy.

Sometime during the night, a meteor shower started. As the streaks of light shot across the sky, the three climbed a small hill to gain a better vantage point.

"So what happens next," Rei asked.

"Well," Asuka said, "we have two options. We wait for Gendou to come looking for you, is the first."

"Or wait for people to start coming here," Shinji said.

"Pretty much," Asuka nodded.

Another batch of shooting stars streaked over and they turned to watch.

"Asuka?" Shinji said as the symphony of light faded, "why did... why did you come across to here?"

While the others couldn't see it, this caused Asuka's cheeks to flush crimson, "um... well..."

"It was you," Rei said.

"Me?" Shinji exclaimed as he sat up.

"She got her mother back," Rei said, "I got to live a normal life and everyone else was more or less given what they wanted in life- all except you."

"The little sneak read my damn journal," Asuka muttered under her breath.

"Well you just left it sitting there half the time," Rei grinned, "but, Shinji, she- and I guess in the end even me- we couldn't just leave you here. Its not fair for us to get everything we wanted and to leave you here all alone."

"Is... is that true?" Shinji whispered.

"Its true," Asuka told him as she sat up and put her hand on his shoulder, "but it wasn't the only reason. Shinji, I don't understand all of what I went through here, but I shouldn't have taken it out on you. You helped me more than you'll ever know and I never apologized once. I'm sorry Shinji, I'm so sorry."

"I..." Shinji's voice broke as tears ran down his cheeks. He pulled his knees up as his shoulders shook with sobs. Asuka moved closer and in response he clung to her like a lifeline. Holding him back, she As the three got up and walked down the hill back to the

makeshift camp- another wave of meteors shot through the sky.

They walked back to the camp together- friends and allies long lost and now reunited. The following day might bring changes to their very reality. But as long as they could share these precious hours of rekindled friendship? Tomorrow could wait its turn.

[]=====[] The End []=====[]

Authors Incoherent babbling

Well gee- it only took me, what? A year to get this @\$% fic finished? *chuckle* it wasn't quite what I'd expected, but I like how the story wound up. As long as it took- i'm glad that I waited, the old ideas I had for the ending were nowhere near as fun. What held me up for so long was the confrontation with Gendou- I had trouble coming up with just how she tripped him up.

Incidentally, I'd like to thank Rion, Lord Darkscythe and everyone else who chimed in- especially Jullien Goodwin, I might not have taken all the advice from the CC y'all sent, but it was ALL useful and appreciated.

Back to the story- some of you might wonder- is Gendou shlupting Akagi in this universe? And which Akagi came over to this reality at that? 'Neeehhh' not gonna tell ^_^ but just ask this- which one would he prefer to have around given a choice?

Anyway, I'm glad this is done, I've had it sitting in the 'coming soon' section forever now. One more fic and my old 'to be written' list will be done, and I can fully move on to bigger and better projects. So what's next on the horizon for the endlessly inane Hotwire? Well, there's always the constant tweaking to my webpage, but in the fic category we have a couple of projects in the works. For instance, there's still 'Days of Thunder'- a El Hazard fanfic whos' outline has been sitting in my 'get these damn things written ya lazy bastard' file for far too long. And there's the newly announced 'Engines of Creation' fic that Strike Fiss-sama is allowing me to write. (As always, thanks be to him for letting me play around with the stuff in his Omoi multiverse.)

And from there? Heh, who knows what the fates- or my insane brainstorming methods may bring!

Well, hope y'all enjoyed the fic.

I'm Out

Email [Hotwire](#)

[Return to Chain Lighting](#)

Disclaimer: Evangelion and its characters are copyright to Project Gainax and creation of Hideaki Anno.

One-shot Shinji/Asuka set in between “Both of You! Dance Like You Want To Win!” and “Magma Diver”.

Author’s notes at the very end of the fic. Enjoy!

Prologue

“You want us to shovel *shit*?!” Sohryu Asuka Langley leapt to her feet, eyes ablaze. Never one for sugarcoating statements, she found the teacher’s suggestion infuriating. “Is it our fault that we have to save you every time an Angel attacks? We’re getting *punished* for this?”

“Miss Langley, if you’ll let me explain—“

She stomped her foot on the ground, not willing to be appeased. “Are we convicts? Why do *we* have to do this?”

The entire class cowered behind their desks, fearful of the redhead’s temper. She had barely been here a week, yet the not-so-subtle way everyone kept their distance from her was striking. Shinji pleaded silently with whatever God existed to make her stop ranting. Someone had to have the balls to stand up and calm her down, someone had to...

His prayers were answered in the form of Touji Suzuhara.

“Sit down, Devil Woman.”

Shinji groaned. That wasn’t really the answer he was expecting. All the students cringed, waiting for the thrashing verbal or otherwise the poor jock had brought upon himself.

Asuka glared at Touji, who stared back, hands behind head in a manner of ultimate relaxation. It didn’t seem to faze him one bit. After a few heartbeats, Asuka sank into her seat. Once down there, she flipped her hair over her shoulder and sneered. “You’re just an idiot, anyways.”

No one spoke. The teacher wiped his forehead with his hideous yellow tie, no doubt wondering why he hadn’t already retired. “Err, thank you, Mr. Suzuhara...”

The redhead started mumbling unintelligibly again, but the storm had already passed. Everyone dared to relax into their seats, but only slightly.

“...err, now... as I was saying... the recent Angel attack left our city in shambles...”

Everyone’s eyes immediately darted over to Asuka. “I already told you, Shinji did that, not me.”

The teacher put up his hands and started sweating profusely. “Fine, Miss Langley, we aren’t here to point fingers. As I was saying... yes, please pass these out for me Miss Horaki... thank you...”

The teacher rambled on. Although whatever he had to say was probably pretty important, Shinji found his attention occupied by something else. Right after Asuka had declared

that the destruction to the city was all his fault, Kensuke shot him a look and typed something on his laptop. Seconds later...

<Liar. I got proof>

Shinji blinked at the red 36-point font Kensuke used for all his personal messages. After his retinas burned through his eyes, he typed back: <What are you talking about?>

The response was immediate. <Check it out>

A new window popped on screen. After viewing it, Shinji closed the window and sighed. <You really shouldn't be videotaping Evangelions in combat. Isn't that a security breach or something?>

He could see Kensuke snicker at his screen. <I'm documenting it, not taping it>

<Is there a difference?>

Kensuke turned around, shrugged at him, and accepted a paper Hikari passed out. Seeing as how she was still on the other side of the room, Shinji replayed the "documentary" that was sent. Even though the video was captured without sound, Shinji could still hear the clangs and groans of that fight in his mind.

Israfel.

He shook his head when the giant purple Eva was thrown into the air and landed face down in the sea, but chuckled when Asuka's Unit 02 cheerily crushed buildings under foot while trying to hack the Angel in two. Then it was Asuka who first lost timing during the synchronized attack, catapulting both Evas into a pit of fire and molten rock...

The video cut out briefly after blanking out. Then it started shaking up and down, giving a dizzying view of both sky and ground. It made the Third Child feel queasy just *looking* at it. After the zoom tried to focus (and failed), the video spun around and Shinji found himself video to face with—

"Aida Kensuke!"

On reflex, Shinji slammed his laptop shut and looked around dazedly. Hikari pulled Kensuke's ear and demanded to know why he threw the paper in the trash. He replied that he didn't want to come. She yelled that his opinion didn't matter; it was a school function and he must attend.

Remembering his oath to help a friend in need, Shinji raised his hand. "Can... can I have a paper?"

Instead of having Hikari answer him, Asuka slammed her paper down on his desk. "Read it." Shinji did so...

On Growing Roses...

By: Karina Kineshi (coronaflare@mail.com)

"What kind of a lame ass title is *that*?"

Shinji shuffled beside me, still examining that paper. “On Growing Roses...” he mumbled. I didn’t know how he could walk and read at the same time, especially since he had his face buried in it.

I rolled my eyes. “Geez, it’s not *that* interesting.”

He stared at it for a couple of seconds more before folding it in quarters and giving it to me. “Misato will make us do this, you know.”

I sneered, grabbed the paper, and stuffed it into my schoolbag. Despite the woman being a total slob when it came to living, she was actually quite an environmentalist. Even had those crazy color-coded bins in her kitchen, one for glass, one for paper, one full of beer cans... “Is this the thanks we get for saving them from the Angels?”

He shrugged. “I guess this is the least we can do after destroying half the city.”

As much as I wanted to come back with a snappy answer, I found I couldn’t. It was true. “Well, those buildings shouldn’t have been in the way then.”

It was a flyer advertising EarthSave day. Oddly enough, I didn’t remember seeing this date circled on the calendar at home, because I’m sure Misato would never let something like this get by her. Rumor was that it had been declared just because our latest fight left the south side flattened. Fortunately, we found out that there hadn’t been any people hurt and they were going to clear that area for a park...

“They want us to plant trees? Roses?”

Shinji nodded. “This part we’re working on is supposed to be a rose garden. But, the area hasn’t been cleared of rubble and stuff yet.”

I put my hands on my hips. “How the hell do you know that?”

“It was in the paper. They must want us to move the rocks first...”

Sweaty manual labor. Hauling boulders bigger than Touji’s ego. Throwing smelly compost on rose beds. Putting up with tree-hugging hippies. All at eight in the morning.

Oh yeah. This was going to be loads of fun.

“What I still can’t believe is...” I opened the door to Misato’s apartment and strode inside, “... our teacher has the gall to call this a ‘field trip’.”

“I guess it’s better than being lectured on Second Impact...”

I fished around in my briefcase and threw the flyer on the table. He had a point. I don’t know which was the greater evil, but I’d much rather be moving than sitting around listening to something I’ve heard before. Besides, Mr. Sasaki was just parroting whatever NERV told the public. It was a lie.

“Hey Shinji?” When I got no answer, I took off my shoes and sighed. He probably already had his earphones in and was relaxing on the couch, staring blankly at the ceiling.

After changing out of my uniform and into my lounge clothes, I took something else out of my schoolbag. “Do you know anything about this?”

Shinji took a temporary break from his music (it was Tuesday, Tuesday is Vivaldi day) and stared at the items in my hand. “You got more?”

I scowled and waved the love letters in front of his face. I must have had at least ten clenched in my fist. “Your friends are all morons. Every guy in the *school* is a moron. Though I have to admit...” I picked out a random letter and read the front. “... it’s flattering to be called ‘An Angel Incarnate’.” I put them on the table and sat down beside Shinji. “I really hope there’s no double meaning in that.”

He smiled at me. “Writing love letters isn’t easy, you know.”

“And what would you know about writing love letters, Third?”

Shinji blushed and put an earplug back in. “Nothing, really.”

I picked up all the letters again and started shuffling them. “‘The One I Love Is you’, ‘my Phoenix Rising’, ‘Lean on Me’, ‘you Burn my soul’, ‘if being with you is the Price of Life, I’ll pay it...’... *Scheisse*. They’re freakin’ terrible at addressing these.” When I came across one vulgarly titled “I Smell Sex and Candy”, I instantly ripped it up and fumed. “Morons.”

The boy beside me kept gazing at the ceiling.

It was about this time I realized... I was bored.

God save us all.

“Hey Shinji... have you ever written a love letter before?”

He blinked, quickly shook his head and stammered. “N-No.”

“Do you want to learn how?”

The Third Child stared some more. “Uh...”

I figured, hell, maybe he’d like to learn. And it would be nice to know that all men weren’t idiots and get a love letter done the right way for once.

I grabbed his arm and hauled him to his feet when he didn’t answer. Done. “I’ll teach you how... but only because you’re a spineless loser who could use my help.” I whirled him into a chair at the kitchen table and reached on top of the refrigerator. I handed him an assortment of pens and put my hands on my hips. “Now, thank me.”

It wasn’t a suggestion.

“T-Thank you, Asuka...” His hands were shaking.

I grinned and gestured to the flyer on the table. “Flip that over. Yes. That’s your canvas. In your hand you have the power to... yeah, pick that up... now, the first thing you have to do is address it.”

When he didn’t move for several seconds, I knew that he was in trouble.

“You know, a salutation.”

He blinked.

“You do know what a salutation is, right?”

“Yeah... but... what am I supposed to...” he trailed off.

I fought the urge to give up so soon; after all, if anyone could teach a weak willed boy to

become a Casanova, it was me. I then realized how absurd that sounded, even in my mind. My God, what mess have I gotten myself into now? “You’re going to take a lot of work.”

The boy sighed.

I clapped my hands together, trying to revive my falling spirit. “Now listen up. Let’s start with the basics. First, the paper. Well... if you want to wow the girl you’re writing this to, simple white paper won’t do. You get your wallet out, pay an extra yen for nice paper. Most guys don’t know that it’s all about presentation. Stationary with hearts, bunnies, sunshine, whatever. Bonus points if scented.”

Shinji nodded and stared into the space behind me. He wasn’t looking at me anymore, and I hate it when people blank out while I’m talking. I hate that almost as much as wet hair on my shoulders.

“Hey, Shinji?” That must have been too much for him to process.

It’s only stationary, Shinji. I thought. *If you can’t handle—*

My thoughts were interrupted as a shadow fell over the table from behind. Shinji’s eyes had a crazed, almost frightened glint. “M-M... Misato... you’re—“

“*Misato?!?*” I spun around; right into our guardian’s smiling face.

“Hello, Shinji.”

This woman must take great pleasure in giving me heart attacks. Acting as composed as possible, I coolly breathed, “Hello, Misato.” I simultaneously scooted over and tried to cover her sight of the table. If she found out I was teaching Shinji how to write a love letter...

Oh God.

Misato didn’t seem to see. “What are you guys doing?”

My eyes flitted over to Shinji, and he started stammering in a pathetic attempt to buy time. The look I gave him said that if he didn’t come up with something *fast*, it would be his skinny neck I would wring. He spluttered, “Asuka... well, she n-needed... no, wanted to show—“

C’mon, think!

“—show show... show you this!” I snatched the flyer out of Shinji’s hand and thrust it at Misato. Our guardian raised an eyebrow at my abnormally loud voice. I dropped it down a few decibels, cursing myself. “We’ve... we’ve got a field trip tomorrow... and... and... and we need your signature on the bottom!”

Lame, Asuka. Really lame.

Misato examined the paper after questions of my sanity pooled in her eyes. “There isn’t a line for me to sign on,” she finally said. Her eyes narrowed.

“Well... um... the teacher said we had to get a signature!” I nudged Shinji with my elbow, and he started nodding his head. “Yeah. So sign it.”

Her eyes narrowed even further.

Dammit. I thought there was a signature involved. At my old school, the staff wouldn't let you go anywhere unless you had permission from your guardians. Liability and whatnot.

"You guys aren't just saying this to get my signature right?"

I quirked an eyebrow. "Why would we want to do that?"

"In case you want to get in my bank account."

What?

Shinji turned around with a confused look. "Why would we want to do that?"

"It's empty, Misato," I said dryly. "If I was going to go through all that trouble, I'd choose a person who—"

"Atta girl. I was just kidding, anyways." Our guardian grinned, took a pen from the table, and scratched her name onto the front of the flyer. She sighed and pulled off her shoes. "Um... if anyone needs me, I'll be in the bathroom." Misato then started removing clothing before she even *got* to the shower, dropping her blouse to the ground before sighing again and closing the door.

We sat there and stared after her. When I looked down at Shinji, I found him strangely unaffected by the encounter. Most men would have rivers of blood gushing out of their nose. "No decency whatsoever." I commented. "That's just sick."

"Maybe she had a bad day."

"Whatever..." I flipped the paper over again. "Back to work. You've got this. Now, the pen. It doesn't really matter, any pen will do. But remember, blotches and spots are sloppy. You'll get a date if the pen is scented, and she's in the bag if you do it the old fashioned way."

"Old fashioned way?"

I smiled, almost conspiratorially. "Calligraphy."

At the mention of that word, Shinji paled. Yes, I knew how hard it is to write those characters, but it really showed that the sender of the letter cared. Also, attention to detail is critical when writing to females. "Asuka, I don't know if this is such a good idea."

"Of course it's a good idea!" Did he *dare* doubt me? A female? I pounded my fist on the table and effectively shut his mouth. "Every guy in love is a blubbering idiot, and they've got to learn how to do it right, dammit! You're a blubbering idiot even when you're *not* in love, so you need all the help you can get. Got it?"

He nodded his head quickly. "G-Got it."

"Good. Now, the body of the message... you know the salutation? Ignore that. Most guys writing it look like dumbasses, and it really isn't needed. We like to get straight to the good part: the message. Do you understand all this?"

"Yes."

He didn't sound so sure of himself, but I had to continue. "The message is quite simple. This is where you write poetry."

“Poetry?”

I nodded. “Poetry. C’mon Third, if you just wrote down something childish like “I lurv you lots n’ lots”, it’s a waste of stationary. You’ll run home crying to your SDAT because it’s the only loving you’ll *ever* get. Even an attempt at poetry is better than nothing at all. If anything, the girl will think it’s adorable you tried. But if you do it right, she’ll be falling all over you. That’s how important it is.”

We both gazed at the flyer, awestruck by the power. Or maybe, Shinji was just lost and I was impatient.

“It’s not going to get up and dance, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

He snapped out of his thoughts and apologized. “Sorry. I just... I can’t write a poem.”

“Sure you can.” I nudged his shoulder. “Just think of the girl you like. What do you want to say to her? What is something you share with her? How much do you love her? Why? Talk about her looks, that’s always a plus. Her red hair shining, the way her cute mouth pouts, how smart she is, how she is the most beautiful girl in Tokyo-3...”

Shinji stared at me. “So... I’m supposed to be writing a poem to you?”

That statement took a couple of moments to register, but when it finally did sink in, I shot up from my stool. It tipped over and clattered to the linoleum. “What?! What did you say?”

The boy stammered to explain, and he’d better be coming up with an explanation *fast*. “I-I mean... you started t-talking about red hair, and I thought... I thought you wanted me to write about you. You’re the only... you know. Red hair...”

It was my turn to stammer something. Actually, I went off onto that tangent because I was envisioning *Kaji* writing a love letter to me. Shinji ain’t no *Kaji*, but it would be nice to get a love letter done the right way for once...

“Yeah, that was part of my plan.” I said haughtily, hoping he didn’t catch the waver in my voice. “Since I know you don’t like anyone, what better person to practice on than me? I’m beautiful, smart, sexy, an Eva pilot...”

A blast of hot steam on my neck cut off my self-praise. “I’m done,” Misato announced.

Whoa, that was quick...

Instead of helping Shinji on the fine-tuning, I decided that he needed time to write the poem on his own. It certainly isn’t something I can watch him do, because everyone has their own way of doing it. “I’m going in *first*. *You* keep on working.”

“Um... okay.”

Misato, who was toweling her hair, gave me a curious look as I brushed past. I rolled my eyes and shut the bathroom door. Once safely inside, I put my elbows on the sink, cradled my head in my hands, and stared at the drain. “Why am I doing this?”

Outside, I heard Misato closing the door to her own room. After that, silence. Shinji most likely had his headphones in his ears, Vivaldi’s “Autumn Concerto” humming away inside his brain. He’d stop every once in a while and chew on the middle of his pen when inspiration ran dry. Yes, the *middle* of the pen, not the end like most people. Once struck

with a good idea, he'd put it back to paper and write again.

I knew his every move.

I'm glad he didn't question my judgment when I told him that handwritten was the way to go. Nowadays, everything is done by computer, and various fonts can be made to look like the prettiest calligraphy. But handwritten letters are always best. It just isn't the same printed out.

I started the ritual of undressing myself, neural plugs always first to come off. Left, then right. After those were free, I turned my head from side to side. I need a haircut.

Someone knocked on the door. "Asuka?"

I did what came most naturally and screamed. "You're trying to peek, you pervert! Stop jiggling the doorknob!"

"I'm not jiggling the doorknob!"

"Yes you are!" I ranted on about how he always tries to catch glimpses of my naked body, and when I get out what kind of torture I'd inflict on him...

Never mind I was still fully clothed.

I finally wound down. "What do you want, stupid Shinji?"

Faint scratching. "I'm done with the poem. What should I do now?"

I pulled my shirt off over my head and waved it at the door, trusting that he wouldn't barge in. "Close it with something. Something cheesy."

"Like what?"

"I dunno... a sentence or two afterwards about... well, anything."

He didn't answer me after this, so I knew that he must have gone back to the kitchen. Ah well. Maybe he gave up. I showered, dried off, and stepped outside. No sign of Shinji or Misato, but the television was blaring in the adjacent room. If I didn't already know Shinji didn't like TV., that's where I would have guessed he would be.

Walking into my room, I flipped on the light while rubbing my hair. The whole room was meticulously clean except for a single chair out of place. That chair was sitting in the middle of the floor. I walked closer, and found the flyer. "On Growing Roses...", it said on the front. I turned it over.

August 3, 2016

Miss Sohryu Asuka Langley...

I shook my head. We could work on salutations later. I could tell that he was having a difficult time with that one; there were numerous scribbles and erasings around that area. Old fashioned for sure, he even included the date and the "miss" before my name.

I liked it. Shows the guy actually had respect for us instead of thinking that we were just an easy way to sex. Or whatever in the world they were after. I deemed the first impression "good". Would have preferred it to be neater, but that was just me being extremely picky.

“Nice.”

Not wanting to read the poem in between just yet, I forced myself to skip to the ending. A little known secret is that women always save the best for last, despite what I said earlier about getting to the good part first. My heart pounded.

Zum Stern der meine Nacht beleuchtet,
Shinji Ikari

An ending in German? “To the star that lights up my night?” I wrinkled my nose. What kind of a way was that to end a letter? “This better have something to do with your poem, you’re losing points here Third.”

But... where would he learn the German? And why?

I shook my head and dismissed it as a fluke. It was thoughtful, that’s for sure, but without knowing what it tied in with... ah well. Now it was time for the poem. I made myself put the flyer down for a moment. It must have had something to do with stars; otherwise that ending wouldn’t make much sense. Could it be possible allusion to when we went stargazing together during synchronization?

I took a deep breath.

A Special Star

I stared up into the heavens
Looking for a special star;
One caught my eye: I grabbed it -
Very closely, I put it to my heart;
Endlessly, it shined so bright -
Young and pulsating, its brightness grew
One day, I finally understood -
Understood that this star was my love for you.

There really isn’t anything else to say. I can say “I love you” in so many ways, but I’ll stay with the one that you’ll understand the best. Ich liebe dich, Asuka.

...

God help the lucky girl who gets Shinji’s next love letter.

“No, honestly, how did you do it?”

“Um... I... um...”

I couldn’t get a damn wink of sleep last night, trying to solve the riddle known as Ikari Shinji. The social outcast Ikari Shinji? Self-proclaimed extreme introvert Ikari Shinji? Love letter writer extraordinaire Ikari Shinji?

It didn’t make sense.

Misato turned around in her seat and waved at me, all while driving at speeds of over 75 MPH. “I thought it was cute.”

The boy beside me flushed. “It wasn’t that good...”

No no no. This wasn't *possible*. He *had* to copy that poem from somewhere. Internet? One of Misato's corny romance novels? He sure as hell couldn't have written it himself. It was too... good.

I crossed my arms. "Not bad, but not great either. You still need a lot of work."

Thank God I'm much better at lying than I am at telling the truth. At my critique, Shinji relaxed and slumped. "I... yeah."

He's more at ease when people put him down than when people praise him. What a weirdo.

Misato skidded to a halt and announced that we were here. I pulled Shinji's poem out of my pocket and read the front. "Is this the place?" It appeared to be more of a construction site than anything else. Yellow forklifts, bulldozers, and other heavy machinery blocked my view out the window.

"It says that... well..."

Someone tapped on the glass from the outside; I looked up and saw Hikari smiling at me. "Never mind," I said. I folded the paper back up and shoved it in my schoolbag. Why I chose to bring that stupid letter was beyond me. And why I also brought my schoolbag...

It was eight in the morning. Give me a break.

"I'll just pick you up at three, okay?"

Shinji got out of the car, followed by me. "Okay."

I slammed the door and started to walk away, but she rolled down her car window to talk more. I leaned in closer while she grinned, "By the way Asuka, you look very nice in those dungarees. Very American."

"Shut up Misato," I growled uncharitably. You can't wear a school uniform to something like this! And since this horrid denim outfit was the only old clothes I had...

Hikari smiled at me after Misato roared down the street. She wore a t-shirt with blue paint splatters on the shoulders. I couldn't even see her shorts, the shirt being so oversized. "It's about time you showed up. Did you bring your flyer?"

"Yeah."

The park wasn't a disaster area like I had first imagined. Shallow ruts from bulldozers speckled the otherwise flat area, but I didn't see any rubble. When I asked Hikari about this, she explained that they had cleared it yesterday so the "beautification" could start. I snorted, and then asked her where our teacher was. She said he was wandering around here somewhere.

I snorted again.

We walked over to where the rest of our class was gathered, and I made especially sure to stay as far away from Shinji as I could. The boy's presence made me uncomfortable, especially since I couldn't figure him out. I chatted idly with Hikari and another girl named Mayuka until the teacher shuffled up to our little group. He started, "We need partners during this project—"

“I call Hikari!” I cut in.

The man narrowed his eyes. “They’ve already been assigned, Miss Langley.”

Damn.

He pointed to Hikari as I crossed my arms in defiance. “You will be paired with Touji Suzuhara.”

I couldn’t help but snicker. At least I didn’t get the worst of them all. Can you just imagine? That hulking brute tenderly caring for flowers? Hikari didn’t seem thrilled with the suggestion either, but she obediently followed orders.

“Mayuka has Aida Kensuke...”

“Who do I have?”

The man ran an arthritic finger down his list, and I confidently turned around to survey the landscape.

That’s when it hit me.

All the blood pulsed out of my face and drained to my feet. Everyone had a partner already except for one boy drawing circles in the ground at his feet.

Please God, anyone but...

“Ikari Shinji.”

I noted with annoyance that God *never* listens to me.

Figures.

Once Shinji got the hand shovels, we were ushered to our designated corner of the park. The whole place was drier than the Sahara . I looked at the rosebush I was carrying and questioned if it would live. Getting no answer from the roses (I wasn’t expecting one), I asked my teacher where the compost was. “You can’t expect these things to grow without compost,” I explained.

He only gave me a lopsided grin and said quietly, “Oh, you’ll see. It’s a surprise.”

I never, *ever*, want to see that kind of smile from a teacher again.

While walking back to our area, I saw Shinji sitting cross-legged on the ground looking at the potted roses beside him. Every once in a while, he would blink his eyes and keep them closed for a fraction of a second longer than normal.

“Enjoying the view, idiot?”

Shinji snapped his head around and gave me a slight glare. “You don’t have to call me that, you know.”

“Yeah, whatever.” I knelt down beside him and picked up a small spade. Everyone was already hard at work digging the holes to put their roses into. Touji and Hikari were actually working pretty well together, and their dirt mound was the biggest so far.

Shinji moved into position and pointed at a giant orange “X” on the ground. “Here, right?”

“*Obviously.*” I stabbed at the “X” with my spade to loosen the dirt... and found that it was solid as rock. I looked at Shinji with a disbelieving eye and stabbed it again. Solid chunks of dirt chipped off. I started ramming it into the ground repeatedly. “What the hell is the matter with this!”

“Need help, Devil Woman?”

“Not from you, idiot.” I snarled at Touji before ordering Shinji to help me. “Don’t just sit there, dig!”

How ridiculous we must have looked, two powerful Evangelion pilots vainly attempting to loosen packed dirt. As for the other pilot... Ayanami Rei wasn’t in sight.

“Probably... skipped... school... again...” Each syllable was enunciated by a hard thrust. To my satisfaction, the tough earth was only existent in the first two inches. Once Shinji and I carved away a two-foot area, our desperate hacking slowed. Good thing too, because my wrists were starting to hurt. “Where exactly is Wondergirl, anyways?”

Shinji shrugged, and started a more even pace of shoveling. “Maybe she was sick today.”

Could be.

Seeing how he could handle the work, I leaned back on my knees and felt the displaced dirt. The layer beneath was slightly wetter than the one on top. It had a very smooth, non-gritty feeling to it. Clay. Shinji didn’t seem to mind me stopping, and I think it was understood that we should work in turns.

He can take the longer shifts, of course.

Just for idle chitchat, I motioned over to where Hikari and Touji were digging. “Their roses aren’t as big as ours.”

Shinji paused, gave me a strange look, and started digging again. “Their roses aren’t as pretty, either.”

“Are you joking? I’d rather have their red roses than these yellow ones.” I touched a rose, gently enough so it would not be bruised. “They’re... nicer.”

“Yeah.”

I stopped. Why was I saying this? It made me sound like a huge softie for flowers, and that’s not the kind of image I want to convey. He kept on digging, and I changed the direction of the conversation to something that didn’t make me feel uneasy. “Oh look, there’s a tag in the pot.”

Shinji didn’t look up. “A what?”

“You know, the piece of plastic that says the kind of rose it is, idiot.”

“Oh.”

I pulled it out. It had a tiny picture of our yellow roses followed by the given name. You know, hopeless romantic rose breeders would stumble onto a new variety of rose and dub it something sappy. We had people like that all over Germany. I squinted.

Then gasped.

Class 2. Variety: "Evening Stars".

"Huh?"

Growing infinitely more paranoid, I stared at that tag for a sizeable fraction of my life. My thoughts raced to the piece of paper that had been given to me the night before. More specifically, the poem. I must have read and reread that name, making sure it wasn't some trick of the light.

"Evening Stars," I murmured.

I threw my hands in the air in frustration. All right. That's it! I was getting to the bottom of this silly love letter nonsense once and for all. That boy must have the greatest dumb luck of any kid I've ever met. This was just too huge of a coincidence.

I tapped Shinji on the shoulder and glared at him. Well, maybe "tap" is not the correct word for it; he lost his balance and toppled over into the dirt. I looked around me to make sure no one was listening. "All right Third, how'd you do it?"

"Do what?"

Shinji gazed at me with those annoyingly confused eyes, and that made me even madder. Didn't he have any *clue*? I've lost so much time thinking about this, and all he could say is 'do what'? I leaned forward. "How'd you write that love letter?!"

"What do you mean?" He blinked, and I gasped. That's when I *knew*. Shinji wasn't playing stupid; he honestly didn't know what I was talking about.

Shinji wrote it himself.

If he hadn't written it, he would have gotten defensive. This simple fact left me speechless. That poem was far better than any love poem I had ever read, and the feeling behind the letter almost moved me to tears. And the sad thing was, he gave me the impression that he didn't even *try* to make it good.

I didn't speak, not really knowing what to say. My only two paths were dead ends. If I admitted it was good, that would show weakness on my part. If I said it was bad, I would be lying to myself and the conversation ends there. I wanted to hear an answer from his mouth, explaining why such a boring boy can turn out such a fantastic letter.

What do you mean?

I went for the option that would make me feel the best.

"I mean..."

I bit my lip. Don't blow your cover, Asuka! Hide it under an insult! An insult! "Well... for an *amateur*, you didn't do half bad. I mean... yeah... stop looking at me like that."

A bright flush rose in his cheeks, and to my horror, I felt the same heat crawl into my own. Embarrassed, he resumed digging again, if you could call stabbing at the ground digging. Part of me was tempted to hit him for having such a stupid expression on his face, but the other part of me was angry that I was hesitant to do so. I chose not to storm off to the nearby Port-O-Let. No, that would be an admission of weakness. He would think I was lying to him.

Instead, I turned to look at the roses and decided to give him the cold shoulder. I knew that he didn't really deserve it, but it was sloppiness on my part. Sloppiness because I didn't plan out what I was going to say before I said it. I guess ignoring him was more to my benefit than to his. This way I wouldn't say anything dumb.

Trying to act detached, I rubbed a petal in between my fingers. Soft, almost velvety. If I pressed too hard though, a brown depression of my fingerprint appeared. Roses are so frail. Supposedly, in the language of flowers, a rose says "I love you". A dozen roses means "I love you lots", while a single rose means "romantic and mysterious". I don't know, I think a single rose is indirectly saying "I'm a cheapskate".

But in all seriousness... roses wither, blacken, and die. Why would anyone use it as a declaration of love? Doesn't matter how vibrant the color is, it still dies. Even white roses turn black.

Kaji once told me that all the colors meant different things. He came to my dorm and looked around before he went back to Germany. He said red meant passion. That was the most frequent color I found waiting for me in my college dorm, no doubt from my posse of horny college boys. They must have had a Lolita complex, considering I was only 13 at the time. I got a couple of white roses, and Kaji said those meant purity. I don't know why the hell guys gave me *those*.

Our roses were yellow.

I scanned all around me. Reds, whites, a couple of corals, even pinks, but Shinji and I had the only one with yellow flowers.

I never got yellow roses. What does that color mean?

"Hey Shinji—"

"Hey Asuka—"

...

What? Still synched?

We just stared at each other, not really sure what to make of that. It broke the silence so quickly, and so unexpectedly. That made for a very awkward situation, especially since Hikari and Touji strolled by at the *moment* it was said.

"Say... what are you doing?"

Shinji face flared, but I couldn't find it in myself to tear my eyes away. Why? I... I guess I don't really know. We probably would have kept staring at each other if I hadn't realized a depressingly simple fact. If Shinji's face was red, I'd hate to see what color mine was.

"Um... Asuka?" Hikari said tentatively. "Are you finished?"

Shinji was the one who answered. "We're finished... digging I mean." As if this was discomfiting to him, Shinji started to blush again. I regained my dignity and stared up at the two looming over us. Hikari had a decidedly worried look in her eyes while Touji... well, he wasn't looking at me.

"Don't you guys have to put that in the ground first? You can look at each other all you

want later.”

Touji’s tone made my blood boil. Thankfully, I didn’t have to resort to violence. Hikari did it for me. “Why can’t you keep your big mouth *shut*?” the class rep demanded. She dragged him away by his ear towards the podium, where everyone was gathering.

The others had already finished their planting, their roses standing tall in the hard soil. One hole wasn’t deep enough for a bush of lavender flowers, and it was leaning at a 45-degree angle. The two students assigned to that one sprinted over and saved it before it slumped to the ground.

Not wanting to make myself appear lazy, I took a small shovel of dirt out of the hole and let it drop on top of the mound beside it. It looked deep enough to me.

“I guess we’re supposed to put this in,” Shinji said quietly.

“I guess.”

I was analyzing how to take the damn thorny bush out of the pot when Hikari came back with a beat up, rusty watering can in her hands. She said, “One of you is supposed to get the water, and the other one...” she pointed to a gathering of students, “... is supposed to go over there for a special surprise.”

Hikari actually sounded excited about it. A special surprise? I rolled my eyes, “Gee Shinji, it’s an awfully tough choice for me. What do *you* want to do?”

He paused. “Are you sure you want me to choose, Asuka?”

I rocked back on my knees and stood up. Contemptuously brushing dirt off my thighs, I sighed. “Whatever.” I forgot to add, “It’s too lame to waste my time thinking about it”.

Shinji didn’t take long to ponder this. “Then... I guess I’ll do the watering and the planting.”

“Fine then.” Typical answer. I shouldn’t have even bothered asking; I knew what his answer was going to be anyways. Shinji tried to stand, but I waved him down. “No, don’t get up. I’ll spare you the walk over and get your damned water. I’m going that way anyways.” I whirled around and wiped my forehead with the back of my hand, not wanting to see his reaction. Stupid boy probably thought I was going soft on him. In reality, I just wanted a refreshing drink.

Ugh. This is so... stupid.

When I trudged away, it struck me to how incredibly hot the sun was. And the jeans didn’t do much for keeping me cool either. The ground seemed to shift right before my eyes.

Keep it together, Asuka. Can’t be passing out before the surprise.

“Oh goodie...” I mumbled. The tree-huggers and flower enthusiasts were using us for child labor. At least they had the compassion to give us water. Problem was, the water was in tiny sake sized cups and it was also lukewarm from sitting on the end of the tailgate. I downed six and didn’t bother to throw the used cups in the “proper trash receptacle”.

It was too hot, dammit.

I brought back a watering can with a daisy on the front to Shinji. Our roses were already in the ground, and he was patting down the earth around it. Resisting the urge to pour water on him took strength, but I caved in anyway. I told him that he was in my way and if he didn't want to get wet, he should move.

Shinji didn't answer and kept on patting the ground.

"Fine, you asked for it." I tipped the can over slightly, and a bit more water than I had anticipated came out.

He yelped and whirled his head around to look at me. "What was that for?"

I shrugged. "I asked you to move. You didn't say anything."

"What? *You* didn't say anything! You just stood there!" The entire back of his shirt was drenched.

I heard someone call my name, but easily ignored it. "Eh. Whatever. It's not like it didn't feel good. Besides, you should feel honored that Sohryu Asuka Langley chose to pour water on you to alleviate your misery."

He narrowed his eyes at me, and we faced off. Was it a look of annoyance? Sarcasm? Either way, I pulled back a little bit. I found myself wondering why he was making such a big deal out of this, but I suppose I knew the consequences as soon as I poured the water. Was Shinji's spine coming to make a guest appearance? Would he yell at me? I would have yelled right back. Would he ignore me and continue playing in the dirt? I would have said he was spineless.

"Miss Langley...?"

C'mon Shinji.

The unexpected happened.

"Yeah, it did feel kinda good." He rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. Then he *smiled*. "The—"

"Miss Langley!"

"Devil Woman! Get over here!"

I scowled and turned around. "I'm coming already!" I thrust the watering can at Shinji and ran to where approximately half of the students were standing. The other half were tending their roses.

Once I got to the congregation of students, I stopped beside Touji, out of breath. He smirked at me. "You can stare at Shinji all you want later."

I punched him on the arm, hard enough to leave a bruise. "Shut the hell up, stooge."

Our teacher was standing on top of the podium, waving a piece of paper like a flag. Everyone was talking all around me, and the distant jackhammers made his voice carry a grand total of two inches in front of his face. Someone shouted at everyone to keep quiet, and although it didn't have the same commanding air as say, Hikari's did, everyone gradually stopped talking.

The man on the podium shrugged. "Uh, thank you." Injecting some happiness in his

voice, he said, “Is everyone ready for the *surprise*?”

Some muttering. Kensuke popped up beside me, video camera trained on our teacher. “What kind of surprise?”

I pushed the bespectacled boy further away from me; he was invading my private space. “It’s probably something stupid,” I declared.

“For once, you and I agree on something, Devil Woman.”

“If you don’t stop calling me that, I’m going to kick you.”

Touji seemed unaffected.

“And then I’ll sic Hikari on you,” I added.

He rubbed his ear, no doubt remembering previous encounters with the class representative. That effectively kept his mouth shut. I smirked.

It was at this point I noticed a giant green barrel being rolled onto the podium. Several able-bodied boys from our class were pushing it up the incline and placed it beside the teacher. It was bigger than any barrel I’d ever seen before. Our teacher smiled and patted the barrel as if it was a loyal pet. Most of the students took a step back as if the man had lost his mind. “Did you bring your flyers? And your partner’s?”

Kensuke stopped recording long enough to pull his out of a pocket. “He’s been making a huge deal about this all day.”

“Yeah, I know.” Touji snorted and unfolded his, “Mr. Sasaki is just... yeah.”

I narrowed my eyes in suspicion. “What is this stupid thing about? Why are the flyers —“

Our teacher clapped his hands to get our attention. I’d never seen him look so enthusiastic about something before. If only his Second Impact lectures were delivered with the same gusto, I wouldn’t be falling asleep during most of them. “Now make a single file line here in front. Have your papers ready.”

Everyone obeyed, and this was when I started getting nervous. I didn’t have Shinji’s flyer, but I did have my own. It was tucked away inside my pocket. To be on the safe side, I positioned myself in the back behind Kensuke so I could see what was going on.

At the front of the line, I saw a shy girl named Tomoe hand two flyers to Mr. Sasaki. He smiled, took them, marked something down on a clipboard, and gave two black things to her. I couldn’t see very well from this far away, but they appeared to be computer disks.

“Wait a second... isn’t today report card day?”

Kensuke nodded at Touji. “Yeah... it is.”

Our report cards? So soon? I did a double take as Tomoe walked by. On the front of the disks I saw her name followed by our class number. The white label confirmed that it was our grades. My eyes darted over to Mr. Sasaki again, and I caught him in the act of...

Slicing the flyers into ribbons and throwing the confetti into the green barrel.

“What the hell?” Touji exclaimed while I recoiled. He had the same reaction I did. We

both turned to Kensuke for an explanation. Of course, I did it more discreetly as to cover up that I had no idea what was going on. “Uh... what just happened?”

“Are you stupid?” I answered. “He’s *obviously* cutting the flyers into pieces and throwing them into the barrel.”

Touji glared at me. “I figured that out, but why?”

Kensuke took off his glasses, polished them on his shirt, and put them back on. “I see... this is the huge surprise he was telling us about.”

“What?” The other boy leaned forward, and I couldn’t help but move in slightly closer to hear what Kensuke had to say. The sound of another pair of flyers being shredded in two echoed through the air.

“Once we get up there, we give him our two flyers and he gives us our report cards...”

Giving him our flyers? But...

“... and then he rips them up...”

I only have my flyer, with Shinji’s letter on the back...

He stopped. “Do you know what that green barrel is, Touji? It’s a compost maker. You put trash in there, fruit peelings, leftovers, stuff like that. Since paper also decomposes, you can use it to make mulch.”

My heart sank. More paper was being ripped up, and I could feel myself breaking in the process. The first love letter Shinji Ikari ever wrote (and perhaps the only), would be torn up, dirtied, and spread on the ground to help thorny flowers grow.

Once half of the line turned their flyers in, our teacher rolled the barrel a quarter turn to the right and resumed collecting paper. The whole world moved in slow motion as I watched flyer after flyer torn and thrown into the machine. I felt the folded up paper through my jeans and thought to myself...

This is unfair.

I didn’t know that I had been standing still. Because of this, people from behind me in line cut in front. I was at the very end. Without really thinking, I turned around and started walking aimlessly, trying to make sense of what I was feeling inside.

Grief?

Remorse?

No, I think it was confusion.

My flyer in exchange for my report card. I watched other students cheerfully hand over their papers to receive those black disks, as if they meant nothing to them. Just a piece of paper. Something so insignificant that they’ll toss them out without a care or a second glance.

I looked up into the heavens...

It meant something to *me*.

Looking for a special star...

In my aimless wanderings, I found myself back at our roses. Shinji was still sitting on the ground, watering. I don't know how long I stood over him, watching his back rise and fall with each breath. When he finally did notice my presence behind him, he gazed up at me and asked, "Hey... are you... okay?"

One caught my eye: I grabbed it...

"Of course I'm okay, idiot. Why wouldn't I be?" I didn't say this with my usual confidence, but quietly enough so that only he could hear. I really didn't mean to sound like I wasn't in command for once, but I didn't know what else I could say without making me feel worse.

I bent over mechanically and picked up my bag. We locked eyes. He always seemed to know just when I was lying. "Something's wrong," he said. The water droplets on the rose petals flickered.

Very closely, I put it to my heart...

Should I tell him? Tell him that his letter is going to be mulch. Tell him you have to give it up. Surely he doesn't want to have his love letter being degraded like this. Tell him...

Then it struck me. He wasn't the one who cared about his letter.

I was.

Endlessly, it shined so bright...

"It's nothing." And I walked away.

Young and pulsating, its brightness grew...

I headed back towards the podium, towards the fate of Shinji's letter. The line had dwindled down to a total of three people, and it wouldn't be long. All the shouts and talking of the students around me blended into a chorus of nonsense. But I heard one voice very, very well.

"And you're the last one, Miss Langley."

One day, I finally understood...

I hugged my schoolbag close to me while the teacher looked down on me with expectant eyes. I lowered my head and saw the bulge in my pocket. Once I looked up again, two floppy disks were in Mr. Sasaki's hand. Shinji Ikari and Sohryu Asuka Langley.

"Do you have papers?"

Understood that this star was my love for you.

Love? Do I understand it?

No, of course not... but...

I unzipped my schoolbag. "Yes. I do."

The End

Epilogue

After getting home from school that day, a young girl sat down to write.

August 4, 2016

Shinji,

I'm sorry I was too stubborn before, but now is the best time (the only time) to swallow my pride and tell you. That letter you wrote, it was wonderful. Really. Please don't think I'm lying to you. I guess... I guess I was so taken aback by how well written it was, I just didn't know what to say to you. In truth, it was the best love letter I had ever received.

There. I said it. Aren't you proud of me? Aren't you? Please say you are... because it was hard to admit it to myself and even harder to write it on paper...

Wait. There is another reason behind this letter, and it has to do with yours as well. You might already know this, but about the "big surprise" our teacher had planned for us... Turns out we had to give our flyers to him. I only had one, and this was the same paper that had your letter written on the back, in exchange for our report cards. As much as I didn't want to, he told me to hand it over. They were going to shred it, decompose it, and turn it into mulch.

...I had to.

But...

I refused.

Instead, I gave the teacher all the love letters that had accumulated inside my briefcase. I didn't hesitate at all, because I finally *understood*. They had no real love in them, and that's why they were bad. He threw those into the mixture and they are now nourishing the roots of the roses.

Our roses.

However, Mr. Sasaki was still stubborn and insisted that the flyers were the only ones that would do. We don't get our report cards now because of that. So if you were wondering why, there's the reason. Sorry. Misato's going to have to pick them up, but I think it's better this way. First off, I don't have to hand my crappy grades to her myself, and second...

I get to keep your letter.

You know, I feel much safer knowing that this will never reach your eyes, so therefore I can say here what I couldn't say to you before. Even if you did stumble on this... I'm glad that you couldn't understand. It helps to know German, you know.

Well, there really isn't anything else to say. I could humor myself and write you a love letter in return, but girls shouldn't write stuff like this to boys. But since you bothered to find out how to say "I love you" in German, I could at least use my limited kanji knowledge and say...

Aishiteru, Shinji.

Kon'ya wa hitotsuboshi ga kirei desu,
Sohryu Asuka Langley

The evening stars are beautiful tonight.

With a contented smile, she languidly reached for a silver picture frame on her desk. One that had been devoid of a photograph since the day it was bought. One that was waiting for the perfect snapshot, because no ordinary one would do for such elegance.

The girl had found that picture.

She carefully cropped it with scissors, ensuring the fit. She then removed another piece of paper from her pocket and carefully unwrinkled it. She folded the two letters, one old and one new, to fit the dimensions of the frame. Once that was completed, she secured the felt backing and turned the frame over to admire her work.

On the front, a postcard with two yellow roses winked back at her from underneath dewy leaves. In the corner, printed with beautiful calligraphy: "Yellow represents friendship. A friendship that suffers the thorns will yield striking flowers". The girl smiled again, and set the frame to its original place.

Two people knew the significance of the yellow roses, but only one would ever know what lies beneath.

~~~~~

Author's notes: I must admit, this was sitting for a while in my "Complete us, you wench!" folder until mentions of a WAFF-a-thon came up. You readers asked me to do a sappy one-shot S/A that fits into the *real* Eva timeline, and there it was. This is a semi-continuation of "To My Dearest Honey", and the picture frame reference was something only those readers would catch. I think it stand well enough on its own though.

A couple well deserved words of gratitude... firstly, to "my dearest honeys" Rev'd and Javier Caine. After all my grammar/diction/syntax/stupid mistakes, I think my prereaders *deserve* the title. To Lord Malachite for giving me suggestions on salutations (\*starry eyed\*), and to all the authors I discreetly stole fic titles from. If you don't know what I'm talking about, never mind then. ^\_^ Confession time: I'm not a good enough writer to pen that wonderful "A Special Star" poem you saw above. Thanks to Sean for sending that to me.

You men now have the power to please your women when it comes to writing love letters, so stop disappointing us already guys! Get those calligraphy pens to scented stationary and send all attempts (failed or otherwise) to [coronaflare@mail.com](mailto:coronaflare@mail.com) along with some constructive criticism. Okay, maybe not the first part, but seriously... give me criticism. It's the only way a writer can get better. Until later... keep on writing!

Manga - Addicts Presents:

Red Rose, White Day

An Evangelion Fanfiction

Version 2 - 03/13/2001

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Red Rose, White Day written by Jino Turtlegod

WAFF Warning! Discontinuity Warning! OOC Warning! All Standard Non-Lemon Warnings Apply!

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Part One: Red Rose of Frustration

Shinji Ikari, a young Japanese teenager with dark hair and dark blue eyes, sat at the kitchen table trying to catch up with the lessons he had missed due to his extra-curricular activities. Misato Katsuragi, his roommate and guardian, had once cheerfully lectured him on the importance of study and had then proceeded to give vague threats about what would happen if she received any more notes from the school about his poor performance. Shinji, being rather timid, had crumbled like a piece of chalk under a hammer and immediately applied himself to his studies. But today, Shinji felt distracted as he tried to do his Physics homework.

The whole flat was rather warm and muggy due to the eternal summer of Japan, a state that had been in effect since the turn of the century fifteen years before. However, it isn't the weather that is distracted the boy. He glanced at the girl who sat across him, he tried hard not to seem like he was looking at her. Asuka Langley Soryu. She of the golden-red

hair, the clear blue eyes, and the mercurial personality.

It had been months since the need for them to live together had passed. They no longer needed to train to move and think as one, or what Misato called "Synchronization Training". During that one week of intense training Shinji had often despaired of ever understanding the girl. She would belittle him, kick him, order him around, and compete for everything from the TV to the bathroom. Thankfully by the end of the week they managed to read each other like a book and they performed quite beyond what Misato had expected, their synchronicity was perfect- one mind with two bodies. And for a while it was quite thrilling, each felt what it truly meant to be alive.

After that, both gave a sigh of relief that they won't live with each other anymore. Which makes Shinji wonder why they still lived together. It was logical for Asuka to be the one to leave since Misato took him in first and Asuka had complained that she didn't like staying with such an immature pair of roommates.

The flat would be very quiet and peaceful once the noisy girl goes. There wouldn't be anymore bullying, one less person to clean up after, one less person to serve, one less person to worry about.

But would he really want her to leave?

He took in her features, the way the light filtered through her hair as she hunched over at her place at the table as she pored over her textbooks. The way her fingers, delicate yet strong, gripped her pen as she carefully shaped the Kanji of her notes. He watched her give an irritated exhalation and then slump forward on the table, her head rested on several textbooks. His eyes briefly wandered lower and saw the creamy white skin revealed by the way her yellow shirt hang from her body as she lay on her homework. He could see the white fabric of the top of her bra as she pushed herself up back into a sitting position, the sight of which increased the temperature on his side of the room. His eyes were back at his textbooks by the time she finally sat up straight.

"I'm bored." She exclaimed gruffly. The statement had the immediate effect of making Shinji sit bolt upright his knuckles turned white as he gripped the edge of his book. Those words echoed in his mind, dredging up memories that left him confused and embarrassed.

"You can go out once you've finished your homework!" Misato yelled from the living room where she was trying to drink her pet penguin under the table as they watched the news. She had to practice for later when she goes out with her unofficial boyfriend, Kaji.

"Oh, come on! It's a Sunday! I've got to go to church!"

"You're an atheist!" came the witty reply through the door behind Asuka.

Asuka said something in German that sounded very nasty. Shinji knew better than to try and smooth things out between his roommates. Chances were that he'll draw all the fire instead of quenching it. Shinji looked up as he felt her eyes on him. Big mistake...

"Say something, damn it! She can't do this to us!"

The boy gave an inward sigh- so much for staying out of it. "We are a little behind the others you know."

"Damn it! I knew a wuss like you would take her side! She practically has you on a leash you know!" Asuka glared at him in disgust.

"I can help you with your Kanji if you want," he offered with a shy smile. He flinched as he belatedly realized the mistake at his bid to be nice to the girl. Asuka did not like any indication that she couldn't handle something on her own, and worse that she should accept help from someone she had publicly declared as her inferior.

He watched in fascinated terror as he noticed the familiar signs of Asuka about to go ballistic. The grim set of her fine jaw, the slight flaring of her nostrils, the sudden flare of her fiery blue eyes, the crease on her forehead as she frowned, and most importantly, the angry tic on her forehead above her left eye. In a way, he found it cute... too bad he wasn't about to tell her that. She stood up so fast her chair flew back and hit the wall. She opened her mouth to say things that she knew would cut Shinji deeper than any physical wound but Shinji surprised her by doing something the both of them never knew that Shinji would actually do.

He stood up at the same time she did, his chair smacked into the counter behind him at the same time hers hit the wall. For a drawn-out moment their eyes locked onto each other. Two souls looking for kindness and acceptance, melded with each other, one as blue as the sea, the other as blue as the sky. They both felt the synchronicity once more flowing between them - their hearts, bodies, and souls moving as one. Then Shinji made his move, still in the preternatural speed with which things were happening. He leaned forward on the table towards her. The anger in her eyes briefly turned into something which vaguely registered in his mind as hope. Then he vaulted over the table using physical strength and agility he didn't know he had and then he was by her side only several inches away from touching her... and he ran out of the kitchen into his room.

Asuka blinked. Shinji had actually ran away, he dropped any sign of an orderly retreat, threw away whatever small amount of dignity he had as he made his escape.

Asuka Langley Soryu was not pleased.

\*\*\*

"-iece of shit! Coward! Pathetic little boy!"

"You should shut up now Asuka," Misato suggested as she watched the girl in amusement at the same time feeling pity for the boy. Asuka had finished her usual repertoire of insults and had just settled on shouting profanity at the boy's closed door. "He's probably not even listening to you, he does own an SDAT player you know."

Asuka looked at her guardian and saw the wisdom in her argument. She glared at the closed door and the whole flat was plunged into thankful silence. She wasn't about to cross the border of his room and she knew he knew it. It was some sort of unspoken agreement between them that the other would not go into the other's room without permission. She really wanted to tear the door apart so she could tear \*him\* apart. But she couldn't make herself cross the line. Her eyes fell on the heart-shaped frame hanging on his door.

A crash, the sound of breaking glass. Asuka smirked in satisfaction as the frame exploded into a shower of broken plastic and glass against his door after she threw it. Misato stood up quickly, bumped the coffee table which turned over and spilled beer and empty cans onto the floor, her mouth open in indignation. She felt anger since it was her gift to Shinji that Asuka just ruined.

They were both surprised as the door suddenly slid open and Shinji stood at the threshold, it meant Shinji had been standing behind it all this time and took Asuka's verbal abuse behind the dubious protection of the thin piece of wood. He looked down at the broken frame and scattered glass. He bent down slowly, still in shock, and picked up the piece of cardboard on which Misato had written "Shin-chan's Lovely Suite".

"So, you finally came out. If you weren't such a coward I wouldn't have-"

The sound of flesh hitting flesh. Asuka slammed against the wall, she and Misato looked

in amazement at Shinji whose hand was still raised from slapping Asuka. Asuka quickly regained her composure as she finally registered the aching warmth spreading on her left cheek and she gingerly touched it with her left hand.

"Why you-" her eyes blazed in fury.

"SHUT UP!" Shinji roared at her. "I've never done anything to you and you kept pushing me around! So what if I'm a pathetic little boy?! At least I'm not a messed up bitch like you!"

"Wha-?!" Asuka pulled back in surprise the fury in her eyes melted before his. Misato was frozen by the uncharacteristic outburst from the usually unassuming boy.

"Shut up, I'm not done yet! I cook for you! I clean up after you! I do your laundry! What do I get in thanks?! You kept telling me how pathetic I am! Not even a 'Thank you Shinji' or a 'Good job Shinji'! You keep hitting me on the head for things you consider stupid! So I'm not as smart as you! So I haven't graduated from college at fourteen! The only reason I'm still alive is because I'm lucky not because I'm good!" Asuka saw the tears slide down his cheek. Misato wanted to rush over to the boy and hold him in her arms, but she knew he had to get these things off his chest before he could accept kindness.

"You're the better pilot! You're the smarter student! You're the most popular person at school! I- I'm just Shinji, stupid Shinji..." his voice finally broke and he retreated into the sanctuary of his room, the door slammed shut behind him.

Asuka felt sick. She picked up the cardboard and saw the wet drops on them. The wetness of tears. Shinji had been crying because of her. Well, he was really weak. Only weak, pathetic people cried. Asuka felt angry with Shinji, but also at herself.

\*\*\*

Shinji sat huddled on his bed, his back against the wall where his bed was flushed into a corner. His arms wrapped around knees which were pulled up to his chest. The tears were drying on his cheeks. How stupid could he be?

Asuka was still on his mind. He thought he liked her. More than a roommate, more than a co-worker, more than a classmate, more than a friend. But that was it, she was a roommate, a co-worker, and a classmate. But a friend? With a friend like her...

Misato's voice broke into his cloud of depression as she requested permission to enter.

"Go away." He said, withdrawing farther into himself.

The door opened and Misato came in with the first-aid kit.

"I said go away."

Misato silently sat beside him on the bed and pulled his leg making him fall on his back.

"Misato!" the young boy protested, struggling to return to his seat.

"Shut up." Misato said it in such a way that "or else" didn't need to be said. Shinji shut up and lay still as Misato began to dress his foot which he finally noticed was cut from the broken glass.

"Thank you." Shinji whispered. Misato had been so good to him, like the mother he never knew, the older sister that he never knew he wanted.

"Wanna talk about it?"

"No."

"If you're wondering, Asuka went over to sleep at Hikari's."

Shinji just nodded in acknowledgement.

"That was something I thought I'll never see..." Misato mused out aloud as she checked the dressing, finally satisfied that it was perfect for her Shin-chan.

"I- I guess I got too angry..."

"Well, that's what happens when you keep a lot of your feelings bottled up. I guess that's

why you're so good at piloting EVA, it's just one very big stress ball for you, something to get all that negative energy out of your system."

Shinji blinked. "I've never thought of that."

The doorbell rang. "It's probably Kaji. Are you sure you're all right? I could, y'know..." Misato gave a vague wave.

The young boy gave a wan smile. "I'll be OK. Go out, you know you deserve it, Misato-san."

"Well, only if you're sure."

"Don't worry about me."

"OK." Misato left the room. Shinji heard her say good-bye to Pen-pen then the sound of the front door as it closed behind her.

Shinji sighed as he settled more comfortably in his bed. He looked over at the calendar pinned on his wall. Tomorrow would be another boring day trying to get around without being embarrassed around Asuka. He was still uneasy around her because of what happened several weeks ago. They had kissed. His first kiss. He really couldn't describe how he felt during the kiss since he had been too nervous and was struggling for air since she had pinched his nose shut, but afterwards after he had regained his breath he felt like he liked it. But that feeling lasted only for a moment as she shattered his frail ego by saying that she thought it was a disgusting mistake and then went to clean her mouth.

Shinji held up his hand against the light. He had slapped her. He really felt guilty about doing that, he didn't mean to... but man, did it feel good.

\*\*\*

"Oh, wow, you're one sick puppy." Hikari commented as she bandaged Asuka's cheek. They were in the living room of Hikari's house. A sweet smell wafted in from the kitchen.

"It's not like that," Asuka grouched, hoping that Shinji's slap wouldn't leave a bruise. For someone so weak looking like Shinji, he really could hit hard when he wanted to.

"But you said-"

"I said I was proud that I made him stand up for himself. I didn't say I liked getting slapped."

"So there's a difference?" The first-aid kit gave a snap as Hikari closed the lid.

"Look, I told you that Shinji has a side of him that I like - the side that's a hero, the side that's more manly than even Kaji. The side of him that jumped into a volcano to save me! The side of him that can stand up to an Angel and rip it apart! That's the side that I like, not the pathetic little boy that he keeps showing people. That's why I tease him, I keep pushing him. Because that's the only time that he could show his true self. I refuse to fall for the little boy! I want the man!" Asuka stood with one foot on the coffee table and a trembling fist held before her as if defying the whole world to prove her wrong.

Hikari looked at Asuka, wondering if her friend was due for a psychological check-up any time soon. "Um, how come you're so sure that the little boy isn't his true self?"

Asuka glared at Hikari because she really couldn't answer that one. "I'm not overly criticizing you for liking the monkey am I?"

"He's not a monkey! And yes you do criticize me! And - oh! That reminds me..." Hikari left her friend and went into the kitchen where her sisters were cooking. Asuka followed and watched as the Horaki girls poured chocolate into molds.

"What's that for?" Asuka asked as she pulled up a chair.

"Tomorrow's Valentine's Day." Little Nozomi said as she finished filling a large heart shaped mold.

"So?"

"Well, unlike in other countries, Japanese girls are supposed to give chocolate to the boys they like during Valentine's day." The elder Kodama replied by the stove where she was stirred a large pot.

"I think I've read about that somewhere..." Asuka thought that it was a stupid tradition,

but she kept her opinion to herself.

"And if the boy likes you too, they'll return the favor on White Day!" Nozomi cried out, her hands clutched together and hearts in her eyes.

"So are you giving anyone chocolate tomorrow?" Kodama asked the silent Asuka. "We know Hikari here's giving someone a special batch, and so's the Squirt," she jerked a thumb at the hyperactive Nozomi.

"No, not really." Asuka mumbled.

"She prefers slapping her boy silly instead of giving him sweets," Hikari quipped, earning her another glare from the redhead.

"Oh, you're into that S&M thing," Nozomi said, her eyes as big as saucers in amazement. Hikari, Kodama, and Asuka wondered where the twelve-year old learned the word.

Kodama shook her head and sighed like an older woman giving a lecture to a young girl. "One catches more flies with honey rather than vinegar."

Asuka stared at the older girl, what the hell did she know about her Shinji? "So who will you be giving chocolates to," she countered.

"Ah, well, all the boys in my class are really cute so they'll all get some. Then I just wait and see who will give me chocolates on White Day and pick from them."

The younger girls looked at Kodama as if they were seeing her for the first time.

"That's ---" Nozomi was at a loss of words at her sister's scheming.

"Well, y'know 'One catches more flies with honey rather than vinegar'." Kodama began giggling in embarrassment.

\*\*\*

"Good Morning, Misato-san!" Toji and Kensuke poked their head into the apartment while an embarrassed Shinji stood aside, wondering why he bothered staying friends with these two.

"Good morning boys," Misato's hand waved from the corner to the living room.

The boys sobbed in happiness. Shinji just grimaced and then pushed his friends out of his house. "We're going," he shouted over his shoulder.

"Bye, Misato-san!" Toji and Kensuke chorused before Shinji managed to throw them out.

"Really, I don't know whether you guys hang out with me only because of Misato," Shinji complained as they walked down the tree lined avenues of Tokyo-3.

"Hey! We've been friends for what? Six- seven months, right?" Toji got Shinji into a headlock while still walking. "No, it's not because of Misato that we hang out with you-

"Though it's a nice bonus," Kensuke cut in as he rummaged in his bag for his video camera.

"Yeah..." Toji held a far away look in his eyes for a moment. A gagging noise reminded him of the boy he held in his arm. "But any way, the reason we hang out with you is..." Toji blinked- he had forgotten what he was supposed to say.

"Because we're all in the same boat," Kensuke filled in as he started filming.

"Yeah, that's it!" Toji had a fist up to his chest and cried manly tears. "It's a bond of brotherhood!"

"GAH!" Shinji finally got Toji's arm off as they got the school in sight. The boy rubbed his neck, "Well, thanks, I think."

Toji and Shinji bumped into Kensuke who had stopped in his tracks. The Three Stooges landed in an undignified heap.

"Hey! Why'd ya stop?" Toji complained from where he lay on top of the pile.

"L-look!" Kensuke pointed with one hand while the other still held the camcorder to his eye. All three boys looked at the school where a lot of girls were busy running around giving packages to boys.

"What's going on?" Toji drawled as he dusted himself off.

"Valentine's Day," Shinji answered in a tired voice as he picked himself up and led the way to the foot lockers to get his school shoes.

"So expecting any Valentine's chocolate?" Toji asked as Kensuke gathered blackmail material on different students.

"Probably the same as last year," Kensuke answered as he changed the disc in his camera. "Some chocolate from the girls who feel sorry about the boys who don't get any."

"Yeah, that's why I hate Valentine's." Shinji said as he unlocked his locker. He shook his head to keep the sad memories at bay- the heartbreak he felt that time when he was twelve and liked that girl-

"What?! You mean the Invincible Shinji doesn't get chocolate by the dozen?" Asuka stood by the stairs leading up to the classrooms, her hands on her hips and her usual smirk on her face which still had a bandage on the left cheek. Toji and Kensuke froze while Shinji just stiffened a little before continuing what he was doing. Asuka became angry at being ignored.

"Um, Toji, Kensuke, these are for you," Hikari interrupted the awkward silence by giving the two boys their chocolate. Kensuke noted that his package was smaller and raised an eyebrow at Toji as if to say "See?".

"Um, Shinji-kun," Hikari held out the package, careful not to get in the way of Asuka's death glare.

"Thank you, Horaki-san," Shinji bowed as he accepted the gift. He felt a little better when Asuka stormed out of the locker room. He reached in for his shoes and found a letter. He looked around and then quickly stuffed the letter into his school bag when no one was looking.

\*\*\*

It was the end of the school day. Shinji, Kensuke, and Toji sat in a circle around Shinji's desk.

Toji whistled in amazement. They stared at the pile of chocolates that sat on Shinji's desk.

"Not only from our year but also from the First and Third years," Kensuke stated in admiration. "Um, Shinji?"

"Yeah, you guys can have some if you want." Shinji replied in a dazed voice. He had really been shocked by the day's events since he had never received so much chocolate during all the Valentine's he had before as he had that day. Girls had kept coming during the breaks and trying to flirt with him with limited success as his timidity came to the fore.

"Thanks!" Toji and Kensuke got some of the store-bought kind leaving the homemade chocolate alone since those were specifically made for Shinji and they didn't want to ruin their karma by taking something not meant for them. Shinji looked down at the pile left on his desk after the pillaging; it was still too large to fit inside his bag.

\*\*\*

Shinji walked alone towards the temple wearing his blue under-shirt, his bag strapped over a shoulder while one hand held his school shirt which he had used to wrap up the rest of the chocolate. He had read the anonymous letter during the lunch break. It was a handwritten note, each stroke of the kanji carefully penned, asking him to go to the temple after school.

Shinji looked up the stairs. He had thought of not going but the fact that someone had given him a letter that he never thought he would receive in his life was sort of a boost to his self-confidence.

He took a deep breath. "I won't run away."

He took the first step.

\*\*\*

Shinji was panting as he finally reached the top of the stairs. "I've got to exercise more," he told himself as he sat down on the topmost step.

"ikari-kun."

Shinji sat up straight. He felt the familiar presence before he even heard her voice. Without even turning around, "Ayanami."

"you came here." Shinji's heart jumped to his throat, he couldn't believe it would be Rei- it's so unlike her. He stood up and turned, looking closely at her. She stood at the top of the stairs and he stood on a lower step which meant that he had to look up at her. For a moment he felt disappointed but also glad, at least he knew her.

"Ah, so-"

"i am supposed to give this to you," She took something from her bag and handed it to Shinji. Shinji took the thing, a huge box of chocolate which was not wrapped up in fancy wrapping paper - one of the popular kind given by the richer girls to their boyfriends. The fact that Shinji knew about that fact meant that he did pay attention to things like these.

Shinji looked at Rei. "Why didn't you give it to me at school?"

Rei closed her eyes in thought. She opened her eyes and spoke, "because i was not sure i should."

"What do you mean?"

She looked at him, her red eyes searching in his blue eyes. He felt uncomfortable when she leaned towards him until their faces were merely inches apart. She blinked. And then she smiled, making Shinji feel a whole lot better. Her smile was like a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day.

She sat down on the steps and he did the same. They both looked at the setting sun.

"ikari-kun, i care for you." Shinji's heart stopped, Rei had actually expressed feelings and to him of all people. She pressed both her hands to her heart. "my heart feels strange when i am with you, whenever you are hurt, whenever you are sad, whenever you are happy, i feel those too. ikari-kun, we are bonded."

Shinji blushed, feeling that what she said was true.

"you should not blush, ikari-kun." She glanced sideways at him. "because what we feel for each other is not the kind of feeling that you feel for someone else. that is why i did not give it to you then."

Shinji froze, his eyes widening. Did she know? He looked at her, shocked that she was looking at him with that intense soul-searching stare. He swallowed the lump in his throat. "Why did you give it to me now?"

Rei blinked. She looked at the stars coming out. "i do not really know. but it feels right. the word love has many meanings."

She stood up and dusted off her skirt. "ikari-kun, why did you come here?"

Shinji blinked. "Wha-?! I came because of the letter you gave me."

"... i did not give you a letter, though it does not matter. i am glad that you did come. good bye, ikari-kun."

"Ayana--- Rei! Wait!" Shinji gathered his things and rushed after her. "Thanks, for, talking to me."

"it was a..." she paused to find the word. "it was a pleasure."

"Rei. You spoke more words than I've ever heard you speak before," he commented in embarrassed amazement.

Rei nodded. "because i did not feel the need to talk." As she walked off, Shinji could swear that he saw her smile again and that made him smile too.

The bundle of chocolate fell on the stone steps from his suddenly numb fingers. "If she didn't write the letter..."

\*\*\*

Asuka stood in the darkened room. She took deep breaths as she tried not to cry. She was in front of a waste basket, her hands tightly gripped a neatly wrapped package, wrinkling the edges of the box.

She had been beaten. Beaten by a doll.

She looked down at the box of chocolates that the Horaki girls had persuaded her to make. She looked back at the wastebasket. Her breathing was loud in the still silence.

\*\*\*

"I'm home!" Shinji cried out as he entered the apartment, "not that anyone's here except for the bird..." he added to himself. Misato would probably still be out drinking with Kaji, and Asuka -

"Welcome home," Asuka replied from the kitchen. Her tone was far from happy.

Shinji looked back at the front door, calculating if he could outrun the redhead. Shinji wanted to run away but he was hungry and didn't feel like running away again. With a resigned sigh, he kicked off his sneakers and went to his doom. He could at least plead for a last meal before she killed him.

Asuka sat at the kitchen table as she picked at her microwave dinner with her chopsticks. She looked up when he came in and then returned to tormenting her dinner.

"Why didn't you cook anything else?" Shinji asked as he opened the fridge.

She glared at him and then jerked her head towards the schedule Misato had drawn up. It was Shinji's turn to cook dinner. She didn't even wait for Shinji's apology before she left the table in a huff.

Shinji felt guilty as he cooked the steak and mashed potatoes he had prepared before going to school that morning. Tonight's dinner was supposed to be his apology to Asuka and he forgot all about it. Well, it's still not too late yet.

\*\*\*

"Go away." Asuka said as Shinji called her to dinner. She lay on her side on the bed, her fingers gripped her pillows. She felt so hungry since she hadn't eaten lunch because it was her turn to make the lunchboxes, an impossible task since the lunchboxes were in the apartment and she didn't return until after classes ended for the day. The only thing that made her feel better was that Shinji was probably as hungry as she was. What made her feel worse was that Shinji was probably as hungry as she was.

"Soryu, you are pathetic." Asuka gave up the tough girl act as her stomach rumbled at the smell of steak and potatoes. Finally, Shinji cooked something that wasn't Japanese and there was no way she was going to miss it. Even if she had to endure the torture of his presence. She opened the door and saw the tray with her food on it. She knelt down and opened the folded note Shinji had left with the food.

The note had only one word on it: "Sorry".

"Stupid Shinji," Asuka whispered as she tucked the note into her pocket and brought the tray into her room.

\*\*\*

"Well, that went well," Shinji thought as he changed into his sleeping clothes. He was setting out his clothes for the next day when he saw the box on his desk. He touched the box, his fingers noting the wrinkles on the box's surface were strong fingers had crushed it.

"Happy Valentine's, Shinji," he whispered to himself.

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Part Two: White Day of Beginnings

Asuka woke up to the sunshine streaming into her room. She stretched the kinks out of her body. She groaned as she remembered that it was Misato's turn to cook breakfast. That woman's cooking was a crime against humanity, she grouched to herself. Asuka opened her door a little and looked out to see if she could sneak out and escape the abomination Misato calls food.

She looked straight at Shinji who was about to knock on her door.

"Asuka- I- I've cooked breakfast." Shinji looked away.

"But it's Misato's turn..."

"Do you really want to eat Misato's cooking?" Shinji looked back at her in shock.

"I wasn't aware it's called cooking," she cracked a smile and they shared a small laugh.

"Then let's eat. Besides Misato's still out of it. She just came in several hours ago."

Asuka watched him turn away and the smile dropped from her face. It was almost a week since Valentine's day, and every moment she spent with Shinji had been torture.

She still saw the time at the temple in her mind. Asuka had been on her way up when she noticed that Rei and Shinji standing at the top of the stairs to the temple. She had quickly jumped off the stairs and hid behind a nearby tree. She planned on waiting for Rei to go away before approaching. But the unexpected happened and she watched in horror as Rei leaned in to kiss Shinji. That time, Asuka knew what real fear was and she ran away.

Asuka sighed as she shook her head to clear her thoughts and then followed Shinji into the kitchen.

\*\*\*

During History, she found herself staring at him while the teacher droned on about the same boring story. How many times had her eyes wandered to rest on him? She used to say to herself that it was because he sat in a direct line to the window but she knew she was just lying to herself. Every day for the past week she had watched him, she had already burned into her mind every angle of his face and body. She knew how his eyes

would glaze over as he became bored. She knew about the sardonic smile on his face whenever Kensuke and Toji talked to him about girls. She knew about how he would sigh as he opened his lunchbox, as if the break took off a heavy burden from his shoulders. She knew that he would unconsciously clench and unclench his right hand whenever he was agitated, as if undecided whether to punch something or not.

All her furtive observation finally made her realize how nice he really was. He would do all the chores when she and Misato forgot to do them. He always made sure her lunchbox had more viands than rice when it was his turn to make them. He would always know when she needed a drink and toss her a can of juice or soda. He always did nice things in his own understated way, too subtle to be noticeable by most people. He never carried her stuff, never offered to do things for her, and he never, ever called her "Asuka-chan".

\*\*\*

Asuka sat behind some bushes by the temple as she finished off her lunchbox, her brows furrowed. In the days that she had spent watching the object of her affection, she had taken note of the additional things she didn't like; of the girls looking appreciatively at him and giving him cat-calls during PE; the way he flushed red whenever a girl talks to him; how he will prop his chin up on his hand as he looked at that doll by the window whenever he got bored...

Asuka's hand shook at the thought of the doll. She wanted to be the one to make Shinji smile. She wanted to be the one who would lift up his spirits during the long, grueling day. And most of all, she wanted to be the one he would look at when he needed cheering up.

There was a snapping sound. Asuka looked down at her chopsticks. "Damn."

"Here," Hikari gave an amused snort as she handed Asuka a metal fork. Hikari was doing her homework while Asuka kept her company. Or at least that was what Asuka would say if someone asked them what they were doing hiding behind the bushes. Hikari would have given another answer. She would have loved to be somewhere else at the moment but the bonds of friendship were too strong.

"This is boring!" Asuka observed as she shoveled more food into her mouth. She looked through the leaves and saw them still sitting side by side on the temple's steps as they gazed out at the mountains. "They're not even talking! Well, it figures since they're the two dumbest people I know!"

"So, you like the strong, silent type, with the tendency of going on mad destructive rampages while piloting gigantic weapons of mass-destruction," Hikari commented sarcastically as she did some calculations on her notes. Her sarcasm was wasted on Asuka who was too busy watching Shinji.

"Damn it! What does he see in her? I'm prettier, more popular, a better conversationalist, and I know how to have a good time!"

"Humble too..." Hikari mumbled. With a frown, Hikari replaced her stuff into her bag. "Asuka, we've been spying on them for the past few days and they haven't done anything. In my opinion they're not really an item as you would make it out to be."

"Do you really think so?" Asuka tried to keep the hopeful tone from her voice.

"Really! Rei kissing Shinji? I don't really see her doing that. Or vice-versa for that matter."

"Then why do they keep meeting here after school?"

"I don't know! They probably want to start a nature appreciation club or something! Look, if you're so desperate to know about him why don't you talk to him?! It's better than spying on him and dragging you're best friend away from her love life. Toji's bound to be finished cleaning up the classroom by now- I'm going back."

"But..."

"No 'Buts', Ms. Soryu," Hikari admonished, "Talk to him!" Hikari stalked off, leaving a flustered Asuka behind.

\*\*\*

"Is she still there?" Shinji asked as he watched the red sunset color the mountains.

"yes. however class representative horaki has left." Shinji didn't ask how she knew without even taking a look. Rei knew a lot of things and he didn't want to seem to pry.

"I wonder why she keeps spying on me," the boy asked in an annoyed tone.

"specifically for the reason you think."

Shinji felt the warmth in his cheeks and tried not to turn his head towards the bushes which Asuka hid behind.

\*\*\*

"Shit. I should learn to read lips. What did she say to make him blush?" Asuka pondered as she angrily stabbed a piece of squid.

\*\*\*

"Huh?!" Asuka brilliantly expounded as she sat at the kitchen table waiting for dinner. She had spent a miserable afternoon spying on a boy from behind a bush and alone at that since her very own best friend deserted her for some monkey who pretended to be human.

"I said it was a beautiful sunset," Shinji repeated as he checked the pot simmering on the burner, his back towards her.

"I didn't notice, I was- uh- busy doing my homework- with- uh, what's her name? - Hikari." Asuka cursed as she stumbled over her words. She glared at the boy's back. Why did he have to make her feel this way?! "So, what are we having? It smells delicious."

"Buffalo wings," Shinji proudly announced as he opened the oven. "Aoba-san gave me the recipe when he found out I liked to cook."

"And what will we be having with it?" Asuka's mouth watered at the spicy smell. One of Shinji's strengths is that he's a damned fine cook.

"Spaghetti with meat sauce," the boy answered as he placed the platter of chicken on the table and began to fuss over the pasta.

Asuka looked down at the food, feeling the desire to cry in happiness. He cooked for her, she had been badgering him earlier about cooking something special like what he did

during Valentine's day a couple of weeks ago, and he actually did. She watched him drain the spaghetti and she briefly wondered if he would be closing the lights, lighting up the candles, and popping the cork of the champagne bottle at any moment. She sighed, even if he didn't do those things, only one more thing would make this perfect...

"Oh! Shin-chan that smells good!" Misato entered the kitchen in her usual cheery way.

"Well, that killed the mood," Asuka thought to herself, scowling at Misato, the one thing that ruined her perfect dinner with Shinji.

"Shinji, you really outdid yourself," Misato praised as she rummaged in the beer fridge. She returned to the table with a bottle of champagne and started to pour it out into their glasses.

"Misato! I'm under age!" Shinji complained as he set down the spaghetti.

"Oh, come on, Shinji! It's only one glass!" Asuka took her glass and took a sip. "See? It's not even as strong as beer!"

"But-"

"Or are you scared?" Asuka smirked at the predictable reaction as Shinji automatically went on the defensive. By this time Misato had already tuned out their squabbling and had begun eating.

"I'M NOT!" Shinji sat stiffly on his chair and glared at Asuka. Calm down Shinji, he thought to himself. She's baiting you and you're falling for it.

"Then prove it," she purred as she held out her glass to him. Damn, he's cute when he's frustrated, she thought to herself.

"All right then," he reached out and grabbed her glass. For a moment their hands touched. He looked down at the glass, his hand slightly trembled.

"Well?" she purred. Shinji gulped, he didn't know whether he hated it or loved it whenever she did that. He steeled himself, glared at her, and then downed the whole glass.

"oh my..." Asuka and Misato gasped.

\*\*\*

"I can't believe his tolerance was that low," Asuka grumbled as Misato laid Shinji on his bed.

"Well, I think he never even sneaked drinks when he was younger, so he never built up a tolerance." Misato took off the boy's socks.

"He's just a wuss," Asuka sniffed in disgust, crossing her arms. She blinked as she noticed that Misato was unbuttoning his shirt. "What do you think you're doing?!"

"I'm changing his clothes," Misato deadpanned.

"But he's a boy!" Asuka stamped her feet.

"So? He's got nothing I haven't seen before." Misato pushed Shinji on his side to take off his shirt, leaving him in his pants and undershirt.

"Wha-?! You mean..." Asuka swallowed as Misato began undoing Shinji's belt.

"Yup. Very first day he was here." Misato suppressed a giggle at the memory of Shinji's panic stricken face as he ran out of the bath after seeing Pen-pen for the first time. "Besides, from what I gather from Ritsuko, you've seen him butt-naked before."

"That's different." Asuka mumbled, not believing how hot her face felt. She did see him naked before and at the same time he also saw her. But it was different since it was during a test for the mechanical monsters they piloted. Besides when she had glanced sideways at him as they and Rei walked naked down the corridor to board their entry plugs she only got a peek and that wasn't enough to satisfy her curiosity... Asuka felt hot, wondering if the heater went on the fritz again. "It was purely professional."

"Then why are you blushing?!" Misato needled as she pulled down Shinji's pants.

"I AM NOT!" Asuka screamed in frustration. She covered her eyes with her hands and turned away as she saw Shinji's boxers.

"Wha-?!" Shinji muttered sleepily as he rubbed his eyes and both females looked at him. Everyone blinked in surprise. Shinji turned an interesting shade of red as he noted one of Misato's hands on his pants which were down by his knees.

"oh my..." Asuka and Misato gasped.

\*\*\*

Shinji was seething mad as he walked under the trees that lined Tokyo-3's streets. This has probably been the worst day of his life. He glared over his shoulder at the person responsible.

Asuka tried to suppress a giggle. "I'm so sorry Shinji, but it was so funny!"

"You didn't have to tell it to the whole school," he growled back. The fact that he had passed out after one glass of champagne was embarrassing. The fact that a woman twice his age had been changing his clothes while a girl his age was watching was very embarrassing. The fact that when he woke up in the middle of getting his clothes changed and had a natural reaction was sufficient cause for suicide. The fact that the school grapevine got wind of it and blew it out of proportion was the world coming to an end. Toji, Kensuke, and a whole mess of boys had been begging him for details while the girls kept whispering while looking at him. Hikari had to browbeat everyone into submission for disrupting the class and worse she blamed Shinji for being a pervert.

"Did you really think we were going to... y'know?" Asuka can't help but tease the young boy. She could see his ears redden from where she stood behind him.

Shinji fumed silently, trying to ignore the desire to strangle the girl. He turned when he heard Asuka shout his name. "What is it this time?" he growled.

"You went past the temple," Asuka pointed out the gates about half a block behind them.

"I'm not going to the temple." He began walking away.

"But... You've been going there for weeks and-" Asuka covered her mouth.

"You could go there and sit behind a bush if you want." Shinji gave a dismissive wave as if he was shooing away a particularly irritating pest.

"What?!" Asuka had a horrified expression on her face. Did he know?

"Do you really think I or Rei wouldn't notice you?" he retorted as he continued on his way.

Asuka felt her face go red, she had underestimated them and made a fool of herself. "But won't Rei be waiting for you?"

"She told me yesterday that she had something to do. Don't ask me what it is since I didn't ask her."

"Who told you I was interested in whatever Wonder Girl is doing?" Of course Asuka was wondering, but to admit that Shinji had read her like a book would have been embarrassing. However, having Shinji's angry face inches away from her was another thing she never even considered. "Wha-?!"

"Her NAME is REI. DON'T call her Wonder Girl," Shinji growled, he could take being abused but to have somebody else he cares for badmouthed was something he couldn't take. He was so angry he didn't even notice that he had grabbed Asuka's arm.

Asuka was scared. She could see the determination, the anger, the steel resolve in his eyes. She had unleashed his true self and she found that she was afraid of it being directed against her with all of its fury. He wasn't standing up for himself as she wanted but he was protecting someone else. Asuka wanted to cry - he was protecting someone who wasn't her.

"Let me go!" She cried out and broke free from his grasp. They looked at each other standing several meters apart. Shinji's right hand was clenching and unclenching in its usual way whenever he was really worked up. Asuka rubbed her arm where there were bruises on her white skin.

"So, you do like her," she accused him.

"Yes, I do. I like her a lot." Shinji felt the words coming naturally since they were what were in his heart. She felt daggers in her heart at his words.

"More than..." She swore at herself for faltering. "More than you like me?"

Shinji was expecting that, but it still hit like an EVA's fist. Well, no running away this time. "You don't make it easy to like you, Asuka."

She felt her heart breaking. "So, you don't like me." She looked up and saw his blue eyes looking calmly at her, but she saw it, the hint of guilt in those eyes. She really wanted to... "FINE! I HATE YOU, SHINJI IKARI!!!" she screamed then she rushed blindly past him as she tried to keep her tears from coming.

"Asuka-" He watched as she fell down on the street after tripping by the gutter. In a moment he was by her side.

"Get away from me!" she pushed him away and immediately felt the pain course up her leg. She gritted her teeth and closed her eyes, trying to ignore the pain and desire to cry. She opened an eye as she felt his warm hands pull down her sock and gently probe her ankle.

"It's not broken, but you should keep off it for a while." Shinji made an effort not to look at her face as he rolled her sock back up. "Here," Shinji helped her up, one hand gently held her shoulder while the other supported her waist.

"Shinji..." She gritted her teeth as she stood up on one leg.

"We could call NERV and-"

"NO! I'll be fine. I won't have anyone say that I can't handle a small thing like a sprain without calling for back-up!"

Shinji smiled, at least she was back to normal. "Do we walk or do we call a cab?"

"Walk." Asuka immediately supplied, there's no way a sprained ankle is going to make her look weak in front of this boy. She immediately regretted it as she tested her sprained ankle.

"Are you sure?" Shinji didn't like the way she winced.

"Positive." Asuka swore at her stubbornness.

Shinji just gave a wry smile. She could just admit that she can't take it but, no, she had to stand by her decision, no matter how rashly she had made it. It's one of the things that fascinate him about her, but it sometimes also infuriated him.

"What?" Asuka exclaimed as Shinji knelt with his back to her.

"I'll give you a piggy back ride." He saw the refusal forming on her lips and he didn't feel like a long, drawn out lecture on how he was inferior to her for suggesting that she needed help. He looked at her, the soft boyish features left him as he emitted an aura of strength. "And I won't take no for an answer."

Asuka felt like melting as she looked into his eyes. His true self, the self-sacrificing hero, had come out for her, to protect and care for her. "You better not tell anyone about this," she growled as she climbed on his back.

Shinji almost gasped out as he felt her soft body against his back. He had never carried anyone before and didn't know what to expect, and most certainly he didn't expect to feel the soft curves of her body against him to be so uncomfortable in such a nice way. He was blushing as he linked his hands under her bottom.

"Shinji," Asuka whispered into his ear as she wrapped her hands around his neck and gripped the sides of his body with her knees.

"Hmm?" was the only coherent word that came out of his lips. Asuka's hot breath on his ear was something that he never thought could be so sexy.

"You better not be having hentai thoughts." Asuka giggled mischievously as she felt his skin become hot, the pulse on his neck throbbed with a frenetic pace.

"I- I'm not!"

"What?! Most boys would die to get me this close to them?! Are you sure you're not

thinking hentai thoughts?" Asuka used her uninjured leg to brush the front of his pants.

"Asuka!" Shinji cried out, his fingers reflexively tried to clench into fists, instead they unintentionally dug into her rump. He relaxed his fingers after hearing Asuka gasp in surprise. His face felt hot and he wanted to die from shame.

"J-just checking," Asuka joked lamely as she tried to bury her flushed face on his shoulder. She didn't have to say that he was lying.

They were both silent for a while, trying to keep their hormones under control. A summer breeze rustled the leaves of the trees that lined the street. They mostly had the whole street to themselves, the few people that met them just thought how the two teens made a good couple. By the time they reached their street, Shinji had to stop at a park to rest his back and arms. He stopped at a bench that faced the street and gently eased a sleeping Asuka down on the bench. Asuka mumbled something as he laid her down. He knelt on the pavement and gently pushed back strands of her red hair from her face. He looked at her lips, slightly parted and moist. His heart was pounding as he felt his body lean towards her and he soon found himself a few centimeters from her, her warm breath caressed his cheek. Shinji pushed away, gasping hard at what he had nearly done. Deciding she was too much of a temptation, he turned his back to her and sat down on the pavement.

"Shinji? Where are we?"

He turned towards her and felt guilty as she rubbed her eyes and straightened her clothes.  
"Asuka, I-"

She stopped him with a finger to his lips. He looked into her eyes and saw a gentleness he had never seen there before. "I know."

Shinji frowned. "How long have you been awake?"

She blushed. "Ten minutes?"

"What! You cheat!"

"You tried to kiss me!"

"... Why is this conversation so familiar?" They laughed as they remembered their victory together- the product of their synchronization training. After a while they watched as the sun touched the mountain tops.

"Shinji?"

"Yes?"

"Why are you so kind to me?"

"I think because it's my nature."

"So I'm not special. You're just kind to everybody." She looked really disappointed.

He thought he shouldn't answer that. "Asuka?"

"Yes?"

"Why are you so mean to me?"

"It's a long story."

"... I have the time."

She smiled gently at him, not her usual smirk or her happy grin, but a real intimate smile. "I'll tell you. But not today. Someday when I'm ready."

"... I'll keep you to that." He stood up and knelt before her. Without a question, she climbed on his back and rested her head on his shoulder. They went up to their building, the red glow of the setting sun bathed everything in a pink light.

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Asuka hummed as she and Shinji climbed the stairs to the temple. It was after school and Shinji had invited her to the temple with him. He was going to play his cello for Rei who

had confessed she had no appreciation for music.

"Are you sure she wouldn't mind?"

"There's very little that she actually minds." Shinji replied as he stopped to catch his breath. He was holding his cello case in one hand and Asuka's violin case in the other.

"Are you sure you don't mind," Asuka motioned to her violin, she had been surprised that Shinji had offered to carry it for her since she usually had to prompt him on the way a gentleman is supposed to act.

"It's all right," Shinji smiled at her. That was another thing that Asuka noticed. He smiled a lot more often these past few days.

"Shinji, you said you liked her a lot... does that mean..."

"No. It's not like that. I like her, but not in the same way that Toji and Hikari like each other."

"So, you're just friends?"

"... Yes. I guess I'm the first friend she ever had."

"I guess she's a very lucky girl to have you as a friend then," Asuka wanted to jump for joy. He finally dispelled any remaining suspicions in her mind. But then Asuka remembered seeing them kiss and her heart faltered. They came to the top of the stairs, Rei wasn't in sight.

Shinji proceeded as if there was nothing wrong and started tuning his instrument while he sat on the steps of the shrine.

"She's not here?" Asuka observed as she tuned her own instrument.

"Yes, she is," Shinji replied as he began playing something to get into the mood.

"How'd you know?"

"We share a bond."

Asuka frowned at this. "A bond?"

"Yes." Shinji closed his eyes, allowing the soothing hum of the cello suffuse his body.  
"She's inside, praying."

"Wonder Girl prays?" Asuka winced at the scratching screech of the cello. Shinji was glaring at her. "I'm sorry, I meant Rei."

"i do believe in god, pilot sorryu," Asuka jumped as Rei appeared at her elbow.

"How do you do that?!" she screeched at the girl with blue hair.

"do what?"

Shinji had began playing again, ignoring the conversation. Rei had been the one to suggest that perhaps Pilot Sorryu would prefer to sit with them instead of at her usual place behind the bushes.

"Appear just like that!"

Rei didn't answer but her eyes seemed to say "does not everybody?"

"I don't know why I bother talking to you," Asuka huffed as she tucked the violin under her chin and waited for the right moment to join in with Shinji.

"because you want to bond."

"WHAT?!" Asuka cried out and Shinji glared at her again. She was amazed that Shinji didn't miss a chord. She bowed to Shinji, "Sorry."

Asuka stood up and dragged Rei away so they could talk without interrupting Shinji.

They stopped at the top of the temple stairway. "What do you mean?!"

Rei cocked her head. "you bother talking because you want to feel human."

"Look, Wo-" Asuka paused as she felt Shinji's glare from across the courtyard, "Rei, I am human."

Asuka drew back as Rei invaded her private space until they were just inches apart, Rei's red eyes searching in her blue eyes. "Get back, you- you perv!"

Rei drew back. "i understand now."

"Wha-?!" Asuka felt weak-kneed, she felt as if Rei had looked right into her soul and stripped away all the walls she had put up in the past ten years. Asuka didn't like the feeling that she had been judged and found lacking. She sat down on the stairs before she could fall down and hurt herself.

"humans draw away from pain even if it is good for them. they fear pain, fighting it, trying to escape it."

Asuka stared at Rei. This was a lot more words than she was accustomed to hear from Rei.

"your bond with someone caused you pain. you fear that pain would come again if you bond with others, thus you push others away." Rei sits down besides Asuka and looks out at Tokyo-3. "yet a part of you desires the bond. that is the reason behind your actions towards ikari-kun."

Asuka gave a short laugh. "So you think I've got the hots for Shinji?! He's just a boy I live with! I just decided that it would be for the best if we got along together."

Asuka felt Rei stare at her with those cold, indifferent, red eyes of hers, and she resisted the urge to shiver. Asuka felt relieved when Rei finally shifted her gaze away from her.

"the greatest lie is the one we tell ourselves," Rei quoted as she stood up and went back to the shrine to listen more closely to Shinji.

Asuka drew her knees together and rested her chin on them, her eyes focused on the lengthening shadows engulfing Tokyo-3 as the sun sets.

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Asuka didn't go with Shinji to the temple that afternoon. The red head gazed out the kitchen window as she waited, an open can of orange juice was held in her hands, forgotten as she lost herself in thought. She had been doing a lot of thinking after her strange conversation with Rei. Was it that obvious to everyone? That she, the Great Asuka Langley Soryu, had a nasty experience that she would rather not repeat. Was it that obvious to everyone that Shinji was the person she was taking a risk with. More importantly, if someone so dense and indifferent like Rei had picked up on it, does it mean that he did too?

Asuka shivered at the thought of Shinji laughing at her expense when her back was turned. He probably knew and he just let her fumble her way around him because he found it an ego boost to have someone superior to him get so flustered. He was just probably stringing her along while--- a loud pop and the wet trickle over her hands alerted Asuka to the fact that she had squeezed the can too hard. With a frustrated exhalation Asuka threw the can into the sink to drain and looked down at the orange pool at her feet. Asuka watched in fascination as a red drop hit the pool, the crimson mixed in with the orange. Asuka held up her hands and noticed with a sense of detachment that her finger was cut from the ruptured can.

"Asuka!" She heard a boy call out her name followed by the sound of something heavy falling onto the kitchen table. She felt him pull her towards the sink and the cool sensation of water on her cut.

She blinked. Shinji was holding her hand under the faucet, his fingers gently bled the wound clean. Asuka cried out as the stinging cut finally registered. Shinji turned off the faucet and noted that the bleeding had stopped.

"I'll go get you a band-aid," he said as he went out of the kitchen.

Asuka muttered various swear words under her breath while she held her injured finger and inspected the grocery bag Shinji had dropped on the table. Uncooked chocolate, molds of different shapes and sizes, and other ingredients and items for making homemade chocolate. Asuka briefly wondered what he was planning when she suddenly turned and checked the date on the calendar Misato had put up beside the phone.

"Tomorrow's-"

"Here, give me your hand," Shinji said as he unwrapped the band-aid as he walked back in. Asuka meekly held out her hand and Shinji treated the wound.

"You're making chocolate?" She asked as Shinji arranged his grocery on the kitchen counter.

"Yeah, White Day. There were about ninety girls who gave me chocolate on Valentine's, I want to say thanks," Shinji pulled out a list from his shirt pocket. "Add to that Misato, Doctor Akagi, and Maya-san..."

Asuka grabbed the list and scanned it, noting with disappointment that her name wasn't on it. "You can't possibly make chocolate for ninety-three people and make tonight's dinner."

Shinji turned stiffly, a horrified look on his face. "D-dinner?"

"Don't tell me you forgot, baka-Shinji," Asuka mock-glared at the boy. She felt better after putting him down, he deserved it for forgetting about her.

"Asuka-san, could you, you know... please?" Shinji pleaded with a hopeful expression. A part of his brain registered that this was the first time she called him baka-Shinji in almost a month.

Asuka really, really wanted to turn him down but Kodama's words echoed through her mind, 'you catch more flies with honey...', hmm... Asuka thought, maybe there is a way to get the count up to ninety-four...

"Just because I don't want you asking Misato to cook..." Shinji's face looked relieved until Asuka got his apron out and started putting it on. Asuka saw the look of complaint on Shinji's face before he turned back to sorting out his ingredients.

Soon, the smell of sausages (Asuka refused to cook anything more elaborate) and chocolate filled the air. They cooked in silence, Asuka tried hard to make Shinji notice that she was displeased with him without actually antagonizing him as she usually did. Shinji for his part, knew Asuka was displeased with him and since he didn't know why and the fact that she was keeping unusually quiet, he didn't want to say anything that may

spark her off.

Asuka moodily stabbed at a sausage with the cooking fork. He wasn't even interested enough to ask her what was wrong! She glanced sideways and her eyes became as big as saucers as she watched Shinji slowly unbutton his school shirt.

She found herself mesmerized as his hands undid the buttons, her throat became dry as he finally made the motion to remove the shirt from his body. She felt let down as she saw the blue undershirt he always wore.

"Damn it, Asuka! What are you thinking?! You're sinking down to the pervert's level!" she scolded herself.

"Um, Asuka-san?"

"WHAT?!" she snapped at Shinji who, to his credit, failed to cringe in terror.

"The sausages are burning," he coldly replied as he returned to cooking.

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Asuka lay on her side on her bed, looking out at the night sky filled with dim stars.

Shinji virtually ignored her after the sausage burning. She had watched guiltily as he ate the burnt meat so that it won't go to waste. She knew he was very annoyed with her with the way he frowned and remained silent as he ate the burnt sausages with rice that was unevenly cooked. She wanted to impress him with her simple cooking skills but she had messed up, not only by ruining dinner but by losing her temper. And for once, it was all her fault!

Asuka pulled herself into a fetal position.

Shinji had quickly finished dinner before continuing his cooking in silence. Asuka watched him as she did the dishes, waiting for the moment to apologize. When Shinji had finished pouring a batch into the molds he looked up at her, his eyes silently asked what she wanted.

Asuka shivered, her hands tore into her pillow.

When he looked at her with those dark blue eyes of his, she had turned away and walked out of the kitchen. She had ran away from confronting the Invincible Shinji.

"Soryu, you're pathetic," she whispered to herself as a tear slid down her cheek.

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"morning," Asuka mumbled as she went into the kitchen, her eyes were still a bit puffy from crying most of the night away.

"Good morning, Asuka-chan!" Misato raised her beer can in salute. Needless to say, Misato's day was off to a fine start. Asuka turned away from Misato, feeling hate for morning people everywhere, and trudged towards her usual seat. She suddenly stopped as she noticed Shinji looking at her with cold indifference.

"Good morning," Shinji greeted with a forced smile as he stood up and started putting away his dishes. He didn't even bother to wait for her reply as he gathered two paper bags from the counter and went out of the kitchen. "I'm going," he called back before Misato and Asuka heard the front door close behind him.

Asuka flopped down on her chair as Misato eyed her coolly. "Alright, Asuka-chan, what the hell's been happening?"

"... Nothing." The young girl began filling her bowl with rice. Misato watched as she ate disconsolately. They both perked up as they heard the front door open and the familiar patter of Shinji's feet.

"Sorry," the boy greeted, a genuine smile on his flushed face. He rummaged through one of the bags and gave Misato a small paper bundle tied with a yellow ribbon.

Misato untied the bow and the bundle opened up like a blooming flower. Three large pieces of chocolate lay in a nest of wax paper. Asuka gripped her chopsticks as she looked longingly at the bundle in Misato's palm. Misato beamed at the boy, "You do know that it's improper to hit on your guardian, don't you?"

"Consider it payback for all the times you've hit on me," the boy replied, the two females stared at him with their eyes wide. He grinned and then turned around, "Well, I'm off

again."

"... Well, it does seem that my little boy's growing up," Misato sniffed playfully before beginning to nibble on a piece of chocolate. She noted that Asuka seemed to have been petrified, her chopsticks broken in her hand, Shinji had left without giving her any chocolate. Well, Misato thought, what goes around, comes around. "Asuka-chan, you're going to be late."

Asuka looked at her and Misato felt a wave of pity at the defeated, haunted look in the young girl's eyes. "Oh, yeah, I'm off then," Asuka muttered as she went to gather her stuff.

Asuka approached the school apprehensively. She became painfully aware that most of the student body was composed of girls, giggling school girls to be exact. She noted that most of them were deliriously happy, and that she, Asuka Langley Soryu, was part of the dejected, heartbroken minority.

"- he gave you some?" an older girl said to her friend as Asuka passed them.

"Yes, he's really so cute, I think I'll keep it for a while before I eat it," the other girl replied as she held up a bundle that made Asuka's heart stop. It was one of Shinji's. Asuka hurried to the locker room not wanting to torture herself anymore.

"- you kissed him?!" a girl cried out from a huddle of first year girls. Asuka could see a blushing pretty girl in the middle.

"J-just on the cheek! Eep!!!" the blushing girl cried out, looking directly at Asuka. The girls looked at Asuka and immediately lowered their voices.

Asuka sniffed in indignation as she opened her locker, she really couldn't care less about their silly crushes to eavesdrop on them. She sighed as she unlocked her locker, it used to be full of letters from boys during the first few months that she came here, but since then the boys had drifted away as it finally became clear that Asuka was just a tease. These days she was lucky if she had one or two letters from boys. Asuka opened her locker and saw a small envelope propped against her school shoes. Asuka sighed as she took the letter in her hands.

"SHINJI-SAMA!!!" the huddle of first-year girls squealed as Shinji entered the locker room, Shinji favored them with a smile and the girls squealed some more and the pretty girl in the middle blushed harder. The letter crumpled in Asuka's hand. She looked at

Shinji who was ignoring her and at the blushing pretty girl. She saw Shinji pass the girls, greeting the pretty freshman by name. Asuka angrily pocketed the crumpled letter and stalked off to her homeroom.

"Asuka!" Hikari hurried over to the red head, her face flushed, giddy with excitement. A bouquet of red roses was held in Hikari's arms. "Look at what he gave me!" Hikari took out a silver pendant from around her neck. Asuka didn't need to ask who gave Hikari the pendant as she could plainly see Toji being teased by Kensuke who had his camera out taping Toji's reaction.

"That's nice," Asuka replied automatically as she scanned the room. She froze as Rei entered with a familiar bundle held almost reverently in her hands, a puzzled look on her face. Asuka stared at Rei who sat down in her usual place and intently stared at the bundle of chocolates that Shinji had given her.

"Oh, Rei's got one too," Hikari smiled as she watched Rei. "Shinji's really nice to everybody today."

"What?! You mean Shinji gave you one?" Asuka looked at Hikari in amazement.

"Yes." Hikari beamed at her friend. "But I bet you got more than I did."

Asuka scowled at the top of her desk.

"oh." Hikari muttered in embarrassment. "er- I think I'll go check on Toji." Hikari immediately went to rescue Toji from Kensuke and to escape Asuka's wrath.

Asuka watched as Rei took a piece of chocolate, looked at it as if she had never seen one before, and then she took a small, dainty bite. A small smile slowly formed in Rei's face which was enough to shock the redhead. Asuka watched hungrily as Rei carefully ate the chocolate, savoring the rich, sweet flavor.

"Yo! Shinji!" Toji yelled, pushing away Kensuke and his camera. Asuka looked up, disappointed at the boy's pep. Shinji's face was still flushed from various encounters with the female population of the school.

"Hey! Toji! Kensuke!" Shinji waved happily to his friends but suddenly stopped, his expression hardened as he looked at Asuka who glared back at him. Everyone in the room

felt the sudden drop in temperature and everyone (especially the girls who had received chocolate from Shinji) looked away and tried to ignore the two of them. Toji carefully made his way to Shinji's desk and slid a large paper wrapped bundle towards Shinji.

"How much?" Shinji reached for his wallet.

"Think of it as my thanks," Toji proudly declared.

"Thanks for what?" Shinji asked cluelessly. Kensuke came over and continued taping.

"Well- er, y'know..." Toji began fumbling for words. He blushed as Hikari seemed interested in the conversation. "Oh, come on guys..."

Shinji and Kensuke's fun was interrupted as the teacher came in.

For the rest of the morning Shinji and Asuka ignored each other. Or at least tried to. Asuka couldn't help but glance sideways at him whenever she can. Twice she actually caught him looking at her, at both times they hurriedly looked away and tried to imagine that it didn't happen.

By lunch time, Asuka was really sick and tired of acting like she was angry with Shinji. The last thing she wanted was to make him angry, knowing that she couldn't handle the fire that he could dish out. As she reached into her bag for her lunchbox, she decided that she would talk to him right after eating. Feeling better with her decision, she settled down to eat. Only to find that she forgot to bring her bento. Eating food from the school cafeteria was out of the question since she considered it toxic. Asuka looked around and saw Hikari eating and talking with Toji, it would be very bad for their friendship if she interrupted them. Rei had gone to God-knows-where, and she didn't really want to be indebted to Rei. Kensuke would probably give her his lunch but Asuka wasn't in the mood to properly bully anyone. Which leaves only-

A bento was placed before her. Asuka looked up and saw that Shinji had leaned over and dropped his bento onto her desk. "Shinji..."

"Don't worry, I don't feel hungry." Shinji stood up and left the room.

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Of course he lied. Shinji sat under a cherry tree wondering why he gave Asuka his lunch. He was never much for gallantry or self-sacrifice, and giving something so important like his lunch to a girl he was currently... not pleased with. Shinji did have to admit that he wasn't really angry with Asuka, neither does he hate her. He sighed. It was all Misato's fault. She had to insist that Asuka live with them. Didn't she know that Asuka didn't need them? Shinji sighed again. Sure it would be more peaceful without Asuka, but somehow, it wouldn't be the same without her--

"Open up," Asuka said as she leaned over with food held in her chopsticks.

Shinji opened his mouth and received the offered food. Well, that was really nice of Asuka. Too bad that she had to ruin everything last night... wait a minute... Shinji chewed to make sure. He looked beside him and confirmed that a beautiful redhead was eating from his bento and occasionally fed him some of the food.

"Asuka--"

"Why are you so nice to me? And don't give me that 'it's my nature' shit," Asuka fed him some choice pieces from the bento. She sounded pensive but also a little angry.

"You read the letter?" Shinji blushed a little, glancing sideways at Asuka. Asuka smiled as she took out the crumpled letter from her pocket. He took a deep breath and turned to sit facing her. "I think you already know."

Asuka picked at the bento for a while. Then sighing, she set it aside and turned to face him. She could hear the blood pounding in her ears as she looked straight into his eyes. But she felt calm as she spoke. "I do. But I want to hear you say it."

"Why?" He really wanted to run away.

"Damn it! Don't ask why!" Asuka suddenly stopped as she saw the warmth slip out of Shinji's eyes. "sorry. It's- it's because- I--"

"I like you. I like you a lot." Shinji smiled gently, his face felt hot and he couldn't look at Asuka. "But you don't really make it easy for people to like you. I guess there's something wrong with me because no matter how much you hurt me, I--"

Shinji stopped as Asuka put a finger to his lips. Tears ran down her cheeks. "Baka. Look

at what you've made me do..."

She leaned forward and their lips met. The world stopped and for a long while the only thing that mattered, the only thing that existed, was each other. They finally broke the kiss. They looked at each other with mixed embarrassment and desire.

"So, it does feel different when you're not holding my nose," Shinji shrewdly observed.

"Baka." Asuka playfully pushed him, making him fall on his back. She then laid down on the grass beside him, her head on his chest. Shinji brushed the tears from her cheek with the back of his fingers. "Baka-Shinji?"

"Hmm?"

"Why wasn't my name on the list?"

Shinji looked down and saw Asuka looking hopefully at him. He smiled and took the list from his chest pocket. "You're at the very top."

"My Kanji ain't that bad! I would've recognized my own name!" Asuka complained as she snatched the piece of paper and opened it. Names were crossed out, which Asuka assumed to be the ones who had already received their chocolate. At the very top, just above Rei's name, was one word written in Kanji: Love.

Shinji blushed as Asuka looked at him in wonder. "I didn't know you were the romantic type," she said as she leaned back over him so that they were face to face.

He giggled nervously. "Neither did I." He puckered up, expecting a kiss.

She pressed a finger to his lips. "So, when were you planning on giving it to me?"

He made a disappointed growl. "I had to wait for the roses I had Toji buy for me. That and I was waiting for you to apologize for snapping at me last night."

"Oh. I'm sorry, I was thinking of something else when you warned me of the burning sausages so I was a bit distracted." She surprised him by giving him a brief kiss. She then

whispered huskily into his ear, "In case you're wondering, I was thinking of how sexy you are."

She laughed as he blushed to his ears. She then stood up and pulled him up as the school bell sounded to end the lunch break. They brushed the grass from their clothes and walked hand in hand back to the school.

"Baka-Shinji?"

"Hmm?"

"Tonight, remind me to tell you about my mother."

Shinji nodded, pleased that Asuka trusted him.

They stopped in front of their school building, still holding hands. Asuka beamed at Shinji. "Hey, want to know something special?"

"Sure." Shinji looked intently at Asuka.

"Aishitteru," her lips turned up into a fetching smile.

"Aishitteru, Asuka-chan," they smiled at each other, basking in the warmth of their opened hearts. Then with some regret, they released each other's hands and walked side by side into the school, never noticing a girl with blue hair who stood on the rooftop, looking down at them with a serene smile on her lips.

End.

Author's Notes:

1) Is it me or does WAFF get more reviews? (smiles) Thanks to all the readers and especially to those who gave their reviews, I tried to clean up the grammatical errors, keying errors, and tense shifts (sorry about that, like most people whose first language isn't English, I just went with whatever \*sounded\* right). Er, the mistakes were made

because I was so happy (or sappy) that I finally finished this thing (began some time last year). If there are anymore errors please point them out, I really appreciate people actually going out of their way to help others.

On another note, Rei speaks in a formal monotone and to reflect this I never capitalize any letter in any of her lines or use contractions. I can't remember where I picked up this... er, style? I read too many fanfics to remember details (sweatdrops).

2) Similar work? Sequel? You want me to write another WAFF fic!? That's gonna be hard and I can't really say when I'll write another WAFF fic, probably if I go on another WAFF overdose (so come on people, I know you're all wonderful, go write them WAFF and inspire other authors (wink, wink, nudge, nudge)). As for a sequel, no, sorry but I don't think I could or would write a sequel. Sorry, GRUD, no REI/SHINJI fics (unless you can tell me in what episode they called TOJI's sister MARI, it's really been bugging me that I missed that).

3) Oh, at the time I wrote this fic I just finished reading: "The One I Love Is..." by Rakna; "The Child of Love" by Axel Terizaki; "Asuka's Love" by Chris Angel; "Holding Hands" by Strike Fiss; "Lost Love" by Rakna; "Wake" by TL Webb (and of course the lemon side story "Water Hazard"); "Asuka Langley, Ex-Poser" by Ka Wing-Tam; "The Heart, the Soul" series by Andrew Huang; and of course "Evanjelly Donuts" also by Andrew Huang. The impact can be clearly seen in my work (except maybe for Evanjelly Donuts).

Of course after reading these great fics I also read a lot of other WAFF, so many in fact that I can't write them all or risk having a list almost as long as the fic I wrote.

Thanks to all the authors. Till next time to the readers. And to all the reviewers, congratulations.

## Neon Genesis Evangelion

### A Debt Repaid

By: Lord Deathscythe

Disclaimer: I do not now, have ever, or will ever own Neon Genesis Evangelion. Don't sue me.

The young girl lay lifeless in a hospital bed, her red hair spread out from her, a young boy entered and sat next to her. His dark blue eyes had almost hollow from the pain he felt just looking at her. Shinji had just defeated the 17th angel, Kaoru Nagisa, his friend. He had had to crush the young boy in the hands of Unit-01 to save humanity, but he felt as if his soul had been taken from him. As he gazed upon Asuka, his roommate and fellow pilot, he felt as if, even though he had saved Earth from the angels, he had failed to save her.

"What good is protecting and saving humanity when I can't even save one person? Someone I love. I couldn't save you Asuka, and I had to murder Kaoru." Shinji said to himself. "Asuka, please wake up. I never thought I'd miss your slaps or your insults, but now I'd give anything just to feel the sting of your hand." Shinji squeezed the girl's hand and stayed with her, hoping for some sign of life from what used to be the fiery and determined young girl. But now she was just a shell, a memory of all the pain he had endured. And for what? He had lost everything he had gained since coming to Tokyo-3. Misato was never around anymore, hunting the secrets of Nerv in a blind attempt at revenge towards the organization she held responsible for hurting Shinji and Asuka. Rei wasn't even Rei anymore, just a clone of Rei, which was much harder to take now that he knew she was also a clone of his mother. Touji, Kensuke, and Hikari had left Tokyo-3 after Unit-00 destroyed most of it against the 16th angel.

Shinji Ikari had lost everyone, and could only hope for the others to come out of this nightmare in as few pieces as possible. He kept gazing at Asuka, softly crying until he fell asleep in the chair next to her.

--

Asuka, while completely silent to the outside world, was lost in the depths of her mind. She was wrapped in darkness, not wanting to come back. She felt she was worthless, a failure... ugly. She curled up into a ball in the corners of her soul and wept. She was attacked by her own memory of things gone by with no escape. No rest came for the weary young girl, as she continued to sob out "worthless" over and over like a dark litany.

Suddenly another voice intruded on her self-imposed prison from reality.

"You're not worthless my dear Miss Langley," said a calm voice from the darkness.

"Who's there? Get away from me." She shouted. Asuka did not want anyone to see what she had become.

"I'm here to help you. I'm a friend. I won't harm you, don't be afraid," said the voice. From the darkness walked a boy, about her age wearing a white shirt and black slacks, similar to Shinji's. He had gray, unruly hair and deep red eyes. To Asuka he almost looked like a male version of Rei. Unlike the first child however, while he was calm he wasn't an emotionless automaton.

"Who are you?" Asuka asked timidly. She was still sizing the boy up, and wondered how he had gotten here.

"My name is Kaoru Nagisa; I'm a friend of Shinji's"

"How can you be in my mind if you're a friend of Shinji?" she asked, too stunned by the statement to care that before her another presence was entering her mind.

"For that you will need a little background information Asuka, may I call you Asuka?" Asuka merely nodded, too weak from all the pain and sorrow of being mind raped by the fifteenth to fight anymore. The boy squatted down next to her, coming a bit closer than he had been before.

"This may disturb you to know but I am an angel, the seventeenth to be precise. My true name is Tabris."

Hearing that this young boy was an angel reignited a fire in her. The angels had done this to her and seemed to be coming to gloat. "Get out of my head you bastard, your kind did this to me!" she screamed.

"While Areal is responsible for your current state, I was against this tactic. Destroying a lillim like this is unbecoming of our kind. I'm here to put right what she did, and help you back to reality. I owe Shinji that much for what I did to him."

"What did you do to him you little bastard? Did you screw with his mind too? Did you hurt him like you did me and now you're coming to admire your handiwork?"

Kauro took her anger and accusation with a placid patience. He knew she was hurt and took things very carefully, knowing how she reacted to confrontation from his talks with the young Ikari. Fortunately, patience was a virtue angels had in abundance.

"I did hurt him, I admit that. But I am not pleased with what has happened to you both. You have been put through much during your lives and I hope to give you some peace in return. You did not deserve these things; you did not deserve to feel all this pain. That is why I am here, to try to at least right one of the many wrongs towards you both."

"You said you owed Shinji, what did you mean by that?"

"Well you see he was my friend. A very good friend at that, I understood him better than anyone else had before. I comforted him when he was dealing with his pain, weeping over losing everyone he cared for, especially you I might add. I even told him that I loved him. And for all his friendship I repaid him with betrayal. I used Unit-02 to get to the very heart of Nerv to obtain my goal. However, upon realizing that it would destroy humanity if I did, I surrendered to Shinji. I made him kill me in the giant hands of his Eva"

Asuka was stunned; this angel had confessed to her all these things. The worst of all was his betrayal of Shinji. She may have hid her feelings from him, but what Kaoru had just told her was unforgivable. She knew Shinji would rather die than take another person's life especially that of a dear friend, even if that friend was the enemy. He almost had during the battle with the thirteenth angel, not even knowing who was in the entry plug. This was unforgivable, and no amount of penance could right that wrong.

"How could you do that to him, he was feeling bad enough from everything that happened! To have to kill his best friend must have completely destroyed him! Do you know what this means? He might just get depressed enough to kill himself!"

"I know, which is why I am here. I owe a great debt to Shinji Ikari, and I intend to repay him, at least in part."

"Then why are you here? I can't do anything to help. I'm useless, a failure, he could never want to be near me after they way I've treated him."

"That's where you're wrong. If anything you are the only one who can save him now. He

is alone now, lost. The only thing he can do now is go through the motions of living. If things don't change soon for him, then his life will end by his own hand. Time is short, and if you stay here too long the damage will be irreversible. Let me show you some things I saw in his mind before I came here."

In a flash she saw a scene of her and Shinji. It was the just as he jumped into the volcano after the 8th angel to save her.

"I won't let her die, I won't. I have to save her."

Another flash in the darkness, and Asuka was watching herself coming closer. It was the only kiss they had ever shared from Shinji's point of view. She could feel her air running out as he had, but the asphyxiation was secondary to his enjoyment of her kissing him. She felt his hurt when she finally let him breathe, and ran to the bath room to wash her mouth out. The shame he felt was almost unbearable to her.

The light came again, this time she was sitting in a shelter. While she watched the people huddled together a large part of the wall caved in. There she saw Unit-02's head, bloody and severed from it's body staring at her. She recognized when this was, the fourteenth angel had neutralized her by dismembering Unit-02. She felt a surge of panic in her, what Shinji felt as he saw the great head of Unit-02 stare at him with lifeless eyes.

One more flash came, and she was sitting in Unit-01's entry plug. It was dead, lifeless, without any power syncing the man to the machine. Unfortunately there was power to the comm. system. She could hear her own screams as the fifteenth angel torn through the walls of her mind, and laid everything before her to live over and over again. She could sense Shinji's feelings of helplessness as he was forced to hear her suffer. Asuka felt Shinji damn himself for not being there instead of her, where he could have done something. This was followed by the aftermath, Asuka watching through Shinji's eyes, her tell him she hated him.

Then they were back in the same dark room. Asuka was digesting what she saw, unable or unwilling to accept the meaning of it all. Everything he had felt towards her, everything he had thought about her resonated through her mind thanks to this angel. It was just like when the fifteenth had ripped through hers, but not physically painful. It was horrible none the less though, having to see things through another's eyes. To see how her actions had affected Shinji after that kiss hurt almost as bad as what she had been through.

Eventually she was able to stammer out, "He did all that for me? Every single bit of it? I hurt him so badly. Why does he still want to be around me?"

Kaoru sat down next to Asuka and pulled his knees up to his chest and sat with a calm demeanor.

"This may come as a surprise to you, but he is in love with you. I know you don't think he could but he does. I think he has ever since you two first met on the 'Over the Rainbow'. Why do you think he never once retaliated against you? His friends have bugged him about it for all this time, wondering the same thing you have. How can he be in love with her? How can he take all the abuse? How can he even think of liking a bitch like her? But he does, for no other reason except for that. He loves you because you're a bitch, because of the abuse. He loves you for being you. He just never said anything because he, like you were afraid of what it would mean. That you would abandon him like all the other people he loved in his life. His mother was stripped from him while he watched; his father just plain threw him away until he could use him. He was afraid you would do the same, and you would have because where he runs from others to escape the pain, you drive them from you. You and he are the same in that you avoid the pain by being alone, but the methods are different. But by being alone, by keeping others from getting too close to you, you feel another pain, the pain of loneliness. That's the pain he's going through right now. Made a hundred times greater because of me and what I did to him."

"Why should I go back? My soul is so dirty, wouldn't he be better off without me? I've caused him nothing but pain, I pushed him away when he wanted to help me. I insulted him when he did nothing but care for me. Why then would he want me back?" She confessed to Kaoru. She still couldn't believe anyone would want her, that her soul was too dirty and dark for anyone to want to be around. Even with what the angel had shown her through Shinji's eyes.

Even as Asuka spoke, she knew that this angel was right. How else could she explain Shinji's acts towards her? He had never hurt her, never attacked her even though he had reason to. The only reason she could come up with would be that he loved her.

"But I can't, if I love him, if I let him get close he'll be taken from me. Even if it's the last thing he wants, I'll lose him like everyone else."

"No, you may lose him in body. He may die in battle, die from an accident, or even taken by force by his father. But he would never leave you truly. His spirit, his soul would be with you always, even when his body cannot. And if you go back to him, to the world, Shinji Ikari will be strong enough to stay. So will you, together there is nothing you two lillim can't do. But, if you stay here you both will die. You in this hospital bed, and him, if not by his own hand or in battle, will lose his soul to grief and sorrow. Go to him, love him, and be loved by him. You can save each other from the darkness. That is the most important victory you could ever win. All your successes and failures in Eva pail in

comparison to saving one life, the life of the one you love."

"No, he doesn't deserve to be pulled down by me. I'm not worth his concern."

Karou had almost ran out of things to convince her of her importance, and had to pull out his final ace. He was reluctant to do so, it would be very disturbing for her to see this, but it was the only way to convince her.

"Do you want to see what will become of Shinji if you refuse to leave this place? Do you want to know what will become of him should he not take his life?"

Karou bent the fabric of the darkness again in to an image of Shinji's future. Asuka thought the angel had mad a mistake for a moment, the image in front of her looked like Commander Ikari. As she looked closer she saw subtle differences; the lines on his face were not as defined as the commanders, nor did he wear those amber tinted glasses. Because of that, Asuka could see right into his eyes – his dark blue eyes.

Asuka let out a horrified gasp as she saw Shinji Ikari ten years from now, a dark mockery of the boy she knew. This was worse then anything she could have thought happen to him. Even death would have been better then what she was seeing. She turned to Karou, and saw a sad look in his eyes.

"This is his future without you. He will become like his father, only worse. Gendo Ikari still has a chance to change his fate and open his heart to his son. Shinji will not, he will become something even worse then his father. A person with no soul whatsoever, no hope of any redemption. He will fall so far into the darkness that nothing will be able to save him after this."

"Nothing at all? Not even Misato?"

"Only you can reverse this course. Major Katsuragi may be able to slow it's progression, perhaps even prevent it. But the shadows of this future are strong now, and she more then likely will not be able to stop it. If you stay here, you condemn both of you to a nightmare nothing will be able to wake you from."

Asuka took all this in, and knew it was right. She had fought to save all of humanity, but what did that matter if she did nothing to save one boy. The boy who loved her for no reason other then she was her, and that she loved for the same reason. She had made her choice now, to fight for him and save him from the darkness that had almost won over

her.

"Thank you, for an angel you're not that bad a guy."

"If anything I should thank you. I am the angel of free will, and of my own free will betrayed a friend. This will partly repay a debt that can never truly be repaid, and it will make you both stronger than you ever thought possible."

Karou offered a hand to the Second Child, knowing his work here had finally been finished.

"I'll lead you back now. Take my hand, and don't be afraid."

With that, Asuka took the outstretched hand of Kaoru Nagisa, the 17th angel known as Tabris, and walked with him to the light.

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Shinji had awakened from his troubled sleep after, in his dreams heard Kaoru's voice say to him "I owe you a great debt, one which I can never fully repay to you. I hope this will help you and partly make up for what I have done. Live, Shinji Ikari, and know that you are never alone. Wake up now, someone is waiting for you."

After hearing the voice of his friend say that, he awoke just before Asuka did. He pondered the meaning of the words of his friend that he had heard in his dream. "What did he mean by a debt that can never fully be repaid?" Shinji thought. Just as he was becoming fully awake, he saw Asuka stir. He rushed to her side and took her hand. Then her eyes opened and looked into his, the fire back in full force. They looked at each other, and Shinji began to cry again, this time in joy, for the girl he loved was returning to him.

"Shinji, you look terrible." Asuka said softly, weak from almost two weeks in coma.

"You've looked better yourself." He said through the tears, he now knew what Kaoru had meant. After almost losing her forever, he made a decision. One he would never regret even if she didn't feel the same.

"Asuka, I love you." He finally said. After all this pain, saying those three words made

him feel finally and completely happy.

Asuka looked at him and smiled a small smile. "I love you too, Baka Shinji."

At that he gave a weak chuckle, his Asuka had been returned. He held her close, afraid to let go, as she did the same. They both heard Kaoru's voice in their minds. "Love each other, and be loved by each other. That is the greatest victory you will ever achieve."

Author's notes

Hope you liked that, My take on Tabris is that even though he would betray Shinji, he would try to make up for it. After all what are friends for? Some may be pissed because of Asuka's portrayal in this fic. So what? I believe that after she went into that coma, she was broken and scared. She would have been weakened to the point of not wanting to fight anymore, to curl up and die if you will. And Shinji, well how hard is it to do a depressed, not quite but almost suicidal person like him. He has plenty of reason to be that way. Wouldn't you want to put a bullet in your head if you went through what he had? God knows I would. Thank the Maker we don't have to and have something like Evangelion to show us the way. I love a series that makes you look at yourself and ask what would you do in that situation.

Authors notes on Version 2.0: After having this story out for several months, writing other stories and the like, I went back and looked at it. I wasn't especially happy with some of the scenes and thought some of it was too fast. So I went back now and expanded everything I felt needed expanding. The flashback scenes especially needed expansion, so I made them Asuka flashing back from Shinji's POV. Tell me what you all think

Thanks to Matt Williams for his assistance Pre-reading. Thanks to Ender for hunting down the mistakes that were still left after all that.

Lord Deathscythe

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Disclaimer: Evangelion is owned solely by Studio Gainax animation. I claim no rights to the characters or concepts in this story, and will gladly remove it from the net should Gainax (or anyone associated with the EVA project) request it, rather than face legal action. Also be warned that this story is rather sad, so if you are easily depressed... please do not read. Thank you. One final note, this is the original cut of this story, and varies from the one finally posted on Fanfiction.net – mostly in that it has one or two scenes changes and includes some outtake scenes at the end. Enjoy.

## Sacrament

By Random

Shinji Ikari heaved a deep, heartfelt sigh. “Another day,” he whispered, “another soul saved...”

He was beginning to take the white collar off of his neck, when there was a soft knock on his chamber door. “Father?” Came the voice of his acolyte, David Murphy, “Do you... have time for one last confession? There is a woman outside that asked specifically for you...” the boy’s tone was apologetic, “she said no one else would do...”

Shinji smiled, “It’s alright, my son...” he said, still slightly uncomfortable with the titles given and received, “I am doing the Lord’s work, and I am on His time... of course I can take another confession.”

It had been five years since he had come here – six since he had left NERV behind him – and he finally felt as if he had found his calling. It was not a surprise to him that he was requested specifically, as it happened all the time. He was an excellent listener, and was always polite and offered good advice (though he was beginning to tire of the single women persistently trying to pick him up).

He re-donned his long black robe and retrieved his Bible from the nightstand (where it sat in front of a faded, crumpled picture of three teenagers... three Children), and walked towards the door of his humble room. He paused for a moment as he caught his reflection in the simple wooden mirror near the entrance, taking in his now broad chest (a side-effect of trying to stay fit in a monastic life and assisting in church-building) and his – according to the women in the congregation, anyway – handsome features... just a bit too much like his father’s for his liking.

He sighed, “It is thy will...” he said, felling somewhat better. He had made peace with his likeness to his father. In fact, he had made peace with many things in his life... though he still sometimes woke in the middle of the night in a sweat, remembering the clone

tanks that had held the copies of Rei. He frowned as he thought of the blue-haired girl... the girl who was based in part on his mother's DNA.

He pushed the thoughts of the past aside, knowing that they were unhealthy, and walked briskly out of the room, smiling gently at David, "Is she already in the booth?" He asked, expecting that she was. Most late-evening confessors did not want their faces seen, and would wait in the box for him to arrive.

The young man (though Shinji had never asked, he estimated him to be about seventeen) nodded, "Yes Father... and..." he hesitated, then went on with a frown, "she's not alone."

Shinji blinked, "What do you mean?" He asked, "Is there someone in the confessional with her?" This had happened before... usually with a husband insisting that he be present for his wife's confession – or vice-versa. Shinji always told them the same thing when this occurred, 'What is spoke here is between her (or him) and the Lord... please respect that.' It had only failed once... and Shinji had been forced to ask the young couple to leave, as the husband was growing loud and disrespectful of the Lord's house.

The boy shook his head though, "No, Father... but there are men waiting outside for her... lots of them." He paused, looking both scared and excited, "I think that... that she's someone important."

Shinji frowned slightly. There was no one important in this small town in rural America – that was why he was here. He could have chosen to pursue his work elsewhere, as there was much need of the Lord's kind word throughout the world... but he had chosen this place because of its tiny size – and because few in it knew the details of the EVAs and their pilots. Most people here thought of the war as a far-off thing... something that was important, and yet didn't QUITE affect them.

That was just the way Shinji liked it.

"Don't worry, my son..." he told the boy, smiling reassuringly, "all men – and women – are equal before Him."

The young man flushed and bowed his head, "Yes, Father Ikari..." he said softly.

Shinji paused for a moment at the door to the chapel and laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, "You are a good boy, David..." he said gently, "just remember your lessons. We are all created in His image, and none of us is better than the others. Worldly

trappings mean nothing to Him.”

The boy nodded, “Yes, Father...” he said softly, “thank you for reminding me...”

Shinji sighed. It was a hard life that David had chosen... but he could feel the strength of the boy’s spirit, and knew he would go far. His biggest problem was that he was too easily impressed with people that displayed wealth and power. He had yet to learn that these things were only temporal, and would vanish like a shadow at daybreak in the light of His presence.

Shinji gave the boy’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze and opened the door leading to the chapel. He walked slowly to the confessional and opened the door, stepping inside. He sat down on the small bench and took a moment to compose himself, feeling that familiar twinge of fear – almost like stage fright – that always took him before he accepted the sins of the congregation.

Finally he offered a short prayer of thanks for the blessings that he had, and opened the window. “Yes, my child?”

“Bless me, Father...” a soft, familiar voice whispered, “for I have sinned...”

Shinji paled, “No...” He opened the door to the confessional and stepped out, his entire body shaking.

The other door opened, and a woman with long red hair stepped out. “Hello, Shinji,” she said quietly, “it’s been a while...”

“No...” he whispered again, trying to find his voice as his hands clamped tightly onto the back of one of the pews, supporting his weight as his knees threatened to buckle. He took her in at a glance. She still had the same, pretty face... but it had matured and become downright beautiful. Her hair had grown longer – down to the middle of her back – but was still the same flaming red... and still bore the distinctive A-10 neural connectors. She was also wearing his former guardian’s old, beat up red flight jacket.

Asuka Langley Souryu smiled gently, “Is that any way to treat an old friend?” she asked chidingly, “I would think after six years I would get a hug... or at least a, ‘How have you been?’”

Shinji grimaced, “No offense to you, Miss Souryu,” Asuka frowned at this title, but he continued, “but I had no desire to see you again... I left Toyko-3 as far behind me as I could, and if you’re here to take me back you might as well just leave now, because I will not come with you.”

Asuka stared at the floor, “I’m... not here to take you back, Shinji...” she whispered quietly.

An uncomfortable silence descended, and Shinji took the opportunity to collect himself. After a moment he said, “Forgive me, I’m being rude.” He turned to face her, “It IS nice to see you Asuka... and I’m sorry for my behavior. It was unbecoming to a man in my position, and outright uncalled for.”

She blinked in surprise, “Intelligence was right,” she said with a slow smile, “you HAVE changed...”

He flushed, “Well... not that much...” he said humbly, “I just... found my place, that’s all...”

She let out a gusty sigh, feeling that she had put things off for too long. “Shinji...” she said softly, meeting his eyes, “you know what happened to your father four years ago... don’t you?”

His eyes broke from hers, “Yes...” he said softly, “I was called...”

She nodded. She knew he had – she was the one who had demanded that the call to be made. “Why didn’t you come to the funeral?” She asked quietly, folding her arms and leaning up against the confessional box, “If not for him... you could have done it for her...”

Shinji closed his eyes, “I didn’t want to remember her that way,” he replied, “I wanted to think of her like she always was – happy and full of life... not lying in a box.”

Asuka looked away, “She... she wasn’t, Shinji... they couldn’t recover the bodies...” she shivered as she thought of how their former guardian, Misato Katsuragi, had died. It had all started when they had been walking from their car (whenever Gendou traveled with Misato, it was always in the same car. He said it was because she was the best at her job... but Asuka suspected it was because he secretly admired the woman’s fiery spirit – though he would never admit it, she was sure), to the open door of a transport plane.

They had been halfway to the plane when gunfire had erupted all around them. Misato had thrown Asuka to the ground and drawn her pistol, firing blindly towards one of the hidden gunmen. 'Take her,' the purple-haired woman had said to one of the faceless section two men, 'get her to the car and get out of here.' Asuka had been picked up and rushed to the car under a hail of bullets, Misato following close behind.

'Commander!' Misato had yelled, 'Go! Get her out of here!' Asuka heard her say... and then she had turned and run back to the center of the fighting, where Gendou was kneeling, clutching his chest with one hand and firing a small pistol with the other. Blood was clearly visible between his fingers.

The man carrying Asuka had taken a bullet as he all but threw her into the car, and fallen atop her. As she had worked her way free, thankful that the car had a trained driver who was already starting it, she was afforded an unobstructed view of the fight... and her heart stopped beating at what she saw. Misato was on her knees, back to back with the Commander. She had a gun in each hand and was alternating fire between them, trying desperately to stay alive.

Blood rushed freely from two bullet wounds in her side, and she was screaming in anger and pain.

The car's tires had squealed, then, carrying Asuka away from the horrible tableau before her. She had finally fought her way out from under the dying man and looked out the back window, her hands pressed desperately against the glass. Her eyes met Misato's briefly... and the woman smiled at her brightly, as if saying, 'Don't worry... everything will be ok'. Then the entire airstrip had exploded in a fireball, hurling the car end over end and into a water reservoir.

It was a miracle that Asuka had survived.

Now she looked at Shinji's downcast face, "She left everything that she owned to you, you know..." she said softly, "she loved you like you were her own child."

Shinji nodded, "I know..." he said, swallowing a lump in his throat, "but when I took my vows, I agreed to hold no worldly belongings... I said that when I declined to take possession of her things..." He had other reasons for not taking her things – the biggest being that it would mean a trip back to Tokyo-3... but he wasn't lying when he said the main reason was his vows. He took his vows very seriously.

“Shinji...” she said, stepping away from the confessional and into the middle of the church, “will you... administer the sacrament for me?”

He blinked in surprise, “The sacrament?” He echoed, her request taking him off guard. She nodded slowly, and he could see that she was serious. “Normally it’s only done on Sundays... but I’ve done it before on off-days...” he walked over to the pulpit and pulled out a long, wooden box covered in ornate scrollwork. Reverently, he opened it and withdrew a small silver plate and flask. Carefully he placed a single piece of unleavened bread (taken from one of the box’s many compartments) on the tray and set the flask down next to it.

Asuka watched him prepare it for her with a mixed look of sadness and pride, terrified of the things she had yet to tell him and wishing desperately that things might end other than they must.

Feeling slightly foolish, Shinji cleared his throat and said in a clear voice, “Come, my Child... kneel and accept the Lord’s blessing.” Since the day they had met, Shinji Ikari would have been the first to tell you that Asuka Langley Souryu bows to no one. It was hard for him to repress a gasp as she meekly walked up to the pulpit and knelt, bowing her head.

“I am ready, Father...” she said humbly, “I will take as the Lord offers.”

He nodded, masking his surprise that she knew the correct reply. “I offer you the body of the son,” he intoned, taking the bread between his thumb and forefinger and offering it to her, “will you take his name as your own?”

She stared up into his eyes, “Yes, Father... I will.” She opened her mouth and allowed him to place the bread in it, then chewed it slowly, continuing to hold his eyes.

He opened the flask and inverted the lid, pouring a small quantity of dark red wine into it (for normal mass, plastic cups were used... but this was not normal...). He held the small vessel up, his voice trembling slightly, “I offer you the blood of the son,” he said softly, “will you keep his commandments?”

Asuka looked away, unable to meet his eyes as she whispered, “Yes, Father... I will...”

Carefully he reached down, his fingers shaking slightly, and put the cup to her lips. She closed her eyes and rested a cool hand over his to steady him, then tilted her head back

and drank the blood-red liquor slowly.

Shinji reclaimed the lid to the flask, wiping it carefully on a small cloth kept in the box for just that purpose. He then capped the flask and set it aside, making a cross with his fingers in the air before her, "Rise, my child..." he said softly, a feeling of foreboding filling him, "and know that you are one of God's children."

She stayed on her knees, staring at the floor, and whispered, "Father..." she shook her head slowly, "you didn't finish taking my confession."

He blinked, "I... can listen now," he said hesitantly, "if you still need to confess something..."

A small frown graced her features, "I have committed many sins, Father..." she said softly, "I have had immoral thoughts... I have lain with men, though I am not wed..."

He blushed at this. It was not the first time he had heard it – not by far – but to hear it from the woman that had grown from the girl he had secretly loved was a hard thing to take. "Go on, my child..." he said, his lips feeling numb.

She finally looked up at him, and he was surprised to see a small tear on her cheek. Her voice never changed as she continued, "the worst sin, Father... I have yet to commit. I must take a life." She shook her head, "It must be done for the greater good... but I know it will break me, Father... and I do not want to do it..."

For a moment he said nothing, then he licked his lips, "Ending a life is not something to be taken lightly, my child," he said, his mind whirling at the possible victims, and why she would confess this to him, "you say it is for the greater good... but this is not an excuse to take a life. You are not Him," he went on slowly, "and you are not a judge. While on His Earth, we must obey the laws of man... and you are not a lawgiver."

Another tear joined the first on her cheek, "I know that..." she replied softly, "and I know that I will be damned for doing it... but countless lives will be saved." She rose slowly and stepped closer to him.

His eyes widened as she leaned in and pressed her lips gently to his. Just a feather-light touch that lasted no more than three seconds... but to him time stood still. As she pulled back, he touched his tingling lips with his fingers, "Why did you do that, Asuka?" He asked in a quiet voice.

Her tears had dried up... but there was an infinite sadness in her eyes. “Father,” she said softly, refusing to use his name, “tell me the story of Judas...”

Shinji’s knees went weak, “No...” he whispered. He looked at her with confusion on his face, “why?” He gasped, “Why do I have to die?” He was not afraid of death – his faith prepared him for it extensively... but he could not understand why after six years of silence his former roommate and co-pilot had sought him out with the sole purpose of taking his life.

She turned away from him, “When your father died,” she said, struggling to keep her voice level as the moment of action grew closer, “many... secrets were revealed. Secrets about Rei... secrets about Second and Third Impact... secrets about the angels...” her voice dropped to a whisper, “secrets about you...”

About Rei, he already knew – it was the reason he had left NERV in the first place... but he could not imagine a secret about himself that would warrant his death. He held his silence, waiting for her to finish.

Turning back to him she said quietly, “Second Impact occurred on September thirteenth, two thousand. You were born on June sixth, two thousand and one... almost exactly nine months later.”

Shinji paled, “What are you saying?” He whispered... though his mind had already made the connection, he refused to accept it.

Asuka’s eyes fell to the floor, “Please, Shinji...” she whispered desperately, “don’t make me say it out loud.” She held her silence for a minute, and then slowly looked up to him, “You know what I have to do, don’t you?” She asked quietly, drawing a gun from behind her back.

“Asuka...” he breathed, “this is crazy... think about it...”

She blinked away more tears as they threatened to fall, “Shinji,” she whispered, “why do you think the last angel never showed up? It’s because the numbers were wrong...” she took a deep breath, “the sixteenth was actually the seventeenth... making the third actually the fourth... and the third...” her voice cracked slightly, “the third was safe and sound behind the controls of his EVA...”

There it was... no shades of gray – just pure black and white...

He closed his eyes, his mind working frantically, “If what you say is true,” he said softly, “then why would I need the EVA at all?”

She smiled sadly, “You didn’t...” she whispered, “not truly. When you fought what was called the third angel... YOU defeated it, your true self. The same with the twelfth and the fourteenth... it was always you in control... but your mind couldn’t handle it, so it shut down...”

He shook his head, “No! The EVA went berserk... and... and mother...” he trailed off as she looked at him with pity in her eyes.

“That’s what you were told,” she said gently, the gun still pointed at the floor, “that’s what you told yourself... but it was always you...”

A tear ran down his cheek, “If I am an angel...” he said, finally saying the word, “will a gun kill me? Won’t my AT field protect me?”

Her face fell further. Instead of answering him, she spoke softly into a microphone on the sleeve of her jacket, “Send her in...”

The door to the church was opened... and a lone figure walked in. Shinji’s breath was once again taken away. The blue-haired woman slowly walking towards him was a far cry from the thin child he had seen last. Her figure had filled out to match Asuka’s, and her hair had grown long and darker, so it was almost the same shade as Misato’s.

“Hello, Ikari...” Rei Ayanami said softly.

Shinji’s mind registered the fact that her voice sounded almost exactly the same... just more mature somehow. “Hello, Ayanami...” he whispered, meeting her crimson eyes steadily, “I am glad that you are well...”

She tilted her head to the side, “I am glad that you are well also,” she replied, “and I apologize for what must now happen.”

He nodded, “Thank you, Rei...” he said, trying to smile, “that means a lot to me.”

He felt a sudden tingle as Rei closed her eyes... and knew that she was neutralizing his AT field. He drew a long breath and let it out slowly, and then turned to face Asuka, "May I ask something, Asuka?" He said in a level voice. When she nodded reluctantly, he managed a smile, "Can you... do it outside?" He glanced around the chapel with a fond look on his face, "It would be wrong... to do it in His house."

She nodded again, but could not speak, as her throat was tight with emotion.

He sighed, "Let's go..." he said softly, then began walking down the aisle. As he reached the door, it was opened from the outside, and Shinji stepped blinking into the street... finding it lined with men in black suits.

-David wasn't kidding when he said she wasn't alone, was he?- He thought with a small smile. Glancing up the street, his breath caught as he spied the familiar brooding shapes of Unit 01 and Unit 02, connected to portable power supplies and crouching at the ready. "Of course..." he whispered, "just in case..."

It was a testament to NERV's efficiency and subtly that they could get this many people – and two EVAs – into a town this small and not let a single person close enough to tell him about it.

He sighed and looked at the redheaded pilot, "You don't need to do that..." he said sadly. She had her gun leveled at him now, as if he would try and make a break for it now that he realized how serious the situation was.

She flushed, but didn't lower her gun, "I'm sorry..." she said softly, "I know you won't do anything... but they don't." Her eyes took in all the nervous men standing around.

He bowed his head, "They think I'm a monster..." he looked at her out of the corner of his eye, "do you think that, Asuka?"

More tears spilled down her cheeks, "No, Shinji..." she said in voice barely above a whisper, "I don't..."

He nodded and walked down the stairs of the church and into the dusty street. He looked around at the faces surrounding him. -If it be your will,- he thought suddenly, remembering an old song, -that I speak no more... I will speak no more... if it be your

will...- “How fitting...” he whispered.

“Ikari?” Rei spoke softly to him, stepping close to him, “It will end now...”

He frowned, “I know, Ayanami,” he said, confused, “I know that it’s ti-“

“No,” she whispered stepping closer still, “you are the last. When the Commander died, he was bearing Adam in his possession... once you are gone, there can be no Third Impact.”

His eyes widened, “You mean...?”

Asuka spoke behind him, and he closed his eyes, realizing with a small feeling of warmth that he was between the two women he loved most, “Since Adam’s gone,” she whispered, “There is no way to start Third Impact the way it was intended... but you could still merge with Rei. From what we can tell, it would mean a perverted Impact... with nothing but death and chaos. Now do you understand why this must be?”

He nodded, “Yes... I see now...” He cast his eyes heavenward, “Mother... father... I’m coming now...” He knelt in the dusty street, clasping his hands together. –What an odd name for a town,- he thought suddenly, his mind desperately searching for something else to focus on besides what was about to happen, -Murphy sounds more like a man than a place...-

“Shinji?” Asuka whispered behind him, “I love you...”

His face lit up in the most brilliant smile that Rei had ever seen as Asuka pulled the trigger, ending his life when he was the happiest that he had ever been.

“So it was written...” Rei whispered, a single tear running down her face as Asuka collapsed to the ground and sobbed, “so must it be...” She bowed her head and whispered a quiet farewell to the only man she had ever said ‘thank you’ to... knowing that she would always remember how bright his face grew with his final smile. And knowing that, now, he was safe with his family. Nestled somewhere high up in heaven... sitting at the right hand of the Lord he loved so much.

Closing her eyes tightly, Rei Ayanami wept... and finally understood the meaning of the word ‘envy’...

The End

I offer you, the reader, an outtake and two alternative endings ((bow)) enjoy.

-- Random

Misato's last stand:

Misato sighed as they made their way to the airplane, -Another stupid diplomatic mission,- she thought with some disgust, -the Commander could have at least let me wear my jacket ON the plane... I would have taken it off before we got there...-

She looked at Asuka, "Why are you so glum?" She asked, trying to lighten the girl's mood, "We're going to Germany... you get to visit your old hometown." Misato thought sadly that the girl had not been the same at all in the two years since Shinji had left... not that she could blame her. She had confessed one night to Misato that she had been secretly in love with Shinji... and his sudden departure had hit her hard.

Asuka shrugged, "Yeah, I guess," she said indifferently, "it's just that-" From everywhere all at once, the chatter of automatic gunfire filled the air.

"Get down!!" Misato screamed at the stunned girl, tackling her and bearing her to the ground as she drew her service pistol from its leg holster and returned fire blindly. -Bad,- she thought as she quickly assessed the situation... and their lack of cover, -oh, this is bad!-

She spied the Commander. The man was crouched near one of the wheels of the transport... pinned down by gunfire, but seemingly safe for the moment. Half of the section two men were on the ground, dead or dying, and the other half were effectively held in place at risk of being shot if they moved. "DAMN!" She screamed.

“Take her,” she said to the one man still with her, indicating Asuka, “get her to the car and get out of here, I’ll cover you.” She stood and clicked off three rounds in the direction she had last heard gunfire coming from as Asuka was picked up unceremoniously around the waist and rushed towards the car under a hail of bullets. Misato followed close behind, sweeping her gun from left to right in hopes of catching one of the gunmen unprepared.

As they neared the car, Misato looked back over her shoulder. “Commander!” She yelled. She looked at the section two man, who was frozen in indecision, “Go!” She said, slapping his shoulder, “Get her out of here!” She turned and ran back to the center of the fighting, where Gendou was kneeling... clutching his chest with one hand and firing a small pistol with the other. Blood was clearly visible between his fingers.

The man carrying Asuka grunted as a bullet slammed into his back, managing to get her into the car before falling on top of her. Misato caught this out of the corner of her eye as she leaned down, still running, and scooped up a discarded pistol. –Hope it’s loaded...- she thought grimly.

As she neared the Commander, she saw a gunman pop up from behind some boxes and take aim. Screaming, she whipped her guns around and fired... a moment too late. Her shot took the man in the forehead... his two took her in the chest and side. She gasped in pain, stumbling and finally falling to the ground.

A cool voice spoke from her right as an arm slipped under hers and pulled her more fully under the cover of the plane, “Glad you could make it, Major...”

She looked up to see the Commander crouching over her, a large quantity of blood running down his arm. “Reporting for duty,” she muttered, forcing herself to her knees.

“You do not look well,” Gendou said dryly, “I believe you should take tomorrow off.”

She glared at him, in too much pain to be surprised at his odd manner of behavior under fire, “Tomorrow’s my regular off day!” She shot back, raising her pistols and looking around unsteadily.

“Then it works out for everyone,” he replied calmly.

In spite of the fact that they were both likely to die any moment, she laughed, “Always about the bottom line, ‘eh, Commander?”

His hand shot out suddenly over her shoulder and he fired twice... she heard a man scream in pain. “Always...” he replied.

-Is he... smiling??!?- She thought incredulously. She smiled wolfishly, “Pascally’s defense?” She asked lightly.

He definitely smiled that time, “With you on my back, Major? I believe I would like that.” He turned and knelt before she could reply, “Come now, Major... I haven’t all day...”

“Yeah...” she muttered, kneeling and putting her back up against his, “I know... you have a plane to catch, right?”

“Precisely...” he replied quietly.

The position they were in allowed for maximum coverage of all possible attack points. Its name came from a set of identical twins that fought in one of the many wars that had occurred immediately after Second Impact, when the world was still in upheaval and everyone vied to keep what they had. The brothers Pascally had successfully fended off over twenty-five attackers before succumbing (and the only reason they lost then was because one soldier on the opposing side – later called a master tactician – had said quietly, ‘Umm... why don’t we use a grenade?’).

It was an odd and desperate fight... occasionally a gunman would try and shoot at them, making himself a target in the process, and one or the other would return fire. And though it was only about fifty seconds, all told, it felt like forever.

“I’m sorry about this, Katsuragi...” Gendou said in a moment of quiet, “but this area will soon be no more.”

“WHAT!?” She cried, firing her guns one after the other as a man presented himself, “What are you talking about?”

“We’re in a code-alpha red situation...” he replied quietly, “should I be in danger of capture, this area is to be bombed... and there’s the plane...” He said coolly.

Misato could barely hear the high-pitched whine of a fast-mover coming in low. “Why?” She said angrily, “Why are we going to die, Ikari??”

She could tell he was smiling as he replied, “I would tell you, Major... but it’s classified...”

Her jaw fell open... but she decided it wasn’t worth talking about. Turning her head to look for Asuka’s car, she saw it starting to peel away, -Well...- she thought, -at least she’s safe...- Keeping her eyes fixed on the car, she said, “You know something Ikari? You’re a real asshole...”

“Yes...” he replied calmly.

As she heard the whistle of the incoming bomb, Misato’s eyes found Asuka’s. – Goodbye,- she thought, smiling at the girl as she sped away, -I love you...-

Then the world was filled with white light and heat... and then cool, quiet darkness...

#### Alternate ending number 1:

“Shinji?” Asuka whispered, “I love you...”

His face lit up in the most brilliant smile that Rei had ever seen, and in that millisecond... she knew her path.

The gun roared in the still air of the dusty town – and a hexagonal shape burst into being half an inch from Shinji’s body.

“No...” Asuka whispered, pulling the trigger again and again... all with no effect.

Shinji’s eyes traveled up until they met Rei’s, “Ayanami?” He whispered softly.

She smiled gently and knelt in front of him, putting her arms around his neck, “Yes... Shinji. I will not allow you to come to harm. My heart and soul... is to unite with you...”

She leaned forward and kissed him softly – and a brilliant flash erupted from between them.

Asuka shielded her eyes, “NO!!!” She screamed. She threw the gun to the ground and ran for Unit 02, praying she was not too late.

Shinji and Rei began to glow and slowly stand as all of the military personnel opened fire ineffectually around them. Their bodies continued to rise, bearing them both into the sky. Soon they were glowing an unearthly white, their kiss still unbroken.

Asuka reached her mecha and leapt into the entry plug, activating the machine and forcing it to run before it had even risen from its crouch. She bolted towards the glowing pair, now hovering ten feet off the ground and rising slowly, “NOO!” She shouted once more, opening her Unit’s shoulder compartment and drawing its progressive knife.

She willed Unit 02 to spread its AT field and brought the knife around in a savage arc – and watched in horror as it collided with one of their AT fields.

The kiss broke, and Shinji’s eyes found hers through the Unit’s optics. As he spoke, she noted with despair that their eyes were entirely black, “This is as it was meant to be all along...” he said gently, “when we are all one, you will understand. No more fear... no more pain...no more loneliness... just happiness and joy forever...”

“I don’t... believe you!” Asuka cried, finding as she tried to move forward that Unit 02’s controls were dead.

“Let me show you...” Shinji said with a gentle smile, his body fusing suddenly with Rei’s to form a giant pure white being.

As instrumentality began, and Asuka’s soul joined with the others being gathered from all over the world, she found that she had been wrong... oneness was not something to be feared – it was something to be reveled in.

As the giant creature that now bore the sum of all human souls rose to take its place at the

right hand of God, the soul of Asuka Langley Souryu uttered one final thought before merging with the collective... and with the ones she loved most.

“I am free...”

Alternate ending number two:

“Shinji?” Asuka whispered, “I love you...”

His face lit up in the most brilliant smile that Rei had ever seen as Asuka pulled the trigger. The First Child frowned, her ears registering a second, very subtle shot... sounding a fraction of a second after the first.

She watched as Shinji slowly slid to the ground, a slight frown creasing her brow. Her eyes traveled upwards to meet those of the Second Child... and she was taken aback by the raw, unfiltered pleading that she found there. ‘Please...’ the redhead’s blue eyes screamed, ‘please?’

Rei nodded barely, “The angel is dead...” she said in a clear voice, her eyes never leaving Asuka’s, “this mission is complete. Return to headquarters.” She smiled very faintly, “Pilot Souryu,” she said, inclining her head, “would you dispose of the body, please?”

Asuka let out a deep, shuddering breath, “Yes, Ma’am...” she said clearly, her voice unsteady. Her eye whispered to Rei, ‘Thank you...’

As she turned to leave with the rest of the departing troops, Rei said, “I would imagine after such a traumatic experience you will be tendering your resignation... correct Pilot Souryu? I will put the paperwork in for you... consider yourself on leave...”

“Yes, Ma’am...” Asuka replied again... only this time, Rei could easily pick out the tone of gratitude, “thank you.”

Rei smiled to herself, knowing that she was being thanked more for her silence than for putting in the Second’s resignation. “You... are welcome...” she said softly, “farewell, Asuka Langley Souryu... I do not believe that we shall meet again...”

“No...” Asuka said with a smile, “we won’t. Goodbye... Rei...”

Asuka watched as Rei turned and smiled at her... one of her rare, genuine smiles, then continued walking away. She waited patiently until everyone had left, knowing that she would not have to worry about the local people bothering her as they had all been confined to their houses until the next day under penalty of death for interfering with a NERV angel elimination.

As soon as she was alone, she knelt down and slid her hands under Shinji's limp form, then lifted him into her arms with a grunt and carried him laboriously to the car she had brought with her. She laid him on the backseat and caressed his face gently, "Soon..." she whispered.

She drove to the hotel she had reserved, one hundred miles from the town of Murphy, and carried him inside to wait.

Seven hours later... Shinji Ikari awoke with a moan, "Wha...?" He tried to sit up, but found that his muscles would not function correctly... and his head hurt terribly.

"Shhh..." a soft voice whispered from the side of the bed he was on, "don't try and move... you still have tranquilizer in your system."

"Tranquilizer...?" He whispered, "Asuka?" He turned his head and sought her out... finding her kneeling beside his bed and smiling.

"Shinji..." she whispered softly, reaching out and running her fingers through his hair, "I meant what I said, Shinji... I love you..."

He blinked, "You..." he couldn't say it yet... it was too unreal. Carefully he sat up, his legs hanging off the side of the bed, and cradled his head in his hands, "what happened?"

She moved in front of him, wrapping her arms around his waist and laying her head in his lap, "I... I couldn't do it..." she whispered, "I couldn't let you go." She looked up to face him, smiling as tears began to run down her face, "I... shot you with a tranquilizer... I love you so much, I... I couldn't kill you... I just couldn't..."

His eyes widened as he watched her collapse into tears on his lap, clutching him tightly. "You love me?" He whispered, trying to regain his balance as she nodded, crying harder. "And you... faked my death?"

She brought her head up slowly, wiping away her tears with one hand and reaching up to caress his cheek with the other. “I can’t live without you...” she whispered, “since you left, I’ve been counting the days... wishing each one would be my last. When I heard about this operation... I demanded that I be the one to carry it out. I had to see you again... I had to tell you...”

“Asuka...” he whispered, “I...”

“Don’t say anything...” she pleaded, grabbing his arms with sudden intensity, “please... don’t say anything until I finish... please.” She took a deep breath, “I love you more than anything in the whole world, Shinji,” she said softly, staring deep into his eyes, “and I want you to come away with me and be my husband...”

He closed his eyes... thinking about his life. EVA... his father... the church... his past—all would be left behind forever if he agreed. Rei... Asuka... the two he loved most... Asuka... Asuka... “Yes...” he said quietly, opening his eyes, “I want that too.”

Without a backward glance, Shinji Ikari let go of all that he had held on to and embraced the woman that had spared his life... the woman that he had loved since they met, six and a half long years ago.

She wept as his arms enfolded her, and blindly she found his lips with hers, kissing him with increasing ardor as he slid down to kneel on the floor in front of her.

They knew it would be hard... everywhere they went, there would be the risk of someone recognizing him – or recognizing her, and then him. Neither cared. So long as they could be together, nothing else mattered. They could change his appearance... cut her hair... find some place secluded...

And finally... at long last... truly start living...

Author’s notes: ok, the sacrament scene was comprised of several churches’ communion/sacrament/whatever other name it’s known by. It is accurate to no one

church that I know of, and was pretty much just cobbled together from the things I've seen in the churches I've been to. I did it this way for two reasons: 1. I didn't want anyone to think I was bashing, or endorsing, any one religion over another, and 2. well... I really don't know ALL of the ceremony from ANY of them, sooo.... :P Information on Shinji's birthday and the date of Second Impact was taken from my printed translation of the Red Cross Book. Now I KNOW that the birthdays of the pilots are taken from the Voice actors that portrayed them, and may not be wholly accurate to the vision of the story... but it fit so nice!! :)

Thanks to 20eva, Rhine, Ryoma, and Lord DeathScythe for pre-reading on this one... you're all awesome! :)

Feedback is welcome at [random1377@yahoo.com](mailto:random1377@yahoo.com)

Disclaimer: Evangelion is not mine. Disclaimers are redundant...

This takes place during the alternate reality that Shinji created in episode 26. The one where Rei actually spoke like a normal girl and said things that I never expected to come out of her mouth... \*shakes head\* For now, this is just a WAFFy one shot with Shinji/Asuka, but maybe I can continue with it if I want to later.

On with the show!

\*\*\*\*\*

### **A Beautiful Day for Piggyback Rides**

By: [Karina Kineshi](mailto:coronaflare@mail.com) (coronaflare@mail.com)

*Late! Late!!*

I didn't know whether to pound on the door or just give it a simple tap. If I had done the former, Mr. Ikari would have come out here and busted my ass before he realized who I was. But then again, there was the threat of knocking so quietly no one would hear me. It's amazing that no matter how many times I stand in front of this very door, I have no idea how to act.

Shinji's parents, namely his dad, were more partial to voices than to knocking on the door. I thought of a better approach. "Hello? Can I come—"

The door whipped open before I could finish my sentence, and I was left standing there with my fist raised in midair and hovering in front of my face, ready to knock. All the blood drained to my feet when I beheld the impressive height of Gendo Ikari filling the doorway. "Yes?"

Can this man *ever* greet me like I wasn't some door-to-door toilet salesman? Just once? Or does he forget my name when I go to his apartment every single day? I like to think of myself as a person who is normally unshaken, but in this man's presence... I felt myself becoming unraveled. "I.. well... Shinji..."

He growled at me, a deep noise that rattled in the back of his throat. "Shinji is still—"

"—dear, who is it?" Yui pushed her husband's hulk out of the doorway, at the same time wiping her hands on a teatowel. She smiled broadly when she saw me. "Asuka! Come in, come in..."

I heaved a sigh of relief when Gendo gave me a once over before striding back to the kitchen table, no doubt going back to reading the stock market profiles in the newspaper. Yui winked at me and directed me to Shinji's room. Well, not that I needed her to do so, but she did it anyways. "Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome."

We assumed an unspoken communication that went something along of the lines of me thanking her for saving me from her husband. She said with her eyes that she knew how intimidating her husband could be to children (even though he really wasn't once you got to know him, she said) and that it was her job to save all people who knock on the

door of room 317.

Why did that man hate me so much, anyways? Is it just me? Or does he treat everyone like that? Maybe I'm going overboard. I had known the family for a long time, was best friends with Shinji and a favorite of Shinji's mother, but Shinji's father? I shrugged and chalked it up as one of life's eternal mysteries.

"Shinji? Are you awake?"

What a stupid question to ask. I don't think being snuggled in your covers with your eyes closed counted as being awake. I looked around to see if he had changed anything since yesterday. Same penguin bobblehead figurine... same prudish sense of tidiness. Other than a box of mangorind candy on the floor, nothing was out of place.

*That's my mangorind candy, damn you!*

He must have stolen it from me, the little punk. Or wait... I think I gave it to him... oh well. I picked the box up off the floor and put it on his desktop. After a moment's hesitation, I took that same box and put it in my lunchbag. I'd have dessert today...

Of course, I'll share. Maybe.

Shinji turned over in his sleep, eyebrows close together and a slight scowl on his face. "Hey Shinji?" If he was having a bad dream, I guess the thing to do would be to wake him. I leaned in closer, not really deciding on the best way to handle this. I kept on moving closer to his face when I realized just how close I was.

C'mon, I had been this close before, and sometimes even closer. We were old friends, there wasn't a thing I knew about me that he didn't. I was comfortable enough to be really physically close to him without feeling guilt or that sense of longing between a man and a woman. I didn't have that at all.

It was okay in grade school, everyone knew that Shinji and Asuka were just friends. Just platonic. It wasn't out of the ordinary to have a girl as your best friend, or vice versa. However, that all changed when we entered intermediary school. Suddenly, hanging out with a girl meant that you had her "in the sack".

I shuddered at the assumption. We were just friends, and it's strange when someone tries to tell us otherwise. I could hear Touji's voice echoing in my head, asking why in the world Shinji and I hadn't gone on a date already. Shinji and I looked at him like he was crazy, and then we walked back to class. Together.

"Shinji?"

I felt his soft breathing on my face, and my eyelids drooped as I stared at him. Boyish, not incredibly handsome, but above average. The innocence was the trait that endeared him most to the girls of my class. Oddly enough, no one had ever asked him for a date because they always assumed that I was his girlfriend.

Which I certainly was *not*.

I remember seeing this same childlike face playing in the sandbox the day that we met. He was playing all by himself, patting down sand in an attempt to build a mound. The boys' consensus was that he was too wimpy and didn't like playing rough boy sports like

wrestling. The girls whispered amongst themselves that his father was a very powerful trading tycoon, and whoever angered Shinji would be struck down by the wrath of God.

I said they were all airheads.

None of them had even bothered to talk to the boy before, so how did they know? My family and I had just moved here from Hamburg, Germany. While getting to know everyone in my elementary school was no easy task, I found myself being drawn to the silent boy with the sad, expressive eyes. The one who wasn't afraid to play by himself.

"Asuka, be careful!" one of my friends named Megumi cautioned. "I hear that whenever someone talks to him, they turn up missing the next day."

I snorted at her and told my friends to watch me talk to him. In that burst of confidence only a second grader can possess, I sauntered over to the sandbox and set my foot on a wooden plank. Of course, I was scared, but I'd never admit it. I cleared my throat to get his attention. "Hi, I'm Asuka. Sohryu Asuka Langley. Pleased to meet you."

The boy's head slowly lifted upwards, as if tearing his eyes away from his sand mound would somehow flatten it. "Are... are you talking to me?"

"Who else would I be talking to, *dummkopf*?" I sneered. Almost immediately, I slapped my hand over my mouth when I said that German word. Mama always uttered it when my Dad says something stupid. Mama never gave me an explanation as to why I can't say it, but I know it's bad all the same.

"I don't know..." He looked puzzled. "What's that word you said?"

"It's a bad word. I can't say it again." I said in a conspiratorial tone. "Mama might wash my mouth out with soap if I say it again."

The boy blinked and nodded with me, eyes wide open. "Oh... right..." Parents could instill such fear in children, and we were no exception. I glanced around, frightened that somehow my Mama was watching me from somewhere. She said that she had eyes in the back of her head, and I wondered if she also had them in the school.

Once I was positive that she wasn't watching (I can't tell you how I *knew*), I asked him what he was doing. He said he was making a sand pile. I remarked that he does that all during recess, why didn't he play with the other boys? "... and you get dirty from the sand!" I added.

Shinji said that the boys hurt him when he tries to play soccer, and plus he liked the feel of the sand between his fingers. He said like he felt like he was playing on the moon. My second grade mind was awestruck by the magnificence (or strangeness) of his words. Playing on the moon? Man... this kid really was weird.

"C'mon, it's fun."

I knelt down in the sand, cringing when the lace border on my dress got half submerged in the sand. But once I ran my fingers through the grit, I started to enjoy it. Mama would never let me join in such a messy pastime as playing in a sandbox, but I really didn't care at the moment. The sand felt really good, cool to the touch. "I bet I can build a bigger mountain than you can," I challenged.

He smiled at me. "We'll see."

Looking back, I was glad I took the time to know this boy. If I had taken everyone's advice and stayed away from him, I wonder where I would have ended up.

A frying pan being slammed against the stove snapped me out of my reverie, and I found myself in a rather awkward position. I was hovering not an inch from Shinji face, just staring at him. I snapped back in horror. What if he woke up and saw me? What if he thought I was trying to kiss him?!

"Not that that'd be a bad idea..."

*What did I just say?!*

"Argh! Stupid Shinji!" What I tried to pass off as an excuse for my closeness came out as blaming Shinji for it. His eyes snapped open, and I found myself without a plan. I put my arms on my hips and tried to act in command. "Wake up, stupid Shinji!"

If there's anyone who can mask uneasiness, it was me.

I watched him as he slowly turned his head and got his eyes to focus. "Oh, it's you Asuka."

I rolled my eyes. He was just like his father when it came to recognizing people. "Is that the best greeting you can give to your oldest childhood friend?" I come every day, endure that painful decision at the Ikari's door, put up with Gendo's scrutiny, and for what?

Shinji pulled the covers around his face and turned over. "Thanks Asuka. Now let me get back to sleep."

I fought the urge to smack the boy. "You're so lazy! You can't skip school... so get up already!" I grabbed a corner of his sheet and yanked it from his body, hoping to stir him from sleep.

One part of Shinji was up bright and early.

When I saw what I saw, I screamed. Never mind the fact that I've seen it before considering I wake him up every day, but still... I slapped him and screamed that he's such a horny moron. He shot back that it was morning and he couldn't help it. I dragged him to his feet and threw his uniform at him. "Put that on right now!" I demanded.

He still moved sluggishly, pulling the shirt over his head like a turtle coming out of its shell. "Asuka, you're so *loud*," he complained. There was only one thing to do to this remark. I slapped him again. That shut him up quickly. Once we had said goodbye to his parents, we bolted down the stairs and into the morning sun.

"Let's go!"

He scowled and started to run. The collar to his shirt was upturned so I quickly fixed it in mid stride. That's no easy task, but I could do it. Once he rubbed his cheek again and glared at me for making it, he slyly remarked, "It's not like you haven't see it before, lighten up Asuka."

My face turned bright red, but I kept it under control. True, but it's... weird. I mean, he's my best friend! "You just can't control yourself when I come to wake you up, can you?"

"Don't get too big headed," was his retort.

I glared at him and continued running. After a brief pause in talking (he was pulling lint out of his shirt pocket), we started talking about any old thing that crossed our minds. "Isn't the sky beautiful today?"

I snorted. "Christ Shinji, try to sound like a *man*..."

"At least I take time to enjoy life unlike you..."

"Enjoying life isn't an excuse to be late for school, you idiot."

He lightly punched me on the arm and I punched him back. We stared at each other and started laughing. Sort of an inside joke that I don't care to repeat. Shinji switched the topic. "I hear that there's a new girl coming to school today."

New girl? Yeah, I heard about her yesterday. Our teacher announced that someone would be sitting in the vacant seat next to mine. Her name was Rei Ayanami, a transfer student who had migrated from the old capital. "Yeah, we're seeing a lot of new people nowadays since they moved the capital to here." We had no shortage of newcomers, our class was filled to capacity.

Shinji wasn't even listening to me. He looked into the sky and his face got dreamlike. "I sure hope she's cute."

Don't ask why this comment pissed me off so much, but since that day I befriended him in the sandbox, he was slowly opening himself up to other people. Not that it was bad, of course, but he accepted mannerisms that seemed very out of character for him. For example, the old Shinji wouldn't have said that, he would have blushed just thinking about it.

Was this my fault as a best friend?

Was I even his best friend anymore?

In an attempt to show my displeasure, I cut in front of his stride and ran in front of him. He stumbled for a bit, arms flailing, as he tried to run on wobbly legs. I laughed and turned around. "I'm all the cute you'll ever need," I declared. It pleased me that he almost tripped. But...

Before being blasted into a dizzying kaleidoscope of colors, I remember two quite well. A flash of light blue hair and outlandish red eyes. Something slammed into me with enough force to knock me to the ground. "Goddammit, what the hell?!" I was looking at that sky, the same one that Shinji said was gorgeous earlier.

It was spinning.

"Asuka!" In the time it took me to regain my senses, I felt two hands on my shoulders, shaking me. "Asuka, are you okay?"

The sky spinning wasn't the worst of it though. My right ankle felt like it was just pounded by a meat tenderizer. Shinji shaking me like a rag doll didn't help matters much either. I shielded the sun with my hand and snapped, "Stop shaking me! I'm not dead!" I scowled and pulled down my skirt which had flown up while I got knocked down. "And quit peeking, you pervert."

"Sorry."

*He wasn't sorry at all, the jerk.*

"You're just saying that!"

Ignoring the pain, I sat up with help from Shinji and saw what it was that had the power to knock me senseless. I was expecting an American football player, but I saw a petite girl with blue hair. She was rubbing her head while sitting up, and her half-eaten toast quickly became a paradise to some passing robins. "Ouch... ouch... ouch..." she groaned.

*You don't have to say it more than once... it's killing me too...*

I groaned when Shinji tried to haul me to my feet, and I quickly found that I couldn't stand on that damn ankle. I sank back to the ground again. "Great... just great..." I muttered.

The girl finally opened her eyes and she immediately apologized. Unlike me, she didn't seem to have a broken ankle or a pounding head, because as soon as she said she was sorry, she picked up her briefcase and started running. She called over her shoulder, "Sorry! I'm late for school!"

*Wait! Hey!*

I yelled at her to come back, but she didn't hear me. Why does this sort of thing always happen to me? Shinji didn't know quite what to make of it either. She certainly was rude!

"Do you need help?"

I gritted my teeth and used Shinji's arm as a pole to help me climb up. As soon as my injured ankle got pressure put on it, I fell to the ground again. "I can't stand on it!" I exclaimed pointlessly.

"—I... I don't know..."

"Well, do *something*..."

Shinji thought about it. "I could run to the school and get some ice..."

I clung to his arm and ordered him not to leave me here in the middle of the road. Truth was, I didn't know what to do either. I couldn't crawl to school... maybe I can hop there on one leg, you know, like those performers in Kabuki theater... yeah, and maybe...

"I have to carry you there." Shinji sighed. When he saw the shocked look on my face, he added, "Unless you want to be dragged."

No. I'd rather be carried. "But... but what about..." I knew I didn't have to finish that sentence. We thought so alike that sometimes it scared me, and I knew he was thinking the same thing I was.

*What if someone sees me? It's indecent...*

He put his fingers under his chin and tilted his head slightly forward, just like he always did when he was thinking. "Let them think what they want to think. We have to get to school," he said. Without another word, he lifted me to my feet. I tried not to put

weight on that ankle for as long as I could, and when I did it sent painful needles up my leg.

After the arduous task of getting me up, I glared and asked acidly, "So what next, genius?"

"You'll have to jump on my back and I can carry you."

I almost fell over again. "What? I thought you were going to carry me... you know..." I made a cradle motion with my arms.

He quirked an eyebrow and looked at me curiously. "You know I'm not strong enough to do that, Asuka."

"Yeah... I know... but..." He glared at me, and I didn't want to continue that train of thought. I guess being on his back was better than being carried like a newborn. It won't do a damn thing for decency though... I sighed. "When are you going to start lifting weights already?"

"Shut up."

Of course, this was all mild mannered teasing. Once I taught Shinji how to stand up for himself, I don't think he's acted spineless since. I was proud of myself. "All right, brace yourself." I hopped up onto his back (with one leg, I might add), and clung to his neck with all my strength. I already knew the boy had no muscle and that wasn't his fault, but if he toppled over backward I was taking him down with me.

He staggered and teetered on one foot, and I closed my eyes and prepared for the worst. Miraculously, he righted himself after throwing his arms in the air to regain his balance. Shinji hooked his arms under my legs and linked his hands together under me, forming a nice seat. "Now don't be getting any funny ideas, Shinji."

To my surprise, he said nothing. Shinji took a shaky step forward, and then another. He caught on quickly and soon walked rather fast, though I realized that we'd never make it to school before the bell at this rate. "What's the time?"

I rested my head on his shoulder to look at my wristwatch. "There's no point in it now," I stated, "we're already eight minutes late."

At this announcement, Shinji let up on his pace. Eight minutes late, twenty minutes late, it was still late. No sense trying to rush for a deadline impossible to make.

"Asuka?"

"Hmm?"

Shinji turned his head very slightly to the right. "Weren't you carrying a purse?"

I would have hit myself if I wasn't holding onto Shinji's neck. "Shit! My lunch... I think... it must have been knocked away..."

"Your lunch?" Shinji stopped walking and turned his head even more to face me. I felt ready to fall off. "In your favorite bag?" It was the oldest lunchbag I had, dating back to our second grade days. I remember Shinji writing my name on it in permanent black marker one day during lunch. He said that this way, it'd never be lost or stolen. A second grader's lunchbag was a pretty important family friend back in those days, ranking

up right there with your mother and father.

"Don't worry about it," I sighed. "I can always get another one." I felt bad enough straining him like this, and there's no point in being worked up over a tiny piece of nostalgia. "Just go."

Without ceremony, Shinji turned around on his heel and marched in the opposite direction of the school. He strained under my weight; I could feel the back of his neck getting warm with sweat. "We're already late anyways, might as well. That lunchbag... means a lot."

I tried to tell him to stop sounding so damn wistful, but the roar of a red car hurtling down the street drowned that attempt. Shinji stumbled when the car raced past, and within I spotted the pale visage of our teacher.

Misato Katsuragi.

As soon as she tore past us, the sound of brakes squealing and rubber grinding against asphalt pierced the air. The entire car pitched forward as Misato managed to stop and reverse in one swift movement.

"Oh shit... she... she saw!"

"Who?" Shinji seemed even more confused than I did.

I couldn't contain my exasperation; I lightly tapped him on the cheek with a finger. If *anyone* should know whose car that was, it would be Shinji. He along with two other dorks from my class made up the KIVS club, long name 'Katsuragi Is Very Sexy'. I asked them why they couldn't just call it KISS with 'Super' or 'Sensationally' to replace 'Very'. They stared at me like I am the dumbest person on the planet. They knew I had a good idea, but were too chicken to...

The car pounced backwards and slammed to a halt right beside us. The reflection in her black car window mirrored two very embarrassed children.

I was one of them.

The black plate of glass that was her window sank down slowly. Misato removed the sunglasses from her eyes with a flourish and peered at us. "Whatcha guys doing?"

I wanted to punch that grin off her face.

"What does it *look* like we're doing?" I asked as haughtily as I could and failing miserably given the situation. "Trying to get to school. Of course." My voice cracked on the last two words, and I wanted to bury my face in the ground and never come back out.

"Asuka? School is *that* way."

Oh shit. I had forgotten about that. I stammered to explain. "Well see, we were going to school, and when I came around the corner, I—"

"She's *hurt* Misato." Shinji gestured to my ankle with a jerk of his head. "She... twisted it. Maybe broke it." After Misato bore her eyes into him, he shifted from one foot to the other. "I'm taking her home."

I sat upright, alert. I only thought we were going for my lunchbag! "Wait a

second Shinji..." I turned to Misato. If I told her the truth, maybe she would... "I... um... dropped my lunchbag over there somewhere. I told Shinji he didn't have to go for it, but we came this way anyway."

Misato grinned at us, opening and closing her mouth as if to say something. Nothing ever came out. The more we stood in silence, the more fidgety I got. This is the part where she would suspend us for being late to school again. Never mind the fact that my right foot now felt detached from my body. Although Misato seemed carefree to outsiders, she severely punished students who disobeyed the rules.

After staring at us (and enjoying my nervousness), Misato casually asked, "Do you need a ride?"

"What?"

Shinji took a step back. "M-Misato?"

*That was something I didn't expect.*

Our teacher only smiled wider. "You need a ride to school, don't you?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

Misato held up her hand. Her eyes darted playfully to the seat behind the driver and she reached over to procure—

"—my bag! The hell?"

Misato hummed a couple bars of a song I couldn't recognize before abruptly stopping. She lazily twirled my bag around, purple strap winding around her wrist like a cloth bracelet. "You've lost it before Asuka. I wouldn't have known it was yours but..." she turned the bag over in her hands disdainfully. "... I spotted the color a mile away."

I glared at her. "Don't start *that* again on me, Misato." To make a long story short, on Misato's first day of teaching she snidely commented on how hideous the color of my bag was. I told her that at least it had better color coordination than her current outfit. I should have kept my mouth shut; she made me clean the blackboards that day.

*Damn you.*

I left soap streaks all over the boards just to spite her. I mean, what new teacher makes remarks like that? I thought that would teach her. In my glee of finally having revenge, I forgot my bag at the school. The next day, Misato was sitting at her desk, hands clasped together and my bag in her hands. She was surrounded by the soapy blackboards.

I was the only one there.

She gave me my bag and said that she was only joking. "Lighten up, Asuka. It's sad when a grownup acts more like a child than the child does." I snatched the bag from her and grudgingly said thanks. Misato grinned.

The relationship between her and me... well, not one that most of the students have with their teachers, but we shared a sort of sisterly bond.

"Asuka?"

"What!"

"Here." She threw the bag at Shinji's face, but considering both of his hands were occupied in holding me up, couldn't catch it. He flinched, but I miraculously caught it with my hand flipped around backwards. "There isn't enough room in my car for both of you. Either you keep on walking together... or Asuka can be dropped off here and *you* can walk."

Shinji's knees were starting to shake. Whatever we were going to do, I'd be quick about it. I don't think he could take me sitting on his back much longer. "Well... Misato... um... see I want..."

I half expected Shinji to ask if he could leave me here on the sidewalk while he rode in Misato's car. Yeah, he had that big a crush on her. He didn't want to carry me to school but he wanted to ride with Misato.

Fine, leave an injured girl here by herself. I'll just claw my way to school.

"What'd you say, Asuka?"

I whipped my head around and felt my face get red. Did I say that aloud? Crap! "I said... uh... I'll go in the car and Shinji can walk by himself to school."

"Fine. Either way works," Misato said.

"Plus," I remarked to Shinji, "you don't need the extra weight." I started to shift and pry his fingers out from under me. Shinji didn't turn around to drop me off in the seat as I had expected. Instead, his fingers clamped even tighter together under my legs. I stopped moving long enough to ask what he was doing.

I felt him swallow. Hard. "I'll... I'll take her to school myself."

I gasped. "What?!" Was he crazy?

What if we couldn't make it?

We'll be passing right in front of the school building. What if the students saw us?

What if they made fun of me? Of him?

What if...

Misato looked stunned. Obviously, she had been expecting that I'd ride in her car. "Shinji... I..." After the three of us stared at each other for a minute, Misato closed her mouth and placed her hands on the steering wheel. She rolled up her window and the car roared to life. Before she dashed down the street, I caught the faintest hint of a smile on her face.

"Good luck kids," she had said.

Shinji and I watched it as it swerved to avoid a rolling trashcan before finally disappearing around a corner. Once it was out of sight, I exhaled, not remembering that I forgot to breathe. "Shinji... what the hell are you thinking?"

He pushed me up further on his back and started his shaky walk. "I don't know... maybe I like carrying weight."

I snorted. "It'll put some muscle on that scrawny frame of yours, that's for sure." Despite my repeated attempts to get him to go with me to a gym, he always shied away from that. Of course, he claimed that he was already in shape. Maybe this would help him after all. "Well, if I was a sack of rice, you wouldn't hesitate to drop me off."

"If you were a sack of rice, you wouldn't be *talking* either."

I loosened my grip around his neck. "Touché, Shinji. I see you still don't like walking with people."

He shrugged, but didn't answer.

I knew exactly why. He wouldn't walk to school with anyone else but me. Not even with Touji or Kensuke. He'd rather walk alone. I never understood why, but that's the way he is. Maybe I should be flattered that he'd choose me. However, he acted pretty uncomfortable with this, and I was the only one he would walk with. Why?

"Are you embarrassed that people will see us like this?" he asked.

*Not really.*

"No, why?"

Shinji slowed down, as if trying to delay the inevitable. "I don't know... I was just wondering."

"How long have we been best friends?" I asked suddenly.

Shinji paused before answering. "Since second grade."

"Do you remember when our families went swimming together in second grade?"

He laughed a little bit. "Yeah." His stride grew a little longer and a little less shaky. "The water was freezing, but we didn't care."

"And when we went swimming again?"

He looked up into the sky as if to gather his thoughts. "Um... in the summer... I think..."

I could hear the thin whistle of a lark overheard. The air suddenly grew stagnantly hot. "Do you remember what we were wearing?"

He paused for too long. In fact, he didn't answer.

"Then if you know the answer, you'd have to agree that we're pretty comfortable with each other, right?" I pressed.

Shinji nodded.

I leaned in closer to his ear so he would hear me. "Then tell me the truth. Why are you not comfortable with me now?"

*Have you really changed that much?*

The lunchbag wrapped around my wrist slapped against his arm, and the only noise was that of the tiny zipper tapping against its track. "Well?"

"People change, Asuka."

"Oh." My heart broke in two; I didn't feel like I knew this Shinji anymore. He carried me for a sense of duty, not because he wanted my company. Because of him I was hit by the girl, and if I hadn't hit her then *he* would have. Typical Shinji, he put the blame on himself. "Yeah. People change."

"Do you think I've changed, Asuka? Is that what this is about?"

I bit my lip. "Sorry I asked."

"Have I... changed?"

I didn't answer.

"Why do you think I've changed?"

I answered him with a question of my own. "Why are you carrying me on your back?" He was probably doing it just because he felt bad. Or maybe to thank me so that he wasn't hit. Or maybe to show to Misato that he was a strong boy and deserving of her love...

I scowled. Like *that* was going to happen.

"Because..." Shinji kicked a pebble and sent it skittering across the sidewalk, all without making me feel like I was going to fall off. "Because I like having you walk with me."

I stopped examining a battered stop sign long enough for his words to sink in. That wasn't the answer I expected. Three times in one day. "And you carried me *on your back* just because you like *walking* with me?"

"I'd rather be with you than be alone."

We walked a bit of the way in silence. So... Shinji had changed. But he changed for the better. At least now he wants to walk with me instead of being forced to because I was the one who woke him up every morning.

He cleared his throat. "And... I like you, Asuka. You're my friend."

I ordered myself to let it slide. A simple "I like you" can mean so many things. Knowing Shinji, it was most likely meant in a friendly way.

*"I like you Asuka."*

But then again... I've never heard him say those to anyone before...

When we got to the school, I prepared myself for the worst. There was no other entrance to the nurse's office than through the front, meaning we'd have to endure the stares of everyone in the building. I heard a shriek from the fourth story window (most likely Hikari), and suddenly my classroom windows were pulsing. Pulsing with the excited hits and taps of everyone inside.

Touji threw open a pane of glass and shouted out the window, "Shinji! You the *man!*"

More assorted shouts followed.

"Traitor!"

"Blackmail material! Ex-ce-llent-e!"

"It's scandalous...!"

"Ah! That's the jerk who was staring at my panties!"

My head jerked up and I shook a fist at the windows while clinging onto Shinji with one arm. "Who the *hell* just said that?!" I most certainly was *not* a jerk! And what panties? What...

Shinji shuffled his arms under me as we passed directly under the window. It was the only way to get to the entrance. "Ignore them. Just ignore them..."

*Just ignore them?*

"You know there's another way in! The janitor's door leads right to the courtyard and we could have gone in there!" I snapped. Why did he have to go and do this? Janitor Ryouji would have been more than happy to sneak us into school. He was just cool like that. Rumor had it that our teacher had a soft spot for the man... "You know the janitor, right?"

Before reaching for the doorknob, Shinji paused. "Thank you for walking with me, Asuka." He looked down, and in doing so his chin rested on my arm.

*That* action quelled whatever fury I had in me of being seeing in a less than ladylike position. I stammered out a thank you, unable to decipher if that was a gesture of tenderness or Shinji simply trying to see where the doorknob was.

But the way he held it on there long after the door was open... the way he triumphantly turned to look at me when we reached the nurses' office... the way he gently set me down on the bleached sheets of the examining bed, making sure I had a pillow behind my head... the way he smiled before Nurse Akagi closed the door and ordered him to go back to class...

After Nurse Akagi removed my shoe (with a considerable amount of pain, may I add), she said, "Miss Langley, I'm going to wrap your ankle, it's not broken, but it's pretty swollen. Think of something else other than the pain." The command from the yellow-headed nurse was firm but gentle.

*"I like you, Asuka."*

Maybe it *is* just me.

Maybe I read into these things too much for my own good.

Maybe... I'm making a mountain out of a sandhill.

I turned my head and stared out of the window. The colors outside were so brilliantly bright that the sharp pains in my ankle were easily ignored. I looked up into heavens through that dirt-streaked window and thought to myself...

... the sky really *is* beautiful today.

**The End**

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Author's notes: It's official. I'm a romantic. Give me angst, give me comedy, but nothing can top romance. Sappy yes, but the idea wouldn't let go. Didn't like the ending too much, but then again... I wanted to end it sappily ^_^ I might expand on this, but I think it stands well on its own.

Oh, don't even bother to tell me Shinji was OOC, I already know. C'mon, the man sighed and said, "I caught just a little peek at her panties..." I don't know about you, but the Shinji we know would never say such a thing without his face bursting into flame. I stayed true to that alternate universe and made Shinji behave the way he was outlined to behave. I sort of shied away from that as the fic went along, because for the love of me I can't type Shinji speaking like a pervert. Can't. He went back to the original Shinji near the end of the fic, thank God.

Future plans? *thinks* I have a couple of epics in mind, so expect another Shinji/Asuka serial (yeesh, how'd you guess?) coming out sometime in August. Until later... keep on writing!

Revised on July 27, 5:42 p.m. central time. Thanks to Ken Sohryu (that is what I get for not having a prereader...) and Reizig for pointing out inconsistencies. Thanks for post betaing. *smiles*

Neon Genesis Evangelion
Holding Hands

Strike Fiss, 2000

Woman was taken out of man -- not out of his head, to rule over him;
nor out of his feet, to be trampled under by him; but out of his side,
to be equal to him -- under his arm, that he might protect her, and
near his heart that he might love her.

-- Henry

"You want to hit me...don't you?!"

I was terrified when she said those words. It was almost as if she was
reading my mind. My one, perfectly clear thought that had been surging
through every neuron in my skull for almost half an hour straight.

I wanted to hit her. Soooooooooooooo badly.

"W...NO!" I try. It was a pitiful attempt at acting weak when my voice was almost shivering with anger. I can't remember hearing my voice quite like that before. Maybe once...

Father.

But never against her. I couldn't bare to think of Asuka in the same thought as my Father. It is something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, let alone the...

"Of course you do!" she leans forward, smirking.

She's SMIRKING at me! I can't believe it! It's almost like she's getting some sick pleasure in reading my mind!

It can't be that hard...reading my mind...It's focused into such a laser-tight thought that a chimpanzee without any psychic ability whatsoever might be able to figure out. Still...to have HER inside my head at this moment? I don't know if I should be terrified, or if I should just be even more angry.

"What do you mean?! I don't want to hit you!" I almost yell. I'm sure the entire train's occupancy load is looking at us anyway. If I whispered, it would still be watched.

Asuka smiles. It is a scary smile. I must admit, she does scare me sometimes. Often, she knows exactly what WILL scare me. I am sure of this also. Damn...she's even doing that thing with her eyes just barely cracked open as she's smiling. She looks like a ghost come to haunt me.

"You want to hit me, Third Child." she pauses for effect. "Don't you!?!"

I do. I really do. I want to take my fist and plough it through her self-righteous smirk. I want to see how fucking cocky she is with a tooth missing! Yeah! See how she likes THAT! See if she can finally figure out that I'm reaching my limit with this shit.

What shit?

How about, for a starters, how she smacks me in the back of the head. Fucking bitch. It hurts too! She uses her nails! I have no idea how she keeps them that sharp, but she also hits me with quite a bit of force. She must drink a lot of milk or whatever to keep them so strong.

She's been doing it all day.

All day.

Yesterday, I mentioned how I'd like her to stop. Of course, today, that's all she does. I was a fool to give her such an obvious invitation, but it was worth a try.

"Asuka! I don't want to hit you." I try again, taking a step back. It's not enough, obviously. The train's too crowded to offer freedom of movement.

Suddenly, she looks almost disappointed. I really don't understand this girl nearly as much as I wish I did sometimes. "Oh yeah? Not even when I do this?"

SMACK!

Oh...that one hurt. A lot.

She's smiling again when I open my eyes. Damn her. Damn her to hell.

"WHAT WAS THAT FOR!?!?" I yell.

"I was right! You DO want to hit me!" she states proudly.

I could have told her that.

She continues, looking down at my arm for some reason that escapes me.

"See? Every time you get mad, you flex your hand like that. You want to hit me, don't you!"

I gasp, actually reaching over with my left hand to stop my right hand's movement. Dammit! I forgot about that... "N...NO!" I beg.

"It's not like that!"

"I'll tell you what." she smiles in that same scary smile. "I'll let you hit me."

What?

"What?!" I echo my thoughts. This is all some kind of sick joke.

She'll grab my arm out of the way, then wail on me, screaming that I'm a pervert for wanting to beat a girl. "No!"

"I'm serious." she won't stop smiling. "If you can bring yourself to hit me, I will let you have one free shot without fear of retaliation."

The way she has been grating on my nerves all day, brining myself to hitting her would be surprisingly easy right now. Still, I'm cautious.

"You're lying." I say. I know I must sound like a detective, trying to solve a mystery. Why the almighty Asuka Langley would ever let me have a crack at her jaw is a damn miracle.

"No I'm not." she nods. "On one condition!" she frowns, then smiles in that same...very...scary way. "I get to hold your hand."

I blink.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to prove, once and for all, that you couldn't fight me even if you had the chance." she states with a dangerous hiss. "I dare you. Do your worst...Third Child."

I hate being called Third Child. I really do.

"Deal." I almost growl.

I can see a little bit of worry flash through her eyes. She is beginning to realize she may have underestimated exactly how MUCH I want to hit her. However, her stubborn pride forces her forward. Fine by me. I deserve this. Just once. Just one good shot to that fucking smirk and I'll be good for a few more months of torture. God knows I've earned at least this much.

Pleeeeeeease, I beg myself. Just hit her...just once...let me have this one, tiny victory over this stubborn, annoying little girl and I swear I'll be...

A warm sensation wraps around my left hand.

Oh. Oh shit.

I hate you, Asuka. I hate you. Why did you have to figure THAT out as well? No...not that I hate you. The other thing.

She smiles as she sees my face soften. She knows she has me by the hypothetical balls. "Well, Third Child? Come on..." she leans forward. "I dare you..."

Ohhhh...she whispered. She whispered. Oh god. She. Is. So. Damn. Sexy. When she whispers.

I start to whisper something back. I really have no idea what it is. All I can feel is her hands wrapped around mine.

"Yes, Shin-kun?" she coos at me. I know it's all just to weaken my resolve further, but damn, is that voice ever going to keep me awake tonight.

"T...cen...p-ll...wit...ch..."

I really have no idea what I just whispered. Neither does she. She gives me a quizzical look. "Pardon?"

"Target centre..." I whisper a bit louder. "Pull the switch..."

SMACK!

Oh. Oh damn.

Did that ever feel good.

I can still see the look on her face as she realized my right fist was about to hit her jaw. Thank god for Misato's training. It's really

amazing what your body can do even if your mind's gone.

"AAAHHHHHHHH!" she yells, almost falling back.

I can't help but smile...just a little. The sting on my knuckles only confirms my sweet, sweet victory.

She is holding the side of her chin, and obviously in a lot of pain the way she's cringing. "BAAAAAAAAKA!"

"Sorry." I say. I really am sorry. But oh...DAMN...I needed that.

Asuka shoots more daggers at me with her eyes than I have ever shot at my Father. The rest of the trip is rather quiet. She's not smirking anymore.

Oooh yeah.

"We're going home."

It takes me a moment to figure out that I'm moving. Dammit. I really

didn't want to move. "What the HELL are you doing, Baka!" I demand, watching the stunned faces around me.

Since when did Shinji get like this? I should have never let him hit me last month in the train. Shit. Now he thinks he can boss me around. I really need to beat the shit out of him.

"Stop!" I demand. It comes out about as clear as possible under the circumstances, I suppose. He does understand it, but it's clear he's not about to stop. Fuck him.

"I don't wanna go yet!"

"Asuka, we are going NOW!" he turns and almost yells in my face.

Fuck him and his damn...ugh. I feel sick. The sudden gust of cold, fresh air as we leave the house is enough to send me over the edge. "Oh no..."

I think it took the sound of my vomit to make him realize he should have listened to me. It's his own damn fault I threw up on his fucking shoes. I don't care.

When I open my eyes next, all I see is his worried expression looking down at me with a horizontal tilt. The nice, cool grass is on my cheek. Luckily, whatever I threw up must have been a short distance away from where I landed.

"Asuka! Are you okay!?"

"Fuck you, Shinji." I whisper hoarsely.

He seems to have taken that last sentence rather badly. A part of me

is wondering if I should have said that or not. The part of me that just puked it's guts out, however, feels exactly that way towards him right now.

"Why did you drag me out here!" I demand. For the life of me, I honestly can't remember.

"You were almost raped!" he yells, equally hoarsely. "For FUCK sakes, Asuka!"

"I...I was fine!" I swallow hard, realizing what he said was not just some twisted dream I had been having. Shit...I really have to stop drinking like Misato. I'm not nearly as good at handling it as she is.

Shinji knows me like a fucking book. Damn him. He's not falling for any of this. "And that's why you almost smashed that beer bottle over his head when I finally got him off you?"

Damn him.

"Were you waiting for a more dramatic moment to stop him?!?" Shinji yells at me. His voice...shit...he's doing that thing. It's like he's almost about to cry...but also about to rip someone apart. I can never tell if I'm being frightened...or saddened by it. Shit. I've had fantasies about him after hearing it. I really don't know what to think at the moment, though.

"I..."

"Well, it couldn't have been much later!" Shinji reaches over and grabs a piece of cloth that used to be my dress' top. It's been ripped clean off. "You scared the SHIT out of me, Asuka! Did you realize how loud you were yelling?"

"I..."

Shit...it's all back now...I hate that...Fuck...no...god no...don't start, Asuka...don't start...not in front of him...please no...

I'm crying. Fuck.

"I...I'm sorry...Shinji..."

Fuck. I hate myself. Why do I always do this shit in front of Shinji? This was supposed to be a party. Something fun. Something to take my mind off of things. Sure...I wanted to meet new guys...but nothing like what happened. I just needed a break from...

Shinji. Damn you, Shinji. Fucking Invincible Shinji saves me again.

God help me. I am grateful. I am more grateful than he could possibly know. Fuck you, Shinji.

"Asuka..." he's already wrapped his coat around me. Now comes his arms. No. God no. I can't handle this right now. "Everything's going to be okay...just let it out..."

I do. I cry. I must have cried for hours. Why the hell is he the only man I can cry around? Weak, baka Shinji. God damn you. No...why is he doing this? Why? He's so small! I probably weigh more than he does!

"Come on. I'll give you a ride." he whispers as he pulls my arms over his shoulders.

"I can walk..."

No I can't. I can barely breathe I'm so exhausted. I don't know if I'm angry or grateful, but he doesn't let me struggle, and gives me a piggy-back ride.

He walks for blocks with me on his back. I really can't remember it much. He never once complains though. I hate it when he does this. It only makes things worse.

But...I don't want things to get better.

All I can feel is his right hand pressed over mine. It's amazing he can do that and still keep me balanced, but I really don't want him to stop, so he's learned to live with it.

"Why?" I ask.

He doesn't answer. Shit. Why doesn't he answer? It's not like it's a complicated question. He has to have SOME kind of answer. He has to know what I'm asking. I know he knows. It has to be there... somewhere...in that damn impervious shell of his. I know he's thought about it once or twice. Shit...please have thought about it, Shinji...

No.

Just hold my hand.

Don't talk.

I swear I'll not do anything, so long as you just do those two things. Just shut up and touch me. Just for this walk. I don't care about later. I need you, Shinji.

I need you.

You don't need me.

But thanks for putting up with me this long.

"Thank you..." I whisper into his ear.

He knows what I'm talking about. I know he does. I can tell by the way he squeezes my hand in response, but keeps his mouth shut.

Fuck you Shinji. Why did you have to read my mind like that?

Ugh. I am so drunk...

I don't remember much after that, but I think I made it to the toilet in time.

"Do you MIND?"

Things are getting worse. I don't know how.

That's a lie.

I'm not exactly helping matters anymore. It's eerie. I could almost swear I enjoy this now. All those things I have subconsciously mapped out in my mind, all those things I usually avoid doing in Asuka's presence, are coming to the surface. Turns out some of them can really piss her off.

She hates it, for example, when I study in the living room. Two reasons. Whatever small bit of guilt she has in that over inflated ego of hers actually kicks into effect, and she feels bad (HA!) about watching TV too loudly when I'm here. That, and Misato always notices, and tells HER to study. She hates having to do both.

"It's not that loud, Third Child." she snaps at me.

Unfortunately, Misato isn't here right now, and ever since that fucking party we went to last week, she's been extra defensive against my actions. Looks like not even the guilt is working tonight.

Well, it's not like I need to study or anything.

See? I'm doing it again! I KNOW it's going to piss her off! I don't even have to do it! WHY am I doing it then?

Argh! I know EXACTLY why I'm doing it...but if I admit how much I loved giving her own medicine right back at her, I'd never stop. Misato would go crazy from the resulting arguments, and whatever chance I have at...

Fuck.

Why do I bother? Chance? There is none. Still, now it's stuck in my head. It's that same bloody thought that Asuka thought she could use

against me in the train. This time it works, too.

"Sorry, Asuka..." I sigh, closing my books. "You're right. I'll go to my room and study."

She seems almost surprised at this. This entire week has just been going towards a giant confrontation anyway. Of course, I had to be the one to give out first. When the hell am I going to listen to my own advice? When am I going to stop...

"Running away, Shin-kun?" she grins at me with that bloody Cheshire Cat smile. It's almost enough to make me want to hit her again...but I told the truth. That moment in the train was enough to last me for a lot of her abuse. At least for another month or so.

"Yes." I state flatly. "You want anything from the fridge before I go?"

Dammit! There's that look again! What the hell IS that? Why does she look like a little girl who was just told she can't go to the park and play with her friends?!?! Well SORRRREEEE if I disappoint you, bitch. I'm not your bloody toy to bat around.

"Uh...yeah...sure." she shrugs, rolling over on her pillow she has propped up on the floor to watch the television with. "Orange juice will be fine."

Good. Fine. I walk to the kitchen and pull out the refrigerated drawer that contains the little food that isn't instant or beer-related. Who the hell am I trying to fool? Not her toy. Shit. There are days where I have wanted nothing better than to stay in bed and die...but I always got up...just so she could smack me around.

I'm a sick fuck, aren't I?

She frowns at me as I hand her the can of juice. "What the hell are you so gloomy about?" she demands.

I really have to start making my mind less readable.

"Nothing." I say. "Sorry. Just a little tired." Yeah. That sounds convincing enough.

She almost buys it too. My voice sounds dead anyway. However, this is Asuka. She's not giving up that easily. Logic...for once...comes to her side. "You slept for twelve hours last night. Why the hell are you still tired?"

I really can't take this right now. Shit...I can barely think anymore. Why is she doing this? I'd rather she just got back to smacking the back of my head. Why is she suddenly prying into me like this?

"Good night." I sigh, picking up my books from the table. They're not that heavy, but at the moment, it feels like I'm dragging chains to my death.

Where's an angel when you need one??

"Okay..." I hear a whisper. "G...good night, Shinji-kun."

Dammit.

Dammit.

DAMMIT!

How the HELL does she do that?!? She sounds like a god damn air-raid siren half the time. The other half is dominated with that smug, teasing tone she has. It's like a little five year old who thinks they are your bloody superior.

But...

She sounds so bloody nice when she whispers. When she does that stupid little 'kun' thing. I don't even care if she says Baka-kun anymore. How does she do that? Every time she does that thing with her voice, it makes me...

Want her.

God I want her. I want her so badly it hurts to think about it.

"Shinji?"

Oh no...she noticed. I'm paralysed. Internal batteries read 0:00. I have no ability to move.

"Shinji?" she is closer now. I feel her right behind me.

"I'm sorry..." I say...oh shit...I'm on the verge of crying, too. The entire week goes down the drain. Whatever self-respect I had clawed and scraped my way for is gone. I would rather throw whatever satisfaction I've gained than think of fighting her at this moment.

She is stunned when I spin around and grab her hand. I don't care. I need contact. I need to say this. "I'm sorry, Asuka...I...should never have hit you...or bugged you...or..." shit, I can barely speak I'm crying so hard.

What tiny glimpses I do catch of her are filled by her horrified expression.

"I shouldn't have...been like that...after the party...I...just...I didn't know what else to do!"

"STOP IT!"

It takes my frazzled mind a moment to realize what she's said.

"W...what?" I look up. She's...crying? Crying? Why is Asuka crying?

She yanks her hand out of mine. I instantly miss it's presence, but I regret even that now, as she looks like she has been shocked by electricity though me.

"BAKA!" she yells at me. "Don't EVER say things like that!" a tear falls down on my hand that I still haven't moved. "Why are you so STUPID!?!"

I really don't believe what my ears are telling me. They're saying that she's crying. That she said those last, all too familiar words, in a different way than usual. Almost like she was worried. I really can't say anything. I just stare at my hand where her tear fell.

"Mein GOTT!" she cries. "Every time you say you're sorry, it makes me want to rip your tongue out! Can't you REALIZE when you do something GOOD for a change? Don't you realize what you do to..." her voice catches suddenly.

The last look on her face I remember was one of pain. She ran straight past me and into her room. The door slammed shut. Hard.

Of course he doesn't.

That is the answer to my three days of deliberation. I feel sick. Physically sick. Every time he walks by my door, I can feel him. I know that I was one word away from causing a disaster.

Me.

Doesn't he realize what he does to me? When he keeps apologizing? When he backs down from me? It pisses me off. It makes me want to throw him into a wall.

Doesn't he realize what he does to me? When I see that other side of him slipping away like that? When he turns into that little spineless boy I hate? Shit. It's like someone taking away something you lo...

Care about.

Yeah. Someone that takes away something you like. It makes you mad. It makes me mad. The night after he finally got a backbone and punched me, I was actually smiling. I thought I had finally done it. Finally edged him on enough.

Even if it was to fight me off.

It was worth it. I knew the moment he dragged me home from that fucking party. Shit. I wouldn't have carried him home in that situation. It was like four blocks away from Misato's apartment! He did, though. He dragged my heavy ass across Tokyo 3 without thinking twice.

I knew this was the Shinji I liked.

I almost lost it when he apologized. I couldn't believe he was so fucking stupid. Dammit! I...I shouldn't have pushed...I wanted another fight. I needed it. A real fight. I wanted to show him he COULD fight me. That he was the only one I thought worthy.

How do you tell someone that? That you want them to beat the shit out of you for their own good? I should have taken psychology in college. Shit.

This is all Misato's fault.

It is, you know.

I hate this situation. I hate this body. This damn biological clock everyone is always moaning about. I realized, not too long ago, but long enough for me to have time to think about it, that my clock was ticking down.

Quickly.

And I wondered if I would have to spend my life like this. Living next to Shinji.

I'm not stupid. I know what's happening. Misato thought she'd be

smart and make us live together to help our teamwork, but that's not all it will end with. Even if I hated the guy, I...well, he's always here. He's always around me. He brushes against me all day. It's not my fault. I...can't help but feel a little...bit...towards him. It's been a year and a half since the last angel, for crying out loud! But, there are always indications that there might be more. That's two years with a guy my own age who...really...isn't all that bad looking.

Argh. ARGH! No. I can't keep thinking like this or I'm going to go insane.

But...in all fairness, I tried. I really did try to ignore my clock. But it's soooo HARD!

Eventually, I came to accept this. I knew that it was possible that I may have to spend another ten years or so around Shinji. I also began to realize I had two options. A kind of choice in the matter. I could spend this time with either the Shinji who apologises, who pisses me off, who is a spineless wussy...or...I could spend it with the Shinji who I l...like. The one who beats the shit out of angels and can actually stand up to me. The one who told his father to fuck off when he begged for forgiveness.

The one who helps me out...even when I'm too stubborn to admit I need it.

When I realized I may have to fight for that Shinji for as long as I know him, I must admit, I wasn't too happy. I don't want to fight him all the time just so I can stand to look at the guy.

Fuck you, Shinji. Both of you, this time.

And he held my hand again, too. I was disgusted. What was worse was I

didn't want to let go. Even when he's that annoying little boy, I can't help but see his other side.

WHY CAN'T HE JUST MAKE UP HIS MIND!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Shit.

I mean, it's not like I'm looking for love or anything. If...if it happens, then...fine, I guess. But...I...I just wish I had someone to talk to. Someone to be with. Shinji's almost that...but...he keeps fucking up.

The other boys aren't even on the same planet we are. The only world I know anymore is Eva. It's all I've ever had anyway. I'm not about to change just so I can hang out with those pitiful stooges that make Kensuke and Toji look good in comparison. At least THEY know this world too.

Dammit. I just wish Shinji would...

Even if he is a wuss.

"Das geht dich einen feuchten Scheissdreck an!"

Err...okay...?

I know that's a bad phrase. The way she said it would make paint strip off the walls if it hadn't been right at my face. It comes at the end of the week, after probably the worst point in our...friendship...I have ever known. I finally got enough nerve to ask what was wrong, and she replies with this.

That urge to hit something is coming back. This time, though, any inanimate object will do.

"What did you say?" I ask, all too aware I probably won't want to know.

"It means none of your fucking business, Shinji." Asuka glares at me, then turns around to continue to make a pot of coffee.

What does she mean by THAT? Of COURSE it is my business! She hasn't been out of her room in days! Ever since I...uh...we broke down in the hall. If it's for some other reason than me, then I'm going to be very surprised.

"Here. Let me help." I offer, reaching past her into the top drawer to get a small measuring spoon for the ground coffee beans. She snatches it right out of my hand before I can do much else, though, and quickly throws it back into the drawer.

"I can do it myself." Her voice is low and dangerous. I know I should be scared. Hell, I should be anywhere but right next to her at this point.

"Asuka..." I sigh. "I don't want to fight you. Tell me what's..."

Oh.

Oh shit.

Something I just said got to her. I find myself backing up even before I can think of what it was.

"That's JUST THE POINT, Baka!" she yells. Despite her obvious anger, she seems almost tired. Fed up and at the end of her rope.

"W...what?!"

Her eyes...they are glaring at me. I never thought something so beautiful could look so damn threatening. Her lips are thin and curled, like she's getting ready to bite something. I believe it was right about then where I started fearing for my life.

"Little Shinji, always so bloody nice and proper..." she began quietly, but her voice was picking up. "But he doesn't realize what a petty, selfish little weakling he is! Everyone's feeding him a string of 'well done, Shinji!' and 'good work Shinji!' so he never figures it out!" She leans back and raises her arms to the Heavens we battle.

"THE INVINCIBLE SHINJI!!!!!! Everyone give him a FUCKING hand!!!!"

The wall hits my back, and I find myself crawling along it, looking for the exit. Oh, but this is just getting started.

"Tell me something, Shinji-KUN..." she growls. I am scared, no matter how often I dream of her saying my name like that. "What would you do if I just kissed you right now?"

I must admit...I don't know.

"Tell me, Shinji..." she glares at me, but there's something new in her voice. "What would you do if I just knelt down and started unbuttoning your shirt with my tongue?"

Oh...

Oh my...

I do believe my heart has stopped.

"You want to know what you'd do?" she whispers at me.

I swallow hard, trying to remember how to breathe.

"You'd apologize." she growls.

I blink.

"Do you REALIZE how much you PISS ME OF!?!?" she yells RIGHT into my face. "For TWO YEARS, SHINJI! TWO FUCKING YEARS! I have had to listen to you apologize! I have had to listen to you cower away! I have had to listen to you squirm under ANY kind of pressure! Do you have ANY IDEA HOW THAT PISSES ME OF????!!!"

I find the door frame, but she pins me with her left arm. Oh shit...

"It's like you wasted the LAST bit of your backbone on your Father!"

Oh.

Now.

THAT.

Was...not...nice...

She sees my reaction, too. I hate knowing it's exactly what she was hoping for. "You heard me, Shinji." she growls. "Tell me, when you watched that bastard's heart-monitor come to a stop, did your spine slip out your a..."

S M A C K !

She stands there, completely stunned as a trickle of blood runs down from the corner of her lips. My arm is shaking, but has somehow found it's way to my other side, conveniently crossing over at the height of her jaw. That one did not feel nearly as good as the one on the train. I'm truly angry this time.

P H O O M !

Oh...I can't say I was expecting that...nor was my stomach, or I might not be keeling over at the moment.

"Ahk...!" I think I remember saying.

"Sorry." Asuka smirks, wiping the blood from her cut lip. Her voice makes it clear she is anything but.

I don't really know what came over me, but it did. "ERRRAHHHH!" I dive right into her. Head first. I don't care how I hurt her, so long as I hurt her. Fists and heads aren't important.

I think I managed to push her into the edge of the table. It probably hurt her a lot, in fact, she let out a sharp yelp as it hit her side. No chance in hell I was going to give up there, though. I all but

charge at her when I finally am able to stand.

She KICKS ME! That fucking BITCH! I can't believe she just kicked me! In the stomach again, too. I vaguely remember hitting the wall and sliding down to the ground but I can't be sure since consciousness was trying to leave me for most of the fall.

"Get the FUCK up!" she coughs. "I'm not done with you yet!"

I fight to get up...I really do...but I can't. I can barely breathe.

"No way you're just going to keel over like your dad did!"

"FUCK YOU!"

The next thing I know, she's underneath me, and am struggling to choke her. Dammit! WHY WON'T SHE JUST...GIVE UP!

Her hands, however, are not nearly as weak as an average girl's. Time has been very generous to this woman, and I'm wondering if I'm even going to be able to beat her. Not only does she manage to pry my grip off of her neck, but she begins to fight back, pushing me away.

If I didn't know better, I could swear she was enjoying this. Bitch...

Her knee comes up to my chest. Had she been wearing a skirt, it would have made a very interesting entry in a Hentai magazine. No such luck, however, as she throws me back against that fucking wall with a grunt and a push.

I really hate this wall. It's beating me up just as bad as she is.

"Come on!" she yells. "Is that all you got!?" her arms have got mine

in a virtual stalemate. I really don't believe how so much strength can come from someone like her. How I'm able to match her is anyone's guess as well.

"STOP IT!" I beg. She's going too far. She's not letting me stop! Every time I try, she threatens to bring back memories I want to leave behind. "What the HELL ARE YOU DOING?!"

She leans against my shaking arms with her entire weight, trying to overpower me. If it wasn't for the wall behind me, she would have won.

I didn't want to bring his father into this.

I really didn't. Fuck it. I don't care, so long as he fights. I don't care if he fights me or something else, so long as he FIGHTS! I have made my decision, and I am NOT going to live with that other Shinji. I want MY SHINJI!

He finally slides out from under me, and I must admit, I'm a little surprised when he pins me to the floor with his shoulders. He's fighting. REALLY fighting. For a moment there, I was almost scared he was going to try to kill me.

But that doesn't matter. I just want him back.

The only sounds now are ragged breathing and the sounds of struggle. Fuck talk. This isn't a conversation anymore. I finally manage to

elbow him in the head, and he rolls off of me, holding his ear.

Honestly, I don't know where this will stop. I'm getting tired. I didn't sleep well last night. He's going to knock me on my ass. I just hope it's not against anything too hard.

I get off another punch. Damn it's beginning to hurt. He has a strong jaw. He, in turn, grabs my side and pushes me into a chair.

Ouch...this is going to hurt...

CRACK!

Oh shit...that did hurt. "AAK!" I cough, but it doesn't help. I'm winded. My eyes go out of focus and I can't move even if I wanted to. The Baka is on top of me again, still grabbing my arms like he thinks I'm faking it.

"Damn you!" he growls at me.

Oh. Oh my. Yeah...I like this Shinji...

And he's not done yet, either. I finally manage to get breath into my lungs, and pain is registering throughout most of my body, but I can barely feel it. The Baka's almost lying on top of me and he hasn't figured it out yet. This is rather...interesting....

"Eep!"

He actually lifts me up. My arms are too tired to stop him and my legs can barely support myself, let alone a fight. I see stars as he pushes me back against the wall and pins my neck with one hand.

And he draws back with the other.

Then stops.

Probably because he's wondering why I'm smiling like an idiot. His grip relaxes slightly as he sees I'm done. I probably couldn't kick him in the nuts at this point. I'm exhausted. Still...it's worth it. The look in his eyes is priceless. HIS eyes. MY Shinji's eyes.

I'm laughing before I know it. I'm relived. That's all. I'm glad I could get him to shed that fucking shell of his.

He smiles. Then laughs too.

Then the pain registers, and we both stop laughing so we don't hurt ourselves further.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIIIEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

We both cringe.

"Oh shit..." I whisper out loud.

A very angry Misato runs into the kitchen, taking one look at the mess we've made. I do the same in a measure of some shock. Wow...we really did fight.

Everything on the table is on the floor. Some plates in pieces. One of its legs is busted, just barely keeping it from tipping. The chair Shinji threw me onto is flattened. Splinters are everywhere. I notice for the first time that there is a small bit of blood on the walls, and the floor where Shinji had me pinned. A piece of ripped shirt, and the lack of an arm on Shinji's school uniform fit together. I notice a shattered piece of red plastic, and quickly feel my hair. Damn. I'll

need a new head-set.

"WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED HERE!!??!!" Misato is almost foaming at the mouth. The groceries she bought are tossed aside as she grabs the collar of my shirt and Shinji's ear to separate us.

"Aaahh..." Shinji coughed. "You see, I slipped..."

My eyes are wide. He nods at me, knocking me out of my surprise.

"Yeah...and then you see, I tried to help him up, but..."

"And then fell backwards..."

"Hit the table..."

"Floor was too waxy..."

Poor Misato isn't used to a dual sided attack like this, and her anger crumbles. "Fine." she lets us go. "Clean this mess, then get yourselves washed up." she shook her head, storming off. "Ritsuko's coming over for dinner later."

I can't believe Shinji's still smiling. And he hasn't once apologized yet. We just sit against the wall and catch our breath for a while.

"I...shouldn't have said anything about your dad." I say. I really shouldn't have. It was low...even for me.

"It's okay." he nods, reaching over to take my hand. I find no reason to deny him it. Maybe it's just my imagination, but his is a little warmer than usual.

"Good punch." I smile, rubbing my jaw. Damn...I'm going to be sore

tomorrow.

Shinji actually blushed at the compliment. "T...thanks..."

It was worth it.

I am officially confused.

I mean, it's not that I don't like this new arrangement. Ever since that fight, things have gotten back to normal, if not better than they ever were. But...this is a big step. Even for Asuka.

Then again, she's proven to me I don't know her nearly as well as I thought I did. And, though it pains me to admit it, I am probably an open book to her.

It's almost the end of summer now. A summer I will never forget. Toji and Kensuke must hate me, but I can't help it. I spent almost the entire two months period with Asuka. It was...out of a lack of a better word...nice.

I may not know her as well as she does me, but I have learned a few

things about her. Things like her love of video games. We never had any video games back when the first group of angels attacked.

Oh, yeah. There were more. Nothing as bad as the last three or four Angels, though. Nothing like Kaoru. Just to keep us on our toes, I think. Maybe they're not even Angels...

But that's not what I'm talking about right now. Asuka loves video games. Last Christmas I bought her an old Nintendo. They're really cheap now anyway, so it seemed like a nice gift. She...er...well, even Misato was surprised at her reaction. She actually kissed me on the cheek after almost flattening me against the ground.

Keep in mind this is in her house-coat on Christmas Morning.

We play it constantly. She's better than I am, but I've been practicing, so at least I can give her a good challenge.

Another thing about Asuka is that she's a great cook. Who would have thought? Misato's been promoted twice since Kaoru, and she's almost never home now. Our final months at the High School were hectic, but we got through. She says I taught her everything she knows...but I really can't cook some of the things she can.

Asuka still has nightmares.

I hate hearing her across the hall. It's almost like her most quiet whisper can get past any music I'm listening too. It...hurts. A lot. I don't want her to have nightmares. That's why when she comes into my room and asks if I want to play some Nintendo, I don't mind. Even if it's in the middle of the night.

We usually end up passed out in front of the TV, drooling on the floor,

though she'd never admit it.

That's another thing. She drools. It's a silly little observation, but I pride myself on knowing it. It's very cute, actually. Not disgusting in any way. You should have seen how embarrassed she was when one morning I took a napkin and dried the corner of her mouth for her.

We go shopping together all the time. She even comes when I go with Kensuke and Toji, and follows us into the army stores and the Otaku-Mart for anime movies. At first, I just thought she was humouring me, but once she learned that half the things we look for aren't 'perverted' or 'idiotic' she didn't mind. Even Toji will accept a little clothes shopping now...though it is Kensuke's theory that Hikari is having a direct influence on that decision.

Either way, Tokyo 3 is rebuilt, my friends aren't fighting, and Asuka seems to actually be my friend instead of an enemy. I am happy. I really am.

So...

So...why am I confused right now?

Didn't I always want this? I mean, it's not like it's anything to be worried about. Asuka and I have been doing this for the last few years anyway. But...

But...

Living on our own?

She's coming to university with me, though she continually reminds me

that she doesn't need to. The apartment is nothing special. Hell, it's basically two bedrooms, a bathroom and a study. The kitchen...to my dismay...consists of an indentation in the wall with a fridge, sink and stove.

"WHOO HOO!" she drops the first of MAAAANY boxes of hers at the door and runs in.

She's excited, too! I...well...it was my personal belief that once the Eva project no longer required us to live together she would have dumped me like a bag of mouldy tangerines.

I follow just behind, carrying a small bag of my most precious items, and two of HER boxes. They are probably filled with clothes, but damn, they're still heavy.

"A...Asuka...c...help?" I grunt.

She instantly spins around and runs over to help, catching the box just before it slips so I can grab hold of the other. "Sorry. I'm just so excited!" she beams at me. "Think of it, Shinji! No more beer cans and ramen soup cups!!"

I can't help but laugh. No wonder she's so eager. At least I'm a CLEAN roommate.

NERV paid it's pilots VERY well, but Asuka insisted we should invest in a small apartment. It would better to study in and get used to a normal, struggling student's life. I agreed. It made sense. Though I still wish the kitchen was bigger. She runs down to the car...

Yes. We actually have a car, too! She drives most of the time, but I don't mind. It's just a little red (her colour choice again) beat up

rust-box, but it was a symbol of our freedom. A new life.

Anyway, she returns with a box under each arm. "Well?" she sighs as she sets them down.

"Well?" I blink, looking around at the dark room. The power won't be connected until tomorrow morning.

"What do you mean, 'well!'?" she frowns, crossing her arms in mock anger. "This has to be done in an organized way, or we'll never stop fighting about it."

I blink. I'm also sure I'm blushing. "P...pardon?"

She points down the tiny hall. "Because you are the university student, I shall allow you to choose your bedroom first." she leans forward at me, smiling. "Choose wisely, after all, it is the most important choice you can make!"

I consider this for a moment. She DID have experience with this, after all. Maybe she's right?

"Uh...well, I'm new at this..." I say. "What one would you choose if you had to?"

She seems very pleased I am asking her expert opinion. "Well, let me see." she walks over to the both of them and opens the doors. They are right across the hall from each other.

I follow. The first room is neat and clean. The second, however, looks to be the unfortunate victim of a party.

"This one." she pointed at the second room. "This one will be yours."

I frown. Figures. "Fine." I sigh.

She hears the distress in my voice. "Don't you trust me?" she smiles.
Damn Cheshire Cat.

"But..."

She leans forward and pins me against the wall with her arms. Oh...

"If that room is unsatisfactory, you can always sleep in my room..."
she whispers in EXACTLY the voice that keeps me awake at night (among
other things).

Oh, all right. She has inspired MANY a wet, sticky dream. Happy?

I can't even breathe.

Finally, though, I notice she's still grinning at me. "Fine..." I
squeak. "I'll take this room."

She lets me go, but is laughing to herself. "Poor Shinji...you should
have seen the look on your face."

At least she's not howling in laughter like most times. Just teasing,
not torment. I sigh and smile as well. "You should watch out." I
warn. "If you keep teasing Hentai like me, you might get hurt..."

"Oooh." she replies. "Shinji's got a backbone after all..." she states
proudly. "I've taught you well."

That little remark makes me stop in my tracks.

I turn around to see her smiling softly. Then, she reaches over and takes my hand. "I'm glad." she says. Then, she turns and goes over to the first of her boxes.

At first...I thought I was mad to hear her say that. Like the only reason she can stand me at all is because SHE worked for it. But...she wasn't looking at me like I was some project. She was just...happy...I've only seen her that happy a few times.

My hand is still warm where she held it. That was not meant for just a job or a challenge.

She's...proud of me?

We avoid eye contact as she passes back into her room, but I see her still smiling.

I am happy.

No.

I'm ecstatic!

"Baka! Are you going to help me with the TV?"

"Hai!"

"So what gift are you two up to?"

I must admit, I'm not quite sure I know what this woman is talking about. Not that I was ignoring her or anything, but up until that moment, she had been yammering on about stuff I wouldn't even bore Shinji with.

"Pardon?"

The woman smiles. She's a study partner in my psyche class. (Yes, I finally bit the bullet and decided to take some psychology courses) I keep forgetting her name...Tammy...but she's rather smart, and never gets on my nerves, so I'll humour her this far.

"Anniversary?" she states, pointing to Shinji, who is in the corner with his cello, cleaning it from its long month in storage. The baka doesn't hear anything, at least not that I can tell.

"Oh, uh...gifts?" I re-state. "What do you mean?"

She regards me with a critical eye. "You mean you two aren't married?"

I almost laugh out loud.

Almost.

"O...of course not!" I think I'm blushing. Dammit. I've been hanging around Shinji too long. "No, we're just living together."

"Oooh!" she laughs softly. "Sorry, didn't know. You two act like you're so close!"

I smile. "Well, he's a good friend. I guess I'm just kind of used to him by now."

She leans forward. "So...you two haven't...?"

Again, that damn Shinji-Blush. "No!" I whisper back angrily. "We're only seventeen, you know. It's a little early for all that..."

Tammy shrugs. "Well, honey...if I were you, I'd make it clear that he's yours."

I blink. "Pardon?"

"Have you seen his entourage on campus?" she smiles. "There must be at least a dozen girls, everywhere from sophomores to seniors who are pining for him. The fact he's an Eva pilot doesn't exactly turn them off, you know."

Oh...

Is it just me? Or do you hear something ticking?

Shut up, clock!

"I...I didn't know..." I admit, stealing a quick glance over at Shinji, who is blissfully unaware of the conversation at hand.

"And well, you know he isn't exactly an asshole, and he's not ugly."
Tammy says. "If I didn't already think you and he were an item, I

would have probably tried myself."

"He's off limits." I growl.

Ooh...that was a little bit much. Mmm. No. No it wasn't. Tammy just smiles.

"Okay, okay. I'll spread the word." she chuckles. "So...how far have you two...?"

I swear if I blush again I'm going to smack myself.

"Kissed." I say. Actually, it's more of a squeak.

"Aaaand?" Tammy leans forward.

"T...that's about it..." I stammer. I really don't want to tell her about the Kiss. I still bash myself over the head when I realize how bloody stupid I was back then.

Flashback time. I find myself doing that a lot. I keep remembering that kiss. How I squeezed his nose, then just kind of smashed my face into his...but then...I...I began to enjoy it. He...Shinji...has the softest lips...warm...inviting...safe...

She giggles. "How was it???"

"N...not..." I swallow hard. "Not bad..." That's the truth, actually.

Tammy is glaring at me like I'm refusing to share a chocolate bar with her. "Mmm, you're no fun." she suddenly brightens. "But I should get going. It's getting late."

I nod. We're nearly done all our papers for the week anyway. It's nice to have her as a study partner. We're both really competitive, so we push ourselves hard to try and beat the other.

"You two have fun!" Tammy calls out, loud enough to get Shinji's attention as she puts on her shoes.

"Uh..." he blinks, taking in the situation. "Have a good night, Tammy-san!"

She turns to me and winks. "See you on Monday."

The door closes.

How DARE she leave me with him! Especially considering what's going through my mind at the moment. Argh! She must have read that chapter on mental-manipulation twice. Bitch.

I try to turn to Shinji only when I'm sure I'm not blushing anymore. "Soo, what are you doing?"

He smiles brightly, now that I've taken an interest in his doings. "I'm just re-stringing the old hummer here."

"Hummer?" I can't help but smile.

"Yeah." he smiles goofily. "I dunno...it sounds like someone humming, don't you think?" he demonstrates by humming as low as he can. Luckily, that's a lot lower than before, or it would be rather comical. Now, however, he has a very nice, smooth voice.

"Oooh, you're turning into Barry White." I joke, getting a blush in response. See? He still does that. Even after a month of me trying

to desensitize him to all this teasing. I don't mind, though. He's bloody cute when he does that.

He turns back to his cello and begins to replace the last string.

"Will you play me something?" I flop down on the floor next to him. We always have a few big, fluffy pillows lying around for just such a reason. The only chairs we bother to use are at the table. We usually just flop down on the floor and play Nintendo all day when we're bored.

Damn...how did he know I liked Nintendo so much? Lucky bastard. I never told anyone about my Mario fetish.

He smiles as I crawl over to him. "Well, I have to get this tuned first, or you'll never ask me to play anything else ever again."

Makes sense. "Want some tea? I'm making a cup." I get up and walk over to the kitchen.

"Please." he smiles a reply.

I think it was probably right about then I decided I was going to kiss him tonight. No real reason why. I just remember standing up, reaching for the cups, and thinking that I was going to do it. By the time the water was boiling, it was a confirmed GO! in my mind.

Damn biological clock. It's hard to ignore, ya know. Even harder to ignore when I picture ten or twenty drooling women following my Shin-kun around the classroom. MINE!

And to think I never wondered where he got all those cookies and muffins and the like. "Here, Shinji, sit down, want a cookie?" and he's too much of a gentleman not to say: "Ooh, that would be lovely!"

I'm not going to be able to wait forever anymore.

The first testing chords of his cello break my train of thought and remind me that I'm making tea. Shinji knows exactly how I like it, and I know exactly how he likes it. I'll be damned if I can ever make tea that is as good for myself, though.

He knows me better than he thinks.

He knows exactly what I like. Where I like it and when I like it. Oh god...yes...I know how that sounds. He...is so attentive towards me...if he's at least half as good in whatever's next, then I'm going to be a happy girl.

It's...not like I'm in a hurry, though. Must be that whole "I don't need anything or anyone!" idea I still have in my head. It has cost me a lot of happiness, in retrospect, but still, I still feel it is my guiding principal.

I do need Shinji, though. But...I just need him as a partner in life. I don't need him as anything more...for now. Maybe that's the reason why I've waited so long.

Here we are in a cozy, lonely room together. The summer heat is pleasant and lets us dress loosely. He looks very nice in that shirt, too. I've finally gotten him to dress less like Kensuke, too. There's no Misato or Pen-Pen. We're all alone, every night. Every night. Oh god...some of those nights...he was very close to breaking my resolve. Often, we'll talk for hours about everything and nothing. I...I've never been able to do that with anyone. Not even Kaji or Hikari. It's wonderful.

And I can see it when he gives me those looks.

Like, after a long day of studying, I'll treat him to some iced cream or something, and we're just sitting in the park, eating, and he just gives me this curious smile that melts right through all my defences. It's almost enough to make me listen to that damn biological clock...and yet, we still haven't done anything yet.

My heart's beating so fast. I'm nervous. Tea's almost done.

Asuka sets my tea on the little coffee table that shares space with all the pillows on the floor. "Arigato." I smile.

She nods, but doesn't say anything. There's something on her mind...I can see it. She's holding her cup with both hands. She only does that when there's something on her mind that's she's not sure of.

Oh well. She's probably just worried about mid-terms or something.

And if I keep looking at her like that, I'm going to get caught staring. Shit she's beautiful. I remember when it was only one minute out of a day when I would realize that, but now? It's all I see. She's gotten so nice to me. We're finally roommates, and not

constantly fighting for position against each other.

We're more than that. We're friends. No. Closer than that.

I...can't think about it or I'll end up disappointing myself, but...I still love every day I'm with her. I really do. She gives my life meaning. I have someone to share it with, instead of constantly working towards things I'm not even sure exist.

And...

I make her happy.

I know that now. I see the way she sneaks in those little smiles at me whenever I get mad and yell at a store clerk that's gone too far. And it's not even just me acting like her...though god knows I do sometimes...she also seems to accept that I try to be nice. Some times, if she's yelling at someone about something, I'll interrupt and try to calm things down. Though she shoots me looks that could kill a horse for a few moments, afterwards she just smiles and thanks me for stopping her.

My happiness is hers. I love seeing her smile. I honestly do. It's a reason to get up in the morning and live life. She smiles a lot now...often for no other reason than it's morning and she sees me. Every time, though, it loses none of it's magic.

"I'm ready." I state, getting lucky and tuning the last two strings almost immediately. The sound is nice. One last test on the bow and my cello produces a nice, low, clean sound.

"Mmm." she smiles, sitting down across from me. "Okay. What do you know?"

"How about Suiten Fur Violoncello?" I state proudly. It's my favourite song to play. The only REAL song I know, actually. The rest is often just me adlibbing.

She laughs. "I have NO idea what that is. Just go ahead."

Probably the best thing about this apartment are the neighbours. There are none. Between the stereo (with SDAT player) that she got me for my birthday, and the huge collection of CD's she packed with her, this must be the loudest apartment on the block.

The first few chords are tricky, as I haven't played in a long while. Soon, though, I've remembered the whole song. Asuka patiently waits for me to stumble through uncertain waters, and smiles as she sees me finally get it. I have such a wonderful audience.

This song is beautiful. It really is. It's soft and complex and flows like honey, even though it's actually a very fast song. Difficult to play, but calming to the ears. It's even, back and forth rhythms eventually blend together into a wonderfully complicated, but soothing sound.

I haven't played it in so long that I find myself almost crying half way through. It feels that good to play. I...I have always played this song when I'm happy. I really can't when I'm sad. It always means that my life is going good when I can.

I'm not even trying to play it anymore. It's just flowing out now. I can't believe it, really...I just listen to the music. At this moment, I consider this my greatest accomplishment. Not stopping the Third Impact, or killing all those Angels, or piloting Evangelion when nobody else could.

This.

Right now.

Playing the song I love for the woman I love.

This is my greatest moment. If I do this again tomorrow, then that will be even greater.

As I open my eyes, I realize Asuka is staring at me. Almost like she's surprised. "S...Shinji...what was amazing..." she whispers.

"New strings." I smile weakly, wiping a tear away from my eye before it threatens to fall.

"No..." she shakes her head. "That...was nothing like how you used to play. That was beautiful..."

She's locked onto me. I can't get away even if I wanted to. Like hell I wanted to. Not this time. "I..." I shrug. "I guess I'm just happy." I explain weakly.

She blinks, giving me the chance to explain.

"This past summer..." I say. "I...I really haven't been happier in my entire life." My voice is threatening to crack, but Asuka doesn't seem to notice. She's only smiling.

"Really?" she asks.

"Really."

Here goes nothing.

"Thanks to you." I add after a second.

She doesn't respond in words. Rather, she smiles, then quickly takes a sip of tea, again, holding it by both her hands.

I join her with my own mug. Occasionally, I'll play a few little improvised songs. One I actually wrote a while ago gets her attention. "Hey, what's that one?" she asks, downing the rest of her tea.

"Just something I made." I tell her with a shrug. "It's actually nothing much."

"I know." she smiles. "Can you teach it to me?"

I blink. Asuka wants me to teach her something? The Forth Impact MUST be upon us.

"Uh...sure!"

"What?" she mocks, walking over to my chair. "Don't think I can handle it?"

"Since when have you played a cello?" I question.

"I may surprise you, Shin-kun..." she winks.

That's more than enough to kick my heart into overdrive, but I manage to stay calm and relinquish the seat to her, holding my cello until she gets behind it. I walk to her front and wait.

SQUEEEEEEEEEEEK!

We both cringe at the sound. She laughs. "Oops."

"You might want to hold the reed flat against the strings." I offer with a grin.

"Oh, right." she winks. "Here we go."

A few shaky notes are played. Nothing nearly as bad as the first screeching one, but still, I must admit, I'm not impressed. She sees the look on my face and frowns. "Well?"

"Well what?" I ask with a shrug.

"Show me." she smiles. "Show me the notes?"

I walk over to her and kneel down so I'm eye-level with her. "Okay, first, put your hand..."

"No!" she sighs, frustrated. "I can't learn anything that way. Here..." she scoots forward on the chair.

It takes me a moment to realize she wants me to sit behind her.

"W...what?"

"Sit behind me." she says. "Come on, it's just like back in Unit 02. You can't show me unless you're sitting with me." she explains.

Damn logic. It will be the end of me, I swear. "Ahh...okay...." I shrug, standing. It's a tight squeeze, but I manage to sit right behind her. There's about an inch between us, and I'm determined to make sure it stays like that. This would be too easy to turn into an embarrassment.

Her body is slim enough that I can reach around her shoulders without too much touch. The less, the better. I'm already going to have dreams about this situation...the last thing I need to do is get too...

OOPH!

Well, so much for that inch. She slides back against me and traps me against the back of the chair. "Stop squirming." she commands. "I wanna learn how to play."

"Jawohl mein Fuhrer. Heil Asuka!"

She blinks. I can actually hear her surprise. Oops. Hehe.

"I had no idea you could speak German so fluently." she says dryly.

"Gomen." I grin. At least she didn't smash my jaw for that remark.

"Teach me some songs and I'll forgive you." she smiles, turning just enough so I can see her do so.

"Hai..." and with that, I muster up just enough courage to rest my hands over hers. "Now..." I swallow hard. "Uh...Mmm...okay, how about this..."

Trying to concentrate on the cello is probably one of the hardest things I've ever had to do, but I manage, and a nice little scales comes ebbing from the cello's belly. Asuka nods and tries herself.

It's close...I'm impressed.

"I want to try something harder." she says softly.

"Uh...oh...okay..." H...h...harder? Did...she just...NO! Bad Shinji!

However...not ALL of me is listening to the No. 'Little Shinji' seems to be quite happy about the situation, and agrees it's time for something harder...

The next bit is a little trickier, but I manage to play it by focusing on the music. This is getting harder and har...der to do, though, as I feel a very soft, warm back up against me. Her golden red hair is all I can see, and it looks very soft. I...really...have to stop thinking about how I want to touch it.

When I pull my hands away from hers, it's almost with a sigh of relief. Doesn't she know what this is doing to me? She plays it. Again, not too badly.

"And?" she asks.

"Play it again." I improvise. I need some time to recover. "Try to get it to loop smoothly."

She nods and begins to play it again. SQUEEEEEEEEEK! Ouch...hehe. Maybe she's not that good after all. She grumbles something in German at my cello, but tries again. The first loop is nice...but when she tries to move her fingers to the original note from the last, she makes that same horrible squeak.

Of course, that's enough to slide me into music mode again.

"No no no!" I sigh, reaching through her arms. "Okay, now, put your fingers like this..."

I can feel her tense up slightly, even if only for a second, but she relaxes back into my arms. "Okay..." again, in that soft, sweet voice.

I'm just guiding her right wrist, with my hand, but I have taken over her left, and have my fingers intertwined with hers. "When you come to the end of this part..." I urge her to start playing, then stop her at the last note. "You can let go on everything except your thumb, and then slide up to here..." I gently guide her hand up along...

I feel something warm against my cheek.

It takes me a second to realize it's her cheek.

Oh.

Oh my.

I think I better move...soon...

But I can't. It's like I'm paralysed. The temperature in the room just jumped ten degrees, and I find myself unable to think clearly anymore.

She's not trying to move, either. She's leaning into me. Right into my arms. Asuka Langley is pressed up against me, and I am so scared I couldn't run away even if I wanted to.

"Shinji..." she whispers, gently dropping the bow.

I...I can't even say her name. I think I'm holding my breath.

"It's okay..." she tells me, leaning forward slightly for a moment, letting my cello rest on the ground.

My heart almost leapt out of my chest as she leaned back again, taking my arms in her own. Her head is nestled up against my neck and shoulder, and she's wrapped me around her body like a blanket that she doesn't want to leave. She...she leaned back? She didn't want to leave? No...this is too much...there...must be some mistake...a...horrible joke...teasing me...

"Shinji Ikari..." she whispers into my ear. "I am going to kiss you now...if you'll let me."

Oh god...

I feel her nose brush up against my cheek, then the warm touch of her lips just below it. Her lips...oh...oh my god...

If...if it stopped there, I might have been okay...but...it didn't. She kissed me again. This time on the corner of my mouth.

"A...Asuka..." I beg. I'm not even sure what I mean, or what I want her to do...stop mostly. I want her to stop. If she kisses me again, I know I'm going to be lost...

"Shinji..." she turns away and sits up.

That was close...oh god...

But...then...she slides her arm around my neck and pulls me forward. The chair falls away, and the next thing I know, I'm propped up against one of those pillows as she descends upon me.

She stops, just an inch above my face. Our noses are almost touching

as I find myself caught in her eyes.

"Shinji..." she whispers. Her breath is hot and sweet as it crosses my tongue. "Mmm?" she asks, mostly with her eyes...but there is a pleading tone in her voice.

I mustn't run away...

We kiss.

Soft, pink lips gently cup my mouth, and without hesitation I kiss back. All I can feel is her body pressed against mine as we gently taste each other.

She....tastes...

Asuka tastes like music.

Complex, but sweet. Completely soothing, but demanding of all my senses. She lets out a soft cry as my tongue finds hers and coaxes it to join. I...really have no idea what I'm doing...all I know is that I can't stop now. Not when she's reacting like this...

Oh god...

She wants me.

She actually wants me.

There has to be some mistake...this is all a horrible, cruel joke...

"God, Shinji..." she breathes against my neck as we break for air.

"Please don't stop..."

Never mind...

Our lips meet again, this time almost with a fever. We dive into each other and explore. The soft, pebbly texture of her tongue slips against mine. Her entire body tenses as I capture it with my mouth and suckle on it. When I let go, she simply does the same to me. I can't believe it.

My hands find her silky hair, massaging at the base of her neck and begging her to stay as close as she already is. "Shin-kun..." she looks into my eyes with heavy-lidded blue orbs.

I answer with all the passion I can muster. She whimpers as I capture her upper lip and test my tongue along it. Asuka responds by pressing her hands into my shoulders and forcing my arms down from her head. Then, she holds my hands in hers and stretches out along my body, holding us together by taking away any leverage that might get in the way. I become VERY aware at the heavy weight against my erection, as well as the soft, hot force of her chest pressing against me.

"Mmm..." she smiles between kisses. "Do you like this, Shin-kun?"

I grunt and have to shift to avoid hurting my groin, but eventually, nothing's getting crushed. I must be blushing something terrible. "Asuka...this is...very..."

"Nice...?" she offers, diving against my mouth again. "Pleasant?" she whispers. "Or how about just perfect...?"

I can reply only with another kiss. Finally, though, I remember my words. "Unexpected..." I offer quietly.

She blinks, letting go of my hands. "Sorry..." she whispers sheepishly.

Dammit! Why do you always do that, Shinji! "NO!" I try to make up for it, but she's already picking herself up off of me. "No! I didn't mean I didn't want it...!"

Asuka looks down at me from her seated position and shakes her head with a tiny smile still on her lips. "Baka...I can tell." Then, she reaches over and takes my hand. "Just...just shut up and enjoy it, okay?" she takes a deep breath and then...

Presses my hand against her...

Oh.

Oh. My. God.

"See?" she whispers. "Me too."

I really don't know what I'm finding more arousing. The soft, firm...ahh!...or...the fact she's...it's...erect...

"Now..." she says to me. "Do you believe me?"

I nod weakly.

"Good." she takes my hand away. I wasn't even aware I was holding it there on my own. "Because I only promised to kiss you tonight." she smiles.

I lay there, stunned, as she leans over and kisses me on the nose before standing up. My hand is still warm.

I wasn't sure until that night.

But yes...I Asuka Langley Sohryu, am in love with Baka Shinji.

It really was only a matter of time, I guess. Everything we do is. I knew all this the moment I decided we should live together. There really is no other option.

For a long...LONG...time, I wanted not to. I knew that if we lived together, something would happen, and if it turned out to be the wrong choice, we would only end up hurting each other.

It's like those hedgehogs.

The closer they get to each other, the easier it is to hurt the other.
However...

However...

Once they find just the right angle...just the right position...and ease into one another, two hedgehogs can be together and live with all the spines.

The last thing I wanted to do was get that close to Shinji and then suddenly have to pull away.

I now know I won't have to.

And on a less philosophical note...

God that boy can kiss.

Kiss. Oh god. He kisses me. He kisses me like it's the most important thing in the world to him. It's scary and thrilling to be wanted that badly. It's downright arousing to see him look at me with those eyes. To feel his tongue do that little...oh yeah...that's the stuff.

I had to stop it with the kiss. I had to. Forgive me, Shinji. Forgive me, body. If I didn't at that exact moment, I would have never been able to stop.

I was honestly wondering if I would be able to stop. Ever since I felt his arms go around me. It felt so perfect. If I live to be a million, I will never know anyone else like that.

Shinji is mine.

I am Shinji's. If he'll take me, I am his. I used to worry about that...but something tells me he wants me just as bad.

It's...It's not that I'm re-evaluating my life. I still exist with or without him. I am Asuka Langley. I have my own dreams and fears. I have goals and desires with or without him.

But...

Existing WITH him is starting to look a whole lot nicer than before.
If I have the choice, I will chose it to be with him instead of alone.

Of course, the sweet Baka needs to be convinced this. That is why I am kicking his ass on Nintendo at the moment. The one battleground where we are still equal, yet can battle without breaking furniture.

"I don't get it..." he says as he tries to pin my character down to the mat. "I mean...this is all so..."

"Sudden?" I growl, flipping out of the way of his fire-ball, then flattening him with one of my own. "HA! Do you think I would have moved in with you if I wasn't thinking ahead?"

"You mean?"

"About a year." I admit. "I've had a lot of time to think about you, Shinji." I shoot him a smile, getting a chance to blast his character with another fire-ball while he's distracted.

"So..." he grumbles, blocking my next attacks. "What now?"

I nod. Logical question. "Well, we can either just avoid stuff like that as much as possible..." I offer. "I mean...it's bound to happen once or twice more, but I'm sure we can keep it to a minimum."

He nods sadly.

"Or, we can just stop worrying and live together." I turn to him and smile. "That includes accepting whatever happens."

Shinji's character gets knocked flat on the floor.

"If you want me to go, then I will." I state. Despite my calm voice, this is the part I've been dreading to bring up. I...I really don't want to go. Still...this is Shinji's life too. I can't be selfish when it comes to this.

Not this time.

This is life. Not Eva. What has been decided in these last twenty four hours is not something that children need ever worry about. This twenty four hours will become the next twenty four years. It's scary, but I'm almost wishing for this first moment to be over with and out of the way.

Just make up your mind, Shinji. I'll live either way...

No matter how much I want to live with you.

By the way he's kissing me right now, though, I think I won't have to worry about it.

"HahAH!" he laughs suddenly breaking away from the kiss that I have somehow fallen into.

I turn to the screen to see my broken and bloody fighter on the ground, KO'ed. I turn to him with a growl, but he just sticks out his tongue at me.

Damn I love him.

"Please stay." he asks softly.

"Okay." I nod as I lean into him again.

End.

Originally, this was leading up into a slight lemon, but I think I'll save that for a sequel if I ever decide to post it. ^_^ I just needed to get some WAFF out of my system. I think I'm taking Higher Learning entirely too seriously, but don't worry that will pass eventually as well.

This story was written on one night, looked over and fixed up over the span of another night, and finally ready to post months later. I really don't know why I wrote it, it just seemed to be needed. I feel kinda bad, and I hope nobody thinks I'm ripping off the idea from "Role Playing", a wonderful fic by Lara Bartram and Ammadeau. In it, they mention how Asuka basically wants someone who can stand up to her and life around her. She wants Shinji to be strong, so she can honestly love him. This fic was actually written before that, so I just want to point out I don't usually take core ideas from other people if I can

help it. ^_^ Fan fiction is one thing, but to copy other people's fan fiction is just bad form.

I wanted to show the gradual progression, reasons why, and thoughts of Shinji and Asuka as this happened. It's much harder to write than a omni-present story-telling view, but I have been told I can pull it off once in a while, so I'm giving it another shot. Also, all the little story hints, like dealing with Shinji's father, or eventually, even Ritsuko and Maya, will stem from Higher Learning, most likely. I WAS going to have this a part of HL, but decided against it, considering two entirely different plot progressions. HL is still a work in progress anyway. This is a one or two-shot.

I hope you enjoyed it! ^_^

C&C can go to: strikef@bigfoot.com

If you're interested in my other funky bad-assed stuff, go to:

<http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/9110>

my homepage and dumping ground for all my brain-by-products. Thank you for reading, and don't forget to put on your favourite "Fly me to the Moon" as you leave. ^_^

Strike Fiss, Ninja Crowbotics 2000. Khattam-Shud, EOF.

Neon Genesis Evangelion
Holding Hands 2

Strike Fiss, 2002

Misato's Christmas parties are famous, even to this day. They bring back a lot of memories too.

I find myself thinking about the last few months, seeing them as a blur that goes by much too quickly for how happy I am during those memories. Asuka and I are finally together, after all. We have a life together. We have comfort and pleasure in each other. Love is finally back in my life, though I know we are both too scared to say it.

School is better, but I'm still glad to be done for a few weeks. Asuka doesn't care either way, as she finds it so bloody effortless. I sometimes have to remind myself she is as intelligent as she is beautiful. (If not even more so) Still, she's glad to have the break as well.

Misato greets us at the door with Maya, who I've heard is rooming with our former guardian until Ritsuko gets out of the hospital. My Father's work still has a legacy. Even three years later. But, there

is hope she'll walk again, and besides weakened legs, she's apparently recovered perfectly.

Asuka and Misato share a teary reunion. I am touched at how close they are. We've been so distant these last few months, and yet, the family still exists. We are still connected in ways that my Father would have never understood.

I'm just about to join in when the door opens and...

"KENSUKE! TOJI!" I almost leap at my friends, who, somehow, catch me with equal enthusiasm.

"Well well! If it isn't Ikari!" Toji laughs, slapping me on the back with a strong, albeit, artificial arm. I can't even tell, though. It's so nice to see him! "I hope Devil-Girl is treating you right."

Asuka breaks from her hug with Misato to give Toji the finger, but they soon share a brief, but friendly hug. "Nice to see you too, Stooge."

"So, how are you newlyweds holding up at university?" Kensuke asks, already recording the reunion on his omni-present camera.

I can't help but smile at the 'newlyweds' term. It no longer seems like such a far-fetched idea. The fact I'm blushing like a tomato at the thought, however, is a bit annoying.

"Wouldn't YOU like to know..." she laughs. "Hentai."

"Speaking of that." Kensuke turns his attentions to Misato. "How is our lovely hostess this evening?"

"Not nearly as drunk as you hope I am." Misato flashes a quick,

predatory smile at the younger man, then walks off to the kitchen.

"Who wants a beer?"

Toji and Kensuke share a "Oooooooooo!" together and run off after her.

Maya smiles and invites us in. She looks exactly the same as when we left last year. It's like a blast from the past, actually. "Come in, you two. I'll take your coats."

We hand her our jackets and Asuka throws her purse in the corner of the closet. "Well, Ikari?" she smiles at me when everyone's got their attention turned elsewhere. "Should we tell them tonight?"

"No." I squirm. I really don't feel like having to explain myself to Toji and Kensuke right now. "I just want to enjoy the evening."

She seems to understand, but...oh no...she has a twinkle in her eye.

"Okay. Maybe next time."

Dammit. I know that look.

Where have I seen it before?

It's making me nervous, whatever it is.

I'm so nervous that I don't realize the eggnog is a special 'mix' of Misato's. Not until the second large mug-full. I notice at last because I'm suddenly not putting up any kind of a fight as Asuka leans over me and kisses me.

Again.

Oh...and again.

She leaves my grasp, however, just as I try to pull her in for a more permanent arrangement, and winks, walking off to talk with the girls.

My vision is replaced with two very surprised looking friends of mine.

"Daaaaamn..." Toji admits. I blush as I realize that Asuka wasn't just giving me a peck on the cheek. We were...KISSING...damn nice kissing, too.

Kensuke is promptly rewinding and making sure he captured the kiss on his camera. "W...when did you two...?"

"It's nothing!" I lie. I lie very badly. They don't buy it for a second. "Nothing at all." I smirk, leaning back in my chair.

I like this.

Yes. This is very nice.

I feel warm. All over and inside me. I know it's probably just the fact I'm not used to drinking, but it seems that whenever I do, nothing bad happens.

I just relax and enjoy it. The lights and colours of the season dance around me. Friends walk over and I talk to them, though I must admit, I don't remember any words.

It's strange, actually. I feel like I've been dreaming. That in a moment, I'll wake up and all of this will be gone. As Misato and Maya sing some kind of Christmas Carol in the background, I catch the words "Merrily" over and over again, until I'm certain the next phrase will be "Life is but a dream."

Through it all, however, I see Asuka. Like a point of perfect calm in my hazy vision, she is lit up by the soft glow of candles, Christmas and smiles all around her.

How did I ever end up with such a woman?

When I'm sure that nobody is around to hear me, I quietly pour myself a fresh glass of eggnog...then...another from the plastic cups on the table.

The new glass, I put on the table in front of me, and I find myself slightly choked up. I'm smiling, though.

"Merry Christmas, Father." I toast to the glass. Even if this is all just a dream, I'm not going to pass up this chance to thank my Father.

Meeting Asuka was the greatest present he could have ever given me.

"You two sure you don't want to stay the night over at Misato's?"

Maya is a wonderful person. I love her like some cute, distant cousin. However, if she asks me that just one more time...I'm going to kill her.

Shinji, the sweet baka that he is, answers for me. "No thank you, Maya..." he hiccups. "Misato will just want me to drink more. I'm done."

I'm pretty buzzed myself. "Yeah." I add. It's about all I can manage.

No. I am not smashed.

I am extremely horny.

What? You know the feeling! When your mind keeps shutting down, until all you can think about is being naked, rubbing up against someone? Even better, someone who is probably thinking along the same lines. Aren't I allowed? Damn rights I am. Shinji's not helping. He has been touching me all night. Brushing up against me in the hall. A little nuzzle while nobody was looking. Wrapping his arms around my waist...a little lower during each dance we shared.

And while we were waiting for Maya, our designated driver, to come into the car, Shinji actually leaned over me and started nibbling on my ear. On the other side, too, so he had to slide across my chest and lap in the process.

And I just sat there, terrified, and moaning despite myself.

He knows me. I'm actually in pain right now, while he's not touching me. It's a wonderful, sweet sensation. Wanting something that is seated right next to you, but not being able to take it.

Shinji knows, too.

God damn if that boy doesn't know, I'm going to show him. Every time I

kiss him I want to stay a little longer. 'Making Out' is NOT going to be enough tonight. Not like it has been the last few months.

Asuka wants more.

Oh yes. She does.

She wants whatever Shinji can give her. She's not picky. She already knows that he has at LEAST the required components to give her. Oh yes. Asuka pays attention to those make-out sessions quite well. Asuka likes it so far...

Mmm... Yup. I can always tell when I'm truly into Hentai mode when I start thinking of myself in the third person. It's easier to think of the things you're about to do when you can imagine them as happening to someone else.

Yes that works.

Asuka Langley is going to strip down to her birthday suit tonight. Then, she is going to make Shinji Ikari do the same. Asuka Langley is not responsible for what happens afterwards. Asuka Langley simply has ideas what will happen. It's really not her fault if they do.

Much...

The car stops, and I almost fall out of the side in the struggle to get out. We're home. Shinji has more patience, however, and helps me up. Then, he turns to Maya and thanks her for the ride. She wishes us a merry something or other, and then drives off slowly.

We wait until she's out of sight.

Not one second longer, though.

Shinji almost engulfs me in his coat as we kiss.

Oh yes. Asuka wants more...please don't stop. I don't have to tell him this. I'm sure the noises he coaxes from me are instructional enough. Damn...I've never made that noise before...

Somehow we navigate the ice-slick steps up to the apartment and get inside without falling. It's a few agonizing seconds until we can open the door. Both of us try our keys at the same time and end up wrestling for control of the lock. I finally win and we gain entry into the dark hall.

He smacks the elevator button and the door opens. We tumble inside right there. I gasp and land against the far corner. He pauses, presses the button for our floor, and then joins me in the corner as the door closes.

Shinji's hands slide along my arms and shed my coat for me. Even under the light sweater I'm wearing, I shiver at his touch. I try to kiss him backwards, but he has me pinned, and my efforts are only intensifying the kiss where it is. Wet, passionate sighs fill the tiny car, and I find myself being turned on even more by the sound.

Wait...I know it's coming...Ahh. there it is.

He stops...briefly...breathing hot, sweet breath against my lips.

"Asuka...If you tell me to stop...I will..."

"Stop..." I whisper "And I will kill you. Mmm..."

That settles that.

We tumble out into the deserted hall as the elevator deposits us next to our home. Shinji takes care of this door, leaving my hands free to have his jacket ready to toss as soon as we gain entry.

The lights are off, but we easily navigate around the meagre obstacles until Shinji stops at the stereo and fumbles past my waist for a tape to put in.

Mmm. Fumbling tickles. Asuka likes this already.

The tiny, but bright little equalizer on the side of the stereo can kick up a beautiful effect in a dark room. It looks like blue candlelight as the music plays.

Oooh...

He does know me.

This song is nice...

But I didn't come here for the music. Shinji watches in surprise as I take off my shirt.

Oh my god.

Oh my god.

Yeah, I know I already said this, but...

Oh my god.

This must be a dream.

No. It's not. She's real. Oh god is she real. In every way. She gasps as I take her left nipple into my mouth. Her hands are on my shoulders, pulling me closer. "Shin...Ahh!" she swallows hard and the mound of flesh presses up against my tongue as she takes in air.

She is so sweet. A hint of salt on her skin mixes in with it's natural, refined taste. It is like the height of the symphony, where all the instruments finally join, getting ready for the climactic force of sound.

Asuka lets me taste her breast, and then the other. This is something I never thought I'd do. Something I only dared to fantasize about in my most lonely moments. It's not cold in here, so I know it must be her excitement that's making her so hard. It is the strangest sensation to feel across my tongue. It's something I keep wanting to do again. It can only be replaced by another kiss, or venturing elsewhere.

And I do.

And she lets me.

I pause only so she can take my shirt off. Then, I start to unbutton

her jeans.

"Oh god..." she whispers anxiously. As the button is undone, I can feel her entire body shiver.

Isn't that my line? Not right now it isn't. My mouth and mind are busy elsewhere.

"Shinji...I don't know if..." a sharp, heavy gasp fills the air.

"Shinji...ahh! P...please, Shinji...mmm...yeah...oh...right there...mmm mmm..."

Every sound she makes is music to me. She lays back against the largest of our pillows, and completely gives herself to me as her breathing quickens. All I explore and kiss and touch is burnt into my mind. The musky, honey-ish taste on my tongue is more intoxicating than anything I have ever known. It isn't long until I'm simply lost to it...and I find myself stroking with my tongue, nuzzling and parting and sipping. Words eventually begin to melt away, though, and my mind works on pure taste and touch...two senses that I wasn't aware could produce this much pleasure...

"Sh...Shinji..." she begs. "I can't...h...hhhaaa..."

I look up, noticing for the first time she is completely naked now. The one window that lets moonlight into this room is making her entire body glow. Perfect, pale white skin sends a soft aura off into the darkness. Her eyes, even now, are sharp and clear, though they are heavier with desire. Her silky, golden hair is just the right mix of messy that I find dangerously sexy.

Oh...

She used my time staring to her own advantage, and I find myself flat on my back with her sitting just below my crotch. My pants are gone a second later, and she stops for a moment at my boxers.

I could swear if I didn't know better, she looked like a little girl about to unwrap a Christmas present. She does. I am helpless as she frees me of my last article of clothing, and she looks up and smiles at me.

"Shin-kun..." she whispers. "Is this for me?"

Before I can question her, she silences me with a kiss. It is deep and passionate. Given a choice of executions, I would gladly drown in that kiss.

"Not so bad yourself..." I reply, getting another kiss for my troubles.

Something warm alerts me to the fact Asuka is climbing up on me...guided by my hands, though I swear I didn't know I was controlling them at this point. Asuka positions herself right over me. "Shin-kun...are you ready?"

Though I doubt I'm really able to consider the consequences of this, I nod, completely entranced as this beautiful woman leans over me, then gently lowers her hips. We both gasp out as I slide into her. Just a little for now...I can tell she doesn't want to hurry. It's impossibly tight, but instead of being uncomfortable, all I can feel is this glowing warmth wrapping itself around me.

"Oh god...Shinji..." she bites her lip as she lowers herself a little more. I feel a barrier and she stops, probably knowing what's next.

Never underestimate Asuka when it comes to pain. Also, I see now the

wisdom in the many toasts a newly-married couple share before. A gentle, warm haze helps one ignore pain, because she leans over, grabs my tongue with her mouth, and simply impales herself onto me. There is no cry of hurt. Rather another sharp gasp of pleasure.

She squirms against me as I ease up into her as far as I can. When I'm finally all the way in, the breath we were both holding comes out. The sensation of being completely engulfed by her is nearly more than I can take.

"T...that...wasn't so bad..." I hear her whisper against my ear.

"Shinji...you fit perfectly..."

"You have no idea how long I wanted to hear that..." I say.

She smiles softly. "Hentai..."

"Mmm...Asuka-hentai...." I reply with a grin.

"Oh yeah?" she frowns with mock anger, and begins to lift herself off of me. Only about an inch, though. Then she eases herself back onto me. Despite her attempts to look angry, she seems to be enjoying this quite a bit.

I'm in heaven.

No other thoughts can really penetrate the overload I am experiencing in my mind. Even the mighty Asuka seems unable to manage much more than an occasional cry of pleasure or laboured breath as I push up into her again and again. Our mouths lock whenever it's physically possible to do so, and I can't believe the look in her eyes as we make love.

Suddenly the pace picks up. Oh god...don't let this be a dream.

Dreams always end just about now...

"Don't stop...don'tstopdonstopdonstop!" Asuka begs. Her nails dig into my back, holding on for dear life. "Shinji...don't stop...I...I'm goanna c..c..."

I almost forget how close I am as well as she screams out my name and buries me with herself as far as she can. Her entire body tenses and shudders, bringing me along with her as we both buck and moan. Her body eagerly accepts my seed, coaxing everything from me. I can't even breathe as the pleasure threatens to shut down my brain completely.

We are one.

Finally.

And I can't believe the only word I can think of...the only thing that I can say to myself...is

"Wow..."

My poor brain must just be sitting besides me, gawking at the scene of us, trying to figure our how it came about.

Coherent thought finally returns to me as I feel her slide off of me, still gasping for air. "Are..." My voice doesn't sound much stronger, actually. "Are you okay?" I ask. We must have been completely silent for minutes now.

I think she actually purred.

A long, deep, throaty sound escapes her mouth as she rests against my chest. "Very okay..." she whispers softly.

I lean back against the pillows strewn around us like a nest. My head's buzzing, though the alcohol isn't the most of it. Where she touches me is fire, and where she's not is only cool air. My back hurts a little, but considering the source of the pain, I don't mind.

We hear a soft click, signalling my tape has flipped sides.

"I love you."

She looks up at me and smiles. For a second, I don't know who said it, but she repeats. "I love you, Shinji Ikari..." her hand comes up and cups the side of my face. "With all my heart."

"I love you too." I whisper back. What else can I say? How can I sum up my true feelings for her in words? I cannot. The closest thing I could ever hope to express is to play more music for her.

I find yet more bliss in the way we trace over each other...making sure this is still real. Honest. Us. Half of us are still entwined, aching and dizzy....the other half is perfectly calm. Loving. Tender. I have never felt such a touch as Asuka tracing her hands over cheek, then my back...

Suddenly, she looks horrified. "SHINJI!" she brings her other hand out from behind my back. "Oh...I'm so sorry!"

I notice the blood and shake my head. "It's not bad." I smile.

"Baka! You're too drunk to feel it right now!" she scolds, standing suddenly. Oooh...that was a nice view. She's still naked, after all. "Come on."

"Yes, mien Fuhrer." I smile, coaxing the same from her. She holds my hand as we stumble into the bathroom together.

I don't think I've ever been as happy to receive wounds in my life. As the door closes to the tiny bathroom, I see her looking forward into the mirror.

"Shinji-kun..." she whispers. That wonderful, soft, sweet whisper that got me into so much trouble in the first place. I follow it and find myself wrapping my arms around her. In the mirror I see the most wonderful sight.

We're together. Glowing with love and care. I must admit, I didn't think we looked that...perfect.

Neither of us move for the longest time, until finally, we meet in a kiss.

Hikari got married.

I don't believe it. With that Stooge, of course. Who else would she get married to? I suppose, though, I'm no better. I used to think Shinji was simply a higher form of Stooge. Maybe Hikari learned what I have learned with Shinji.

It's been another year and a half. A few things have changed. First of all, Shinji and I have bought an amazing studio apartment in one of the older sections of the city that has been rebuilt.

There is something truly wonderful about living in a place meant for art. It's so open and spacious...lots of room to corner my wonderful Shinji-kun and make him do all those wonderful things he does to me... oh my...

Shinji has a bachelor's degree in Poly-Math, and is probably going to polish off a Theology degree this winter. Turns out Evangelion really is in his blood, as he's first in his class for anything he deems important to the Eva project.

As for me? I'm tired of school. One can only take so much. However, I did get an honorary doctor's degree in psychology. That's right!

Shinji seems to like it when we play "Doctor". Heheh.

Not that I'm a Hentai or anything.

Ha!

Okay, yes, I'll admit that aspect of our relationship has been rather nice from day one. Damn perverts all around me, how am I supposed to resist?

On a side note, however, I was exactly right. He knows what I like, where I like it, and when I like it. And the girls in school know DAMN well I'm not about to give it up, either.

My baka. Grr. Hands off. I love my sweetie baka.

We're using the spring break to move into the new place. It's wonderful not to have to rush, and because of my VERY smart foresight of not wasting all our cash on the first apartment, we actually have some money still. NERV can't last forever. We're already planning ahead.

Shinji's the lead candidate for what will be left of NERV after it's dissolved later on this year. I think it's going to be called Eden now. Ritsuko and Maya will stay on as the head techies, and we will still be in control of the Geofront and the Evas, but we are no longer a military organization. Research now. We'll have to fill out reports if the Evas are needed to kick some Angel ass, but at least the JSDF knows not to get in our way.

I'm dreading having Shinji as my boss, but I suppose it could be a lot worse. Not only that, I'll be the head-doctor in the group, and can still boss everyone around in the name of mental health. Ha hahaha! Life is good.

But, I admit, there's one or two things I'd like to get done.

One in particular is on my mind as drive home from Hikari's wedding.

"Ever think about it?" I find myself asking.

"Mmm." he mumbles something.

Damn him and his sounds. He knows exactly how to mumble so it could be either a 'yes' or a 'no.'

I know that getting married now might not be a good idea. With graduation coming up in just a few months, and the start of the Eden project. Not to mention we're going to be on call just in case the

shit hits the fan with the old NERV peoples that still might have had a soft spot for the Instrumentality Project.

Shinji takes it all much more seriously now. I think Misato finally got clearance to show him the Dead Sea Scrolls or something, and ever since that day, he's gotten a little more serious about the whole idea. Every time I ask him about what's on it, he just mentions I'll probably find out soon, and worrying about it at the moment isn't going to help.

Still, I know it's important enough that he's already learned Hebrew and another language I never even heard of, just so he can study them once he's made Project Leader.

I decide to stay quiet for the rest of the trip home. I know he thinks about it anyway. I saw how he congratulated Toji, and how he was looking up to his old friend like he was doing something amazing. He was glad at least SOMEONE was getting married...before it was too late...

About two weeks ago, we fought another angel.

...it was bad.

This was nothing like any of the others. It was like a demon from hell. There was no attacking to the city...it simply wanted to kill us. Me and Shinji. It was bloody. Unit 01 and 02 are still regenerating from the carnage. They're still cleaning up the mess on the other side of the city. Thank god Shinji hasn't lost his touch at piloting. I'm not even afraid to admit, I was severely fucked in that battle. If he hadn't come to help, I would have been ripped clean in half.

When we made love that night, it was desperate, passionate. Like we

were almost scared that we wouldn't have another chance. Again, we have this possibility of Death hanging over our heads. This can all end tomorrow for all we know.

At least it would be with Shinji.

"Baka." I sigh as I notice we missed the turn off to go to our house.

"You missed the road."

"Mmm." he replies again. I HATE it when he lets that damn Gendo shit surface in his attitude.

"Fine." I sigh. He's probably in one of his deep retrospective moments. I don't feel like trying to kick him out of it right now.

"Just tell me when you get back to earth so we can go home."

I really don't mind when he gets like this. He's so far from his Father I feel bad just thinking about "Gendo" in the same train of thought. I...just wish he could include me in those deep thoughts. Maybe he does and I'm just too stupid to realize it.

The car stops. He gets out.

It takes me a moment to realize where we are. I zoned out for the entire trip. We're on a look-out that has a view of the entire city. The last time we were up here, I showed him where the old apartment would be.

The air is cool and damp from a shower that just passed over the area, and I take a lung-full of it in. Mmm...nice.

Shinji takes off his coat and hangs it over his shoulder as he looks out over the railing at the city. For a second, I can't help but see

the resemblance he has with Kaji. Shin-kun wears a white dress-shirt and a long, silk tie at the moment, but it looks so much different from the school uniforms I can still recall so clearly in my memory. He's turned into quite a hansom man. Sometimes, I'll catch him not shaving for a few days, and he looks very sexy. Even better than Kaji, though I still tease him that Kaji looked better.

I don't think he'll ever grow more than stubble, though. He doesn't want to look like his father. I can't imagine enjoying it either. Seeing that monster looking back in the mirror would be enough to make me buy a supply of bulk disposable razors for the rest of my life. And I most certainly do not want the image of his father lying next to me in bed.

Sometimes I realize I look a little like Misato, too. My hair's longer now, and I realize I like it a lot better than the annoyingly undecided length I had it when I first came to Tokyo.

"It's a nice day." I whisper, sliding my hands around his stomach. Mmm, it feels nice to be able to do that whenever I want now. "What's on your mind, Shin-kun?"

He smiles, folding his hand around mine. Then, he takes it up to his lips and kisses me gently on the wrist. I love it when he does that. It's so elegant, but also so easy for him to continue up along my arm and then elsewhere.

Shinji stops with just one kiss, though, and returns to his gaze out at the city. "I haven't needed to come up here in a long time." he explains. "My life's been so nice these last two years, I didn't want to jinx it by coming to my old refuge."

I smile and hug him tighter. He's had the same effect on me, after

all. I haven't felt the need to escape in a long time, either. Sure, we still fight occasionally, and I get in my stupid little moods that make us avoid any kind of human contact for a day or two, but over all? Life is good. It's easier to love life when you have someone loving you.

"But I wanted to come here today."

"Oh?" I find myself wondering.

"I came here because there's something I need to know," he tells me.

"Something that I don't know, and have to ask. But, it is not something I can ask this city, or my heart."

I nod. "What is that?"

"Marry me?"

My heart skips a beat.

Oh...my...

Shinji turns to me and smiles. It's that same damn smile that I fell in love with. The one that shows his confidence and energy.

"Marry me?" he asks again, unconcerned at my lack of words or paused breath.

And, the damn sweet Baka that he is, doesn't let me have time to reply before he reaches into his pants pocket and pulls out a small, velvet box. Then...he actually gets down on his knee.

I think I'm going to faint.

Damn...I honestly feel like I'm going to faint.

"Yes..." I hear myself say, even before I can consciously pick out the word.

His face brightens impossibly. By now, I'm finally aware of where and who I am again, and I jump into his arms. "YES!" I laugh. "And may I add it's about time, baka!"

Shinji laughs softly as he slides the ring over my finger...it feels soooo right. A simple, sparkling ring. Nothing fancy. We've learned to save the best for later anyway. I catch myself crying, but I'm too happy to stop now. Besides, I don't care. It's for Shinji.

We embrace and stay that way for a long, long time. He knows me so well. But...he probably doesn't know that other thing I was thinking of on the way up here.

"Shinji?" I whisper into his ear.

"Mmm?"

"You have really good timing." I sniff, wiping the tears from my eyes.

"A few more months and I probably wouldn't be able to fit into a wedding dress."

I can almost hear Shinji blink in surprise.

"Shin-kun...?" I suddenly feel very tense. I don't know how he's going to take this...

He faints.

I laugh.

When he comes to, he has a silly smile on his lips. "Did...did you just say you were...p...pregnant?"

I nod.

"Ahh...good..." he sighs happily. "I was scared it was only a dream."

Whatever tension I felt is melted away with his kiss as we look out over the city of Tokyo 3.

Angels? Monsters? Evas and Gendo? Bring them on. I'm with my sweet baka Shinji, and nothing can ever take that away from me.

Months pass by very quickly, I notice.

We're married.

Husband and Wife. Damn it feels nice to be able to say those words.

Kensuke gave us the most amazing present at our wedding, too. It was a compilation of all our fights in school that he caught, and all the instances where someone mentioned we bickered like newlyweds. I think even Asuka loved it. Proof of all we had to overcome...but also proof that we succeeded where so many couldn't.

I'm leader of Eden now. It's a nice job. The Magi have been replaced and upgraded, and our horrible, sterile working conditions are renovated to be more like a giant library.

Another two angels are dead and gone. I've finally told Asuka some of the reason why they're still coming. The first batch of angels were actually testing us...these ones are mad we survived....

No.

I'm not going to think about that now. It's not important.

I am continuing my Mother's work, just not in the way she expected. We are creating a time capsule for Humanity. We shall live forever in Eva...but not before living ourselves. The Instrumentality Project will never go ahead, so long as I live. It's not the way we are meant to continue.

We are meant to love. To have children and protect them. To show this world to them, so we might make it better. Teach them so they may know how to prevent our mistakes. Teach them love, so they can do the same

to their own children.

We are meant to continue like this.

No matter how much screaming is involved.

Somehow, even though I think my hand is crushed, Asuka screams louder than I do. Giving birth is something I am very glad I don't have to do. "One more push!" the doctor pleads. How the poor man has dodged all the thrown objects so far, I don't know, but I'm very glad I'm not the only one here (and turning this white with fear of her wrath)

"SHINJI! I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!" Asuka cries out, growling as she squeezes my hand impossibly tighter.

"Ayah!" I can only whimper.

Yeah. Nine months is nothing compared to these last two hours. The cravings. The midnight talks. The long weeks of worry. The passionate outbursts both in anger...and in love. I would gladly live through that all again so long as I manage to live through the next few minutes...

She's still holding my hand, even as she finally pushes the last time and gasps out in relief that it's over.

It's over.

Thank God.

She gently squeezes my hand. Though it's tender from the hours of torture, I smile at her own tenderness. Our eyes lock and we smile.

And as the room is filled by a baby crying, we both take deep breaths.

It's not over.

It's just beginning.

The End!

To this date, I don't know if it was the right thing to finish this off. Holding Hands is now nearly 2 years old, but I still find myself enjoying it. Yes...I'm a bad bad man. I read my own stuff and enjoy

it. :P Must be that whole multiple personality thing. Ahh well.
They haven't locked me up yet....

One more to go...

Thank you to all who sat through the horribly long and far-far-SO-far
from perfect Higher Learning saga/mistake/adventure/laughable/whatever
you wanna call it. Maybe this is simply a quick, simple fic to balance
it out. At the same time, though, I find myself already knowing it's
nice on it's own merits. Hopefully this will bring a smile to the
faces of the Holding Hands fans. It's not nearly the same, but then
again, you can only do the whole "hate / love" thing so many times
before you have to decide on one or the other.

I hope you all enjoyed it. And don't be too stingy with the e-mails.
I'm getting better with the whole "replying" thing. ^_^

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Nuthin but love! Ja!

Strike Fiss, Studio Shinnyo 2002. Khattam-Shud, EOF.

Disclaimer: I do not own Evangelion, that is Gainax entertainment. I don't own the lyrics to this song, that is property of the Band "Staind." The words I put to this music and using these characters are however mine, but at the request of any of the above I will remove them as requested.

"It's Been A While"

By: Lord Legato Deathscythe

Gendo walked through the cage of Evangelion Unit-01. It had been ten years to the day, since Yui had been taken by her own creation. Since he had lost the only one that had seen beyond what the world had seen. It was always the same this day, he'd go to the grave marker with Shinji and spend maybe a few minutes with his son except for the past two years. Two years Shinji had hated him. Not once though, during the past ten years had he said anything to the boy. What could he say? It had been so long since he had even considered being a father.

*And it's been awhile
Since I could hold my head up high
And it's been awhile
Since I first saw you
And it's been awhile
Since I could stand on my own two feet again
And it's been awhile
Since I could call you*

*And everything I can't remember
As fucked up as it all may seem
The consequences that I've rendered
I've stretched myself beyond my means*

But all that seemed petty in the wake of what had turned him into what he was today. The day SHE had been taken from them, from him. The day their lives had been ripped apart by a gathering of bioengineered muscles and electronic circuitry that demanded a soul in exchange for its existence. When it had taken Yui for itself.

*And it's been awhile
Since I can say that I wasn't addicted
And it's been awhile
Since I can say I love myself as well
And it's been awhile
Since I've gone and fucked things up just like I always do
And it's been awhile
But all that shit seems to disappear when I'm with you*

Every year on this day, Gendo couldn't help but think of what might have been. IF Second Impact had never occurred, or IF Yui had never created Unit-01. What would he have been like after all this time? Would he and Yui have raised Shinji and given the home for him they had dreamed of? Would the nightmare that made Gendo awake screaming at night never have taken place? So many questions, so many possibilities. If only Yui had been with him.

It was all her. All he had done had been for her. But he wasn't the same man that she had married anymore. Time had changed him.

*And everything I can't remember
As fucked up as it all may seem
The consequences that I've rendered
I've gone and fucked things up again*

*Why must I feel this way?
Just make this go away
Just one more peaceful day!*

It was at night he felt it most. The loneliness and solitude he had driven himself into after her loss. Gendo could still remember their wedding night, the feel of Yui's body against his and the sound of her breath as she slept. He could remember with almost crystal clarity the night that Shinji, their son, had been conceived. Every touch, every move when they had been together.

His memories of that time made the night much lonelier and much more frightening.

*And it's been awhile
Since I could look at myself straight
And it's been awhile
Since I said I'm sorry
And it's been awhile
Since I've seen the way the candle lights your face
And it's been awhile
But I can still remember just the way you taste*

Gendo stood in front of the behemoth, the glaring demon that had destroyed everything THEY were. Despite how he acted towards the boy, he felt so much sorrow for how he had cast Shinji aside. He had never wanted to do that to anyone, never wanted to abandon his son. But at the time he was scared. Scared that something would happen to harm his son, the only connection he had left to Yui. So he had sent him away. It wasn't the right thing to do, but it was the best thing, the only thing he could do.

Seele wouldn't have allowed him to leave after that moment, he could have only hoped that Shinji could escape that.

And, when he was left without an option, Gendo Ikari had done the one thing he had been afraid of. He had gotten Shinji involved.

*And everything I can't remember
As fucked up as it all may seem to be I know it's me
I cannot blame this on my father
He did the best he could for me*

But now, that was all irrelevant. Soon, the Angels would be defeated and Third Impact would come. The old men were hoping for the final days so they could enslave the souls of humanity. The next step in evolution they called it, but Gendo knew better. Nothing ever came from death but death itself.

He would stop them. All their plots and plans, their scenarios, would be for nothing. He, Gendo Ikari, would make sure that Third Impact went as he saw fit. That Yui would be returned to him.

That the heaven she wanted for their son would be a reality.

*And it's been awhile
Since I could hold my head up high
And it's been awhile
Since I said I'm sorry*

If he failed, Gendo would be remembered as a monster, and perhaps he was now. If he had the chance to change anything of the past he could already name that change.

Yui would never have test piloted Unit-01. That was when his and his sons real suffering had begun.

Authors Notes: Well, I have been listening to the "Break the Cycle" disc for Staind a lot lately and came up with some ideas for a few things. This song fic and an AMV I'll probably try to create when I get set up in Korea . This is of course my FIRST attempt at a song fic, and I must say it's almost as difficult as writing a MST. You have to time everything and set it all in one spot. You have to get all the breaks as you want them just right. I hope I have succeeded with this fic.

Thanks to my pre-readers: Little Bit, Alnilam, Angel 17, Ken Sohryu, TommyRude , Sarevock, and all my others. You know who you are and you know you should be congratulated.

C&C as always is welcome at webmaster@darkscribes.org

<*** Ninja Crowbotics Presents ***>

"SHINJI! WATCH OUT BEHIND YOU!" Misato screamed into the monitor. In vain, actually. The com links had already been severed.

<*** A Jolt Induced 4AM Production ***>

A bright snap of electricity arched off EVA-01's back as the umbilical cord was ripped free. An ungodly roar was emitted from the purple Evangelion's jaws.

"We've lost all pilot contacts!" Ritsuko gasped. "I think he's unconscious!!!"

"Cut the sixth fuse!! Eject the plug!!"

"EVA-01 isn't responding!" Ritsuko replied. "But the sync ratio is rising! I don't understand what's going on?!?"

"Shinji! Five minutes of power remaining!" Misato yelled into the mike in vain, hoping that her voice somehow got through. She turned to the command room. "Get EVA-00 out there! NOW!"

EVA-01's attacker was on the screen now. A small, red object in the shape of some kind of rabid animal. It lashed out with a whip-like tail, connecting with the EVA's head and ripping through it's armor.

It let out another roar as a gush of blood sprayed out over the armament buildings and ground around the two behemoths.

Then...

Two lightning fast hands came up and grabbed the Angel's tail,

surprising it. It hissed in anger, but it couldn't pull away.

Ritsuko's eyes were wide. "Oh no..." she whispered. "EVA-01's going into..."

"Berserker Mode!"

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION!
SHINJI THE CASANOVA? A FRIGHTENING PREDICAMENT!!!

By Strike Fiss, 1999

Disclaimer: If I had owned this, you'd all be paying to read this!
Since you don't have to pay a dime...do the math. You know it's not mine. Isn't this much nicer? I thought so. Don't complain.

Notes: Okay, uh, MOSTLY Lime-Romance/WAFF, with just a wee bit of everything else. Yee gods, OOC. No, wait, OOC is too light of a term. At the same time, though, it's close enough. I've seen a lot worse character representation, and this is not too bad for the time period (sometime after the Kiss, and just before Shinji's syncs surpass Asuka's) ALSO, the slightly different character representation is PART OF THE STORY, so bite me. Snoogins.

C&C: strikef@bigfoot.com

The new Angel had shown up only a few hours earlier. It looked almost like a walking bat with four legs and a long tail with a massive, scorpion barb on the end. The color of blood as well. It's Core was

on it's belly, but it always walked too close to the ground for Shinji to crush. Though it was only a tenth of the size of EVA-01, it was tearing the giant weapon apart, one slash at a time. They hadn't even thought Shinji would need backup... not until the cord was cut.

"EEEEAAARRGH!!!!!" the giant Evangelion kicked the Angel off of it's body.

Before the tiny angel could land and smash into the ground, EVA-01 was already charging after it's opponent. CHOM CHOM CHOM CHOM! Each footstep launched itself forward entire city blocks at a time.

"EEEEEEEE!" the Angel finally smashed into the center of a mountain and stopped flying. Unfortunately for the tiny red attacker, that was the exact moment where EVA-01 jumped forward and flew into the same spot in the mountain, using the Angel to absorb the shock.

"Two minutes left!" Misato yelled into the intercom. "WHERE'S REI!?!"

"She's in the elevator! Thirty seconds!" Maya said, furiously working the controls to get Shinji his backup.

EVA-01 raised itself out of the crater it caused, then, without even pausing, began to pound it's massive fists into the Angel. It never had a chance against the man-made-monster as it howled in anger... blood still gushing from its head.

Battered and cracked, the Angel fought on, however... struggling to twist itself free from the Evangelion's concrete grip. Infuriated by the fact that the Angel was still moving, the raving EVA lifted the monster into the air...

And began to EAT it.

The control team watched, completely stunned, as EVA-01 took massive bites out of the Angel, ripping it into shreds and devouring most of its red flesh. A horrible, growling crunch echoed out across the city as it finally bit into the Angel's Core and swallowed.

Turning to the center of Tokyo 3, it was almost as if EVA-01 was grinning at the camera as the red dripped from its jaws. One final, triumphant roar, and its power cells were depleted. It crouched down on the ground and powered down. A moment later, Shinji's plug ejected from the back of his EVA's neck and parachuted to safety.

Everyone in the control room back at NERV stood silent for a moment, shocked.

"Tell Rei to find the plug...get him back right away." Ritsuko said quietly.

"Well..." Misato smiled as she fingered her necklace absentmindedly.
"At least he won."

"EEeAARGH!"

Shinji woke with a start. His eyes were immediately flooded with the calm, blue-white light of the infirmary. Somehow, even so deep in the hospital, he could hear the sounds of nature outside. Calming crickets and birds that made an eerie, yet relaxing background hum.

The effect was indeed calming, and the young man sighed and let himself hit the pillow with his head once more. The bed was colder than usual. His back wasn't raw. He must have only been out for a few hours or a

day.

A tiny smile crept up on his face as he realized this was pretty much how he started EVA piloting. Still, losing consciousness and going berserk had the advantage that you didn't remember much of the pain until later. What he did find disturbing was the taste of LCL in his mouth. A coppery, blood-like taste that he always hated... but had gotten used to sometime after the Angel or so.

But the taste was bugging him. It was obvious he was washed up. He didn't usually wake up with it in his stomach.

A nurse walking by his room made the observation he was alive and well, and flashed him a warm smile before walking off to alert NERV. Shinji seemed to have a fan club at the hospital. He blushed when he realized his clothes were changed. The nurses probably chuckled each time they saw him naked. He hated that thought. Maybe, he promised himself, in a few years, he'd start working out and not be so skinny, but for now, that fact reminded him every day why the ladies of Tokyo 3 would hardly give him a second...

"Stop your complaining!"

Shinji gasped, sitting up and looking around for the voice that had said that. "W...who's there???" he whispered.

No answer.

Shinji didn't see anyone, and the door hadn't been opened. "Asuka?" he frowned. "Asuka...if this is a joke, I'm not in the mood."

"It's not a joke." Came the voice again. "I'm here!"

Now Shinji was frightened. "ARGH! I'm hearing things!" he placed his hands on his ears. "Great! Just what I needed!!"

The voice sighed. "No wonder you're so jumpy."

Shinji paused, frowning. "What do you mean 'no wonder'???" he asked, not thinking it too strange to be talking to nothing.

A laugh this time. "If I tell you, you're going to be mad, and then you're going to just think you're even more crazy." It said calmly. "Maybe I should let you have a good night's sleep before we continue this conversation."

Shinji blinked. "Wait! No! I'm sorry... I didn't mean to complain..."

No answer.

That was the moment Asuka and Misato came in the room. Shinji was standing on his bed, looking at the pillow with an accusing stare. "What did you MEAN!!? I want to know!" he frowned. "Don't go silent on me! Come on! I'm sorry!" He didn't seem to notice his hospital gown let his bare ass stick out for all the world to see.

Both ladies blinked. Misato sighed and turned to leave. "I'll get the car."

Asuka stormed up to Shinji, who was still growling at the pillow. "Baka Shinji! Get some clothes on, pervert!"

Shinji looked at his back and finally noticed his hospital gown. He squeaked something unintelligible and dove under the covers. "A...A...A...Asuka!" he gasped. "W...what are you doing here?!?" his face was bright red.

"Well, I'm not here to look at your naked scrawny ass!" she fumed, turning almost as red as he was. She promptly tossed his clothes onto him. "Are you coming??"

"Sorry..."

She muttered something in German and slammed her way out of the door.

There was a long, pregnant pause. Finally, the voice came back. "Well..." it said with an obvious grin on it's invisible face. "This is going to be interesting."

"What do you mean!?" Shinji growled as he put on his clothes. "You're just a figment of my imagination!"

"We'll talk later." The voice said, calmly. It wasn't a bad voice. A younger male. Very calm and soothing. Just like the birds and the crickets outside. It was almost...angelic.

Shinji felt a chill run through his spine.

Asuka, of course, wasn't about to let the incident of Shinji yelling at his hospital bed go by quietly. As they ate dinner with Misato that evening, she had a very scary smile on her face.

Shinji hardly noticed. He ate his ramen and drank his water with the same blank look he had on when he listened to his SDAT.

"Shinji?"

He blinked, looking up to see Asuka's evil grin. He frowned.

"Do you two want to be left alone?" the redhead continued.

He frowned twice as hard. "What?"

"Well, it's obvious you and the noodles are discussing something very important." Asuka said with a remarkably straight face. "Do you two want to be left al..."

Shinji got up and left. Misato, who had been nicely buzzed from her after-dinner-beer-beer, finally noticed Shinji's absence and blinked.

"What's wrong with Shinji?"

SLAM!!

Asuka, without pity, began to laugh her head off.

Misato, however, had a concerned look on her face. Asuka noticed this.

"What?!?"

"His Eva went berserk today." The older woman said quietly. Images of the gore still ripped fresh in her mind. "It wasn't pretty..."

Asuka gave her a look that told her she expected her guardian to start laughing any second now. She never did, though. "You're serious? Baka Shinji?" she just grumbled and returned to her own ramen. "Nobody makes this big of a deal when *I* rip apart an Angel. Maybe I should change my name to Shinji the Second to get some attention around here..."

Misato stood, smacked her beer can unceremoniously on the table, and then walked off to her own room. "You complain too much."

"Why do I even bother?" Asuka sighed. Deep down, though, she wanted to smack herself. If Shinji really had a bad day... "Why do I bother...?"

For a change of pace, Shinji put in a new tape in the side of his SDAT and pressed play. This was his 'Sad Sad Shinji' tape. Part Two. The first tape had long since worn out. He always listened to it when, for no reason, he felt lower than dirt.

That little tape had been getting a lot of mileage ever since Asuka moved in.

And not for the reasons one might think.

He lay on top of his covers, still dressed in his clothes as sad, soulful opera played in the background of his mind.

"My GOD man!"

Shinji almost screamed as he heard the voice again. It was clear, even through the music. "Wh...what are you?!?" he whispered, feeling his heart racing.

"We'll get to that in a second," replied the voice with a cough. "But can you PLEASE change the music?? It's no WONDER everyone thinks you're a dork! Come on! 'Sad Sad Shinji' tape number two? You had to make a sequel?"

"I am not a dork!" Shinji whispered back, hoping his discussion wouldn't be heard from the hall. "Who are you?!?"

"I'm not saying anything until you put on something better." Said the voice, now more stern. "I love opera as much as the next guy, but you listen to it WAY too much."

Shinji felt very offended. "Fine!" he popped the tape out of his SDAT and reached over to the night-stand for another. "What would be okay by YOU then?"

"Well, some Barry White or perhaps Fiona Apple would be lovely." It replied cheerfully.

"I got some jazz. That okay by you?" Shinji replied with sarcasm dripping from his voice. He popped it in and pressed 'play'.

"Ooh, that's nice. A lot better." Beamed the voice inside his head. "Is that Ray Charles? You kids today never listen to the oldies anymore. I'm impressed."

"Thanks." Shinji grumbled. "You can stay for the song, but after that, get out of my head."

There was a short pause. "It's not that easy." The voice said quietly. "You see, I'm kind of stuck here."

Shinji's eyes went wide. "What?" he took a deep breath, trying to remain calm. "Who are you? WHAT are you!?!"

"Oh come on...I know you're smarter than that, Shinji." The voice sighed. "Do you remember your fight with the Angel this morning?"

"No." Shinji replied quickly. "Not much. It came out of nowhere and started to..." he paused. "You...re..."

"I'm that Angel." Replied the voice.

"Oh god oh god oh god...!"

"RELAX SHINJI!" the Angel yelled. Shinji stopped. "That's better." It sighed. "Yes, I am that Angel that you fought today. Though I must say, I think I suffered a lot worse than you did."

"Wh...?"

"You ATE me, Shinji!" the Angel replied angrily. "I mean...COME ON! Who EATS their opponent? I was just having some fun! All my bigger brothers were bitching about your Evangelion getting in the way, and I decided to see what all the fuss was about. I wasn't going to kill you! I was just going to ruff you up a bit." It grumbled. "But NO! You just HAD to come off your rocker and EAT ME!?!?!"

Shinji was silent. "I... I'm sorry! I mean, we didn't know you were just playing around... and... well... I blacked out and my Eva went berserk."

"She's right, you know." The voice said, this time, much happier. "You apologize way too much. I suppose I shouldn't have punctured your skull. That was bad form. Probably got you all riled up."

"Uh, no problem..." Shinji said with a big sweat drop forming on his head. "So...I ate you? Is that why you can't get out?"

"I think so." The Angel replied. "Your Eva... nice name by the way... ate me, but because you were it's pilot, the part of me that still goes on has been... digested... by your mind."

Shinji nodded. It sounded like something Ritsuko would be blabbering on about. "Okay..."

"So, hopefully, all we need to do is wait for me to pass out of your system, and I can go back to my brothers, and you can go back to being lonely." The Angel said. "In the meantime, though, your brain is actually quite comfortable."

"So you're not trying to take over my mind, and you're not trying to destroy the human race?" Shinji relaxed noticeably. "So...um...what do I call you? Mr. Angel?"

"Actually, I'm not really a full Angel, you see." Replied the voice. "It's only my Brothers who you call Angels. I'm Cherubim." It said proudly. "And my name is Cupid."

Shinji almost fell off of his bed. "C...C...CUPID!?!??"

"Oh? You've heard of me?" Cupid's calm, happy voice laughed. "Yes, the one and only. The Cherub of LUV!!" he stated proudly. "And Shinji, my boy, you are in luck!"

His eyes widened. "Wh...what do you mean?"

"I know we only have a few days together or so." Cupid said. "And I cannot, in good conscience, leave without making this all up to you. I feel bad for causing so much trouble."

"No... really... that's okay." Shinji whispered. "You can just tell your Brothers to stop attacking, though."

"Can't do that, I'm afraid." Cupid sighed. "If it was up to me, I'd let you all enjoy life and love. But I'm just a Cherub. We aren't

usually in the loop. Maybe it's good that you humans are being attacked. Maybe not. I personally don't know, and can't stop the others."

"Oh." Shinji sighed. "I suppose it was worth a try..."

"What I can do..." Cupid continued. "...is give you something you've been lacking your entire life, Shinji. Ever since your mom died. Something that, even in situations that would make grown men weep with happiness, still manages to elude you."

Shinji's eyes widened.

"A chance for love." Cupid stated simply. The voice was sincere and direct.

The young Ikari's mood threatened to slip deeper into despair. "Even if you are Cupid, I doubt you could do that." He whispered quietly.

Cupid said nothing for a long time. Together, they listened to Ray Charles sing in the background of the brain they were sharing.

"Shinji..." he said slowly. "I cannot create Love. Only you and someone else can do that. However, I CAN give you the chance to find it."

"Mmph." Shinji sighed. "Maybe after the Tenth Impact, I'd have a chance at love."

"I can at least get you laid."

Shinji almost coughed on his own blood as it threatened to spurt out of his nose. "W...WHAT?"

Cupid was laughing. "Sorry...sorry...I apologize. I was just kidding." He paused. "Though...if you really wanted to forgo all that Love stuff, I could probably rig something up for a more immediate fix."

"That's SICK!" Shinji replied, holding his nose. "I don't want THAT!" he paused. "Uh...well, at least not without the Love part first!"

"Don't worry, Ikari." Cupid said happily. "I know you're not a pervert. You're actually under-average for a boy your age. I really can't figure out why Asuka keeps pestering you about that."

"Leave Asuka-chan out of this." Shinji frowned.

Cupid seemed to nod. "It's your call, boss."

"Besides." Shinji grumbled. "I really don't see what you could do from inside my head."

"Oh ye of little faith." Cupid smiled.

Shinji felt a warm tingle run through his body. "What was that?"

Across the hall and a little to the left, Misato was trying to focus on a synch test report, but found it impossible to do without another swig of beer first. The moment she put down her beer, however, she felt a warm sensation pass over her body. Her breath caught in her throat for a moment, and when it finally continued, she was blushing.

She realized why she was blushing. Her finger was absentmindedly caressing the paper, right where Ikari Shinji had been written down.

Her mind kept fluttering back to dinner, where she had seen his sad, thoughtful eyes; trying to recall the memories of the day's battle. Misato kept wishing she could shield him from those memories.

"Oh, Shinji..." she sighed.

Almost immediately, she slammed her mouth shut with her hands. "What am I DOING?!!" she gasped under her breath. Try as she might, however, she couldn't help but recall how tall he was getting as he stood... and how he stormed off to his room. So gentle and reflective, even in the face of Asuka's constant bullying.

"Well, he does have a nice butt..." she whispered to herself, no longer forcing her jaw shut. It wasn't as if she hadn't thought about... this... before. Their ages were a little extreme, but she had heard of worse. And... he was sweet... and a hero... and... very kissable...

Mustering up all her resolve, and all her beer in one gulp, Misato headed for the door.

Before Shinji could question what Cupid had been talking about, there was a soft knock on the door.

"Y...yes?" he answered, taking his headphones out of his ears.

"Shinji-kun?" came the soft voice of Misato. Hallway light crept through the door as it cracked open slightly. "Are you awake?"

Right away, Shinji felt something in the air. Shinji-kun? "Uh...?"

He never had the chance to say much else. Misato stood, closing the

door behind herself. In the soft, midnight blue light, she walked over to the side of his bed and sat down next to him, nearly falling over. "I... I'm sorry... I'm a little drunk." She said, obviously embarrassed.

Shinji's eyes grew impossibly wider. Misato apologizing for being drunk? "Th...that's okay, M...Misato-san..." he replied nervously.

She smiled. It wasn't one of her flashy, dazzle-the-men smiles. It was an honest, 100% proof Misato smile. Shinji found it impossible to breathe. She noticed his stare, and glanced away, blushing. "I... I wanted to tell you something today."

He nodded weakly, but said nothing.

"It seems I... need to... every time I see you almost die out there." She said sadly. "I want to tell you how proud I am of you. How... I cherish knowing you... even as just a little boy." Her hand gently came to rest on his thigh.

Shinji found breath in a gasp, but then it locked up again when he felt the warmth of her touch.

Misato continued, however. "I wanted to tell you that you are not a coward, and you are not a pervert." She said with a tear rolling down her face. Don't let Asuka tell you otherwise. It's not true."

"Misato...?" he whispered. This was a side of her he had never though existed. He didn't even know how to classify it. It was sad... yet... so truthful and honest.

She turned to him with a tiny sniff. "Shinji...I just want to tell you..."

Before he knew what had happened, she leaned towards him and let her lips touch his. He was, out of lack of a better term, paralyzed. He opened his mouth slightly to protest, but just found her doing the same. She was very sweet. Yes. Sweet. Even with all that beer she had been drinking, she was sweet tasting. Soft. Moist. It was like wrapping his mouth around the most inviting chocolate cake imaginable. At the same time, he could almost taste something salty. A tear. This was not just a drunken loss of control... this had real emotion behind it.

Her eyes opened to find his also open... though in surprise. She slid away from him gently. Both of them were at a loss for words.

"I just wanted to say thank you..." she whispered, then stood, shakily, and walked to the door.

Misato had to fight the urge to stay, but knew it would be wrong. Somehow, even with the alcohol and the feelings she knew already were there, it wasn't enough to excuse her staying longer. "G... goodnight, Shinji-kun..." she whispered, then closed the door behind her.

There was a long... LONG... pause. Shinji just sat there, listening to Ray Charles fade, then come back in the form of another song. He didn't dare to move. Not for a long time. His heart racing and his mind a blur.

Cupid finally spoke when he guessed Shinji had enough time to process the information. "I can help you, Shinji. Do you believe me now?"

"M...Misato?" he said weakly.

"She really does love you, Shinji. Not in a passion-drenched, soul-mate kind of way, but also a little more than just your guardian. I just helped her see how much she wanted to kiss you." Cupid stated softly. "That's what I do. I show people what they normally try to ignore out of their quest to ignore love and friendship."

"You made her do that?" Shinji demanded. "Did you?"

"No, Shinji." Cupid sighed. "I don't force people to love. I just show them the truth."

A thought hit Shinji. "Really? You can do that?"

Cupid laughed softly. "I just did, didn't I?"

"Can... can you make me..." Shinji paused, looking for the right words. "Can you teach me how?? How to make it so I can do this on my own?"

"Yes." Cupid said. "I will teach you what you need to find love. Real love, too. Not just the stuff they feed people in bad romance novels. Love that's destined and that's real. Love that is felt on every level of physical and emotional. I will teach you how to get past all the hate and the loneliness in your life."

"Why?" Shinji asked suddenly. "Why are you helping me?"

A long, thoughtful pause.

"Because. If anyone needs it... it's you."

A large sweat drop appeared on Shinji Ikari's head.

"Goodnight, Shinji." Cupid said, sounding distant. "Sleep well, and keep that kiss close to your heart. I know she means a lot to you too."

Finally, Shinji was left alone.

His hand came up to his lips... and he could still feel the kiss. For that night, the entire night, the nightmares could not touch him.

Asuka woke up early for once. Something she couldn't quite place had been eating away at her ability to sleep all night. She ignored it, classifying it as bad ramen noodles from the night before.

Her gloomy early-morning face greeted Misato as she came out of her room with her equally unpleasant hangover face. "Morning." She coughed.

"Again?" Asuka sighed, as if she had to ask, throwing her a beer.

"Not now..." Misato sighed, popping the top and throwing back her head as the can reached her lips. Asuka watched in amazement as Misato literally poured the beer down her throat. She never even swallowed by the look of her neck not moving. She just let it slide down to her stomach. "Ohhhhhhhhhh that's better..."

"Rough night?" Asuka blinked. Even after her customary morning beer, Misato looked horrible. Something gravely important was on her mind, or, more likely, a slight case of alcohol poisoning.

"Mmm." Misato smiled suddenly. "No... just..." her face drooped again. "Yeah... a little rough." She moved to the cupboard and got a bag of

cheese-flavored popcorn to snack on.

Asuka didn't like this. Misato was acting very strange. "Uh, I'll go wake up Shinji to make us breakfast." She stood.

Shinji appeared around the corner, however, with a smile on his face and damp hair from the tub. "Good morning!" he beamed.

Misato almost coughed up her popcorn. "Mmm, uh... good morning, Shinji. Sleep well?"

Asuka's brow was crunched together. Something was wrong. Shinji was acting way too... too... happy? And Misato? She was nervous? While Shinji moved into the kitchen to start making his and Asuka's lunches for school, she moved over to the older woman and leaned over. "Can I ask you something about Shinji?"

"Uh..." Misato blushed suddenly. "Okay??"

"Did you catch him beating off in the shower?!"

This time, Misato actually DID cough up her popcorn. "W...WHAT?!?!?"

"I bet you did." Asuka grumbled. "Eww! I can't believe I live in the same CITY as that dirty little hentai!"

"No!" Misato said, finally wiping the crumbs off her shirt. "I did NOTHING of the sort! I.. I just had a strange dream." She lied.

Asuka blinked, then frowned. Then, finally, she walked back over to the table and sat down. "I bet he spanked the monkey, though. Even if nobody caught him. He's too happy."

Misato decided to reverse the situation. "Is that what you think?" she grinned to herself.

"Yes." Asuka nodded firmly. "Baka Shinji..."

"I bet you liked thinking about that." Misato said, whispering into Asuka's ear over her shoulder. "Mmm..." she cooed. "Steamy, naked, hard Shinji Ikari..."

Asuka's eyes went wide as the mental image forced itself into her mind. "WHAT! NO! I DID NOT!"

Misato replied simply by smiling at Asuka with her best sultry smile.

A steamy, naked, wet Shinji waved back at Asuka mind's eye, blowing her a kiss before returning to the task at hand. [bad pun]

"OH MY GOD!!!" Asuka screamed, running off to her room, not daring to look at Shinji's face as he brought out breakfast from the kitchen.

"YOU'RE ALL A BUNCH OF HENTAI!!!"

Cupid snickered to himself. "That was fun."

Shinji ignored the voice and sat down across from Misato. "What was that all about?"

Alone with Shinji, Misato finally remembered why she had such a rough time going to sleep. "Shinji..." she said quietly. "...I'm sorry if I... did anything stupid last night."

Shinji shook his head quickly. "Misato..."

She sighed and buried her head in her hands. "I shouldn't have been

that drunk when I came to see you. I didn't want to make you uncomfortable... I just wanted to say thank you... and..."

"Shinji... now..." Cupid's voice directed quietly.

While Shinji would have normally been blushing and afraid to move, the guidance of his new friend was enough to change that. He got up, knelt down beside Misato, and brushed his hand through her hair.

Misato was silent. She looked up from her hands to see Shinji smiling warmly at her. "It's okay." He said. With that, he leaned over and kissed her gently on the cheek. "I wanted to say thank you too."

Her eyes threatened to give way into tears. She just smiled and nodded, trying to refocus herself. "Shinji... you may not think so, but you're turning into quite the sweetie." She said warmly. "I'll have to watch myself around you now."

Shinji couldn't help but feel a whole lot better. Cupid or not, this was nice. A lot nicer than normal. He always wanted to say thank you to Misato, but they were always so different. He could never connect with her enough to have a heartfelt moment with her. Misato had always been a physical presence... Shinji always a mental one. It took a little urging to get Shinji to see that.

"You're welcome." Cupid said suddenly, reading Shinji's thanks.

"Don't worry, Misato." He moved back to his own seat again. "After all, I don't want to get Pen-Pen jealous."

Misato was about to say 'what the HELL?' but then she saw the look in his eyes and laughed. Shinji joined her a second later.

Asuka, however, was fuming mad. They were LAUGHING? She could hear them outside. "Grr...I bet they're laughing at me!" she pouted. "Damn Shinji and his damp, hard...NO!" she gasped. "NO! Get out of my head!" she sighed, pounding the ball of her palm into her temple.

She felt something warm pass through her body. This was not Cupid's doing, though. Asuka finally gave up trying to fight it and sighed, shaking her head. "Fine...one little fantasy before school..." she whispered to herself, laying down on her bed and closing her eyes. In her mind, a naked, grinning Shinji Ikari waved to her. His sexual organs covered only by the tasteful, skillfully placed rainbow caused by the shower's mist.

Suddenly, the rainbow disappeared. THAT was Cupid's doing. Asuka felt her face get redder. "Oh my..." She felt a lot more than her face get redder. "Oh my..."

As Misato drove them to school, Asuka had a strange, dreamy look on her face as she stared out the window.

At school, Shinji found himself bored as usual. However, today was a lot more bearable. He had Cupid to talk to. Even though he couldn't talk out loud in class, he was learning to focus his thoughts so his cranium companion could understand them like words.

"So," Shinji 'said.' "What you're saying is that you're able to jump from mind to mind?"

"No. Only take little peeks." Cupid replied. "You see, I have to stay in one place. Right now, because of your Eva's appetite..."

"Sorry."

"No worries, my friend! With a good night's rest it has been all but forgotten!" Cupid replied cheerfully. "I am still able to use some of my powers, though. Even though I can't move around until your brain leaves a Number Two in the psychological toilet."

"So what powers don't you have right now?" Shinji found himself curious. Even if this was a different class of Angel, any information might be nice to have for upcoming battles.

"Well, most Angels can light things on fire." Cupid said. "Even I can. Though some are more fancy than others. I can cause people to spontaneously combust, while others can cause the sky to rain down burning sulfur." He said. "It's personal preference, but I don't like the smell of sulfur, so I stick to combustion."

"Must be fun on camping trips!" Shinji chuckled. A few people turned to him, wondering why he just chuckled out loud, but returned their eyes to the front of the board when the young Ikari shot them his Look Of Doom. The fact he hardly ever used that look prompted a quick response.

"Oh, time for business, my young human friend." Cupid said suddenly. "Look to your right. By the window."

Shinji, curious, turned slightly and found nothing out of the ordinary.

"Her."

"Rei?" Shinji blinked. He blushed slightly. "What about her? You're not going to make her kiss me too, are you?"

Cupid gasped. "What ever gave you THAT idea?" he laughed. "No, not Rei, I'm afraid. A kiss from her would take considerable manipulations, and would probably scare a lot of people."

"Okay, good." Shinji thought. "But, then why did you call attention to her?"

"You'll see." Cupid said cryptically, letting another tingling wave pass through Shinji's body.

Rei's mind was usually not much different from her outer visage while she was at school. Calm, quiet, enigmatic, and most of all, focused on anything she damn well wanted to be focused on. Everything she would ever need to know for the rest of her entire existence had already been introduced into her mind during her initial years at NERV. Quite literally, she could skip every lesson, and still know more about the Second Impact and humanity's state of well-being than the sensei did.

So, that is exactly what she did. Her thoughts were focused usually on the picturesque school grounds outside. These thoughts focused on: "Mmm, nice tree. Beautiful sky today. Woodpecker. A small dog. Slight breeze." Of course, when she felt her body get warmer for a moment, she didn't notice much. Probably just the school's heating system malfunctioning. It was common due to all the Angel attacks recently. However, nothing could quite explain it when she suddenly, inexplicably, had the next thought in her mind:

"Talk to Shinji."

Talk to Shinji? Why did that thought come into her head? She turned from the window and looked over to Shinji, who was trying not to look like he was looking at her.

"Talk to Shinji." The thought repeated.

Rei panicked. "What do I talk to him about?!?" she asked her brain. She began to sweat.

Her brain gasped, then struggled to find a subject matter. "Uh...talk to Shinji about... Paper Airplanes!"

"Shinji! Hurry!" Cupid gasped. "Start making a paper airplane!"

Shinji nearly jumped out of his seat, but managed to stay calm and take out a piece of paper. "I don't know how!" he gasped, not sure where to fold.

Cupid muttered something under his breath. "Shinji! At least PRETEND to! Fold down the middle first! Then on the top corners!"

Rei relaxed noticeably when she saw the young Ikari take out a piece of paper and begin to fold. She sat only a desk away from him, and could probably talk to him without the sensei even hearing them.

"Ikari." She said softly.

He turned, finally noticing Rei was looking directly at him. Her eyes were... glistening???? For a moment, he remembered just how beautiful the First Child really was. "Uh... uh... Rei?" he whispered back.

A few students around them noticed that Rei was actually talking, and promptly passed out from mental shock.

"Are you making a paper airplane?" she asked quietly. Her eyes darted down to the paper at his fingertips, and he could have sworn her lips almost turned up into a smile.

"Y...yes." Shinji nodded. "But...I'm not very good." He admitted. The last time he had finished making a paper airplane, it had flown for three seconds, then dive-bombed into his father's oatmeal. It had been a long time ago.

Rei, compared to what she was normally like, was almost giddy. "May I?" she motioned to the paper.

Shinji had no idea that Rei was so interested in paper airplanes. Maybe she normally wasn't, but it was Cupid's urging that let her enjoy her fascination with them. He smiled warmly and nodded. "Of course, Rei-chan!"

Even more students began to pass out as they saw Rei continue to do something other than stare out the window. "ARGH! IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD!" someone yelled, but was ignored.

Asuka was not lost on this sudden activity by Ayanami and was mortified to see her talking with Shinji. "She's talking?! Wonder Girl is TALKING?"

Her eyes widened almost as much as Shinji's as Rei reached over to his desk to the paper... but instead of taking it to her own desk, began to guide his hands with her own. Another touch, added by Cupid. "Like this..." she said, guiding his fingers where to go.

Despite being close enough to smell Rei's shampoo, Shinji forced himself to be calm and to concentrate on the situation at hand. Cupid seemed to have a calming, steadying effect on Shinji. Anyone who hadn't already passed out due to Rei's activity was staring endlessly at how Shinji was simply sitting there and discussing the merits of each fold with her, almost as if her hands weren't even touching his.

Rei was enjoying the experience quite thoroughly as well. Her calm, neutral face was on the verge of a smile. Not just a grin, not just a upturned mouth corner, but rather a full-blown smile. With teeth. With cheeks. "Okay, now fold there." She said quietly, still below the notice of the teacher's hearing. "Flip it over, and crease the wings."

Shinji finished the paper aircraft and held it up. It was beautiful! A kind of strange dart design with wings that layered over and over on themselves. It almost looked like it as a work of art... not an aircraft. He was scared to throw it, less it be crushed against the wall. "Does it fly?" he asked, running his fingers over it's sharp edges.

When he turned back to Rei, she was smiling. "One way to find out." She replied softly.

The lunch bell rang suddenly, making everyone jump. Nearly the entire class had been gazing at Rei, who, for the first time since she came to the school, had a beautiful... no... STUNNING... smile on her lips. Her corner of the classroom seemed to be twice as bright. The boys in the class refused to blink, caught in her beauty. The strongest, who

could pull away, simply gasped at the amazing, god-like Shinji Ikari, and how he was the luckiest man on the planet. The ladies of the class, though amazed at Rei's change, were also whispering about Shinji... the man who caused Rei Ayanami to smile like that.

The Sensei, who expected the entire class to be gone by the time he turned around after hearing the lunch bell, were all still in their seats. "AHEM!" the old man said. "Would you all like me to continue with the lesson? Or would you all like to eat instead?"

Despite the amazing events, everyone wasn't about to pass up lunch, and hurried out of the class to the cafeteria.

"Come on." Shinji said to Rei. "Let's see how it flies." He motioned his head to out the window.

Rei had lost her smile, but seemed still quite enthusiastic. "Yes. If we throw it into the breeze, it should be fine."

They left the class together.

Asuka sat at her desk, still blinking. "I'm in hell!" she gasped. "That's the only explanation! I died during the last Angel attack, and I'm in HELL!" her brain was whirling... not due to any influence from Cupid, either. Her mind had finally digested the disturbingly erotic images of Shinji earlier on that morning, but now, those images were replaced by Rei touching his hands.

He never even flinched! He let that... he let WONDER GIRL just... glomp all over him! For Rei, that was the equivalent of getting down on her knees and reaching for his pants! And they looked so happy! Just playing with paper!

For one, brief moment, Asuka Langley was jealous. No... not jealous. Sickeningly jealous. She quietly brought out her cell phone and called Misato. "I..." she stated suddenly. "I don't feel very well... I'm coming home."

Misato's voice was concerned. "I'll send security by to pick you up."

"No..." Asuka said quietly. "I can walk..."

A long pause. "Okay... call if you need anything else..."

The redhead stood numbly, then walked out of the classroom with a perplexed look on her face.

With one, graceful throw, Rei's airplane left her fingers and soared through the air. Shinji watched in amazement at it's peaceful, steady flight. "Rei! Where did you learn to make those?" he gasped as it finally came to rest on the ground so far away. "That was great!"

Rei was blushing as she walked over to retrieve her creation. "You will not like my answer." She said softly. Everything about her seemed soft. Delicate. Elegant.

Shinji finally saw through her masks and her calm...finding a rather remarkable, lovely young lady. He shook his head. "Please, I'd like to know!"

"Commander Ikari." Rei said with apologetic eyes. Shinji's mood darkened slightly, but for once, he seemed able to push the thoughts away. She cocked her head to one side slightly. "You are not mad?"

"Not when I'm with you." Shinji admitted warmly. Cupid, though silent as not to distract his young human friend, seemed to be quite happy. He could feel a smile at the back of his mind.

"Ikari?" Rei said suddenly.

"Yes?"

She walked up to him, examining him with her red eyes. Shinji felt very awkward as she looked him over. "You..." she stated "...have changed."

Shinji swallowed hard. "W...what do you mean?"

"May I..." she paused, this time seemingly lost in her own thoughts.

"May I talk to you tomorrow?" she looked up, locking her eyes with his.

"I enjoyed talking to you today."

"Of course!" Shinji nodded quickly. "I would..." he smiled. "...enjoy that as well."

She nodded, matter-of-factly. "Very well." She held up her paper creation for him to take. "I wish you to have this."

"A gift?" Shinji blinked.

"Yes." Rei stated coldly...though Shinji could see a glimmer in her eyes.

He took it with a warm smile. "Thank you, Rei-chan."

They stood there for a moment. Rei finally gave him a tiny grin, then turned. "Goodbye, Ikari-san."

No sooner had she left Shinji alone with his thoughts did Cupid's voice return. "I didn't think she had it in her!" he admitted. "That was amazing!"

Shinji found himself nodding. He was standing alone on the side of the school, so he answered back vocally. "She normally isn't like that."

"I know. I can recall most of your memories of her." Cupid said.

He sighed. "She's beautiful when she smiles." He ran his hand over the paper in his hand. "I had no idea..."

Cupid coughed. "Just keep in mind what she is, Ikari. A paper airplane does not mean true love. All I did was open the friendship between you two a little wider." He neglected to mention Asuka's reaction, but was equally pleased at how that went as well.

Ikari slumped to the ground and then lay on the grass, looking up at the sky as he held the airplane in his hands. "I know... I know... maybe I just feel I can connect with her easier. I mean, every day, I'm up against people who are louder, smarter, older and better than I am." He sighed contently. "Rei makes me feel like I have someone to talk to... even if she never talks to me. It's not that she's lesser than I am... in fact, she seems to be hiding a lot of her abilities. But, she's not always trying to push herself onto me. She never tries to... compete... with me. Not like just Asuka... but the others too. Misato is always teasing me, and..." He frowned at his own words. "Does that make sense?"

A pause. Cupid seemed to be lost in thought.

Shinji sat up suddenly. "Oh my god!"

"W... what is it?" Cupid asked.

"T... that's it, isn't it!" he said. "You're just like me! That's why you're helping me!"

There was no answer.

"Of course!" Shinji continued. "You must feel exactly like I do! Always up against your bigger brothers who are smarter, more powerful, and bigger than you are."

"I..." Cupid stammered. "...maybe..." he sighed. It was a long, tired sigh. "yeah... I guess so."

Shinji lay back down. "Maybe we're not so different. Humans and angels."

"We all have feelings, if that's what you mean." Cupid said. "You're right. That first night, when I was trapped inside you, I started to look through some of your memories..." he paused. "Nothing too personal, I promise."

Shinji smiled, unconcerned. "It's okay."

"I realized that if I could help you... maybe... just maybe..." Cupid sighed. "I'd know enough to pull myself out of the same situation."

"You're doing fine so far." Shinji admitted. "I feel great! I finally connected with Misato, and Rei seems interested in at least becoming a friend." He sighed contently. "Even if you don't help me find true love, I will be happy."

There was a slight pause. "Shinji... I know I promised you a chance for Love. I will give you that chance, but the tricky thing with love is that it has to be the right time for that other person as well."

Cupid said. His voice was serious, yet back to it's old tone. "By George, however, I'm going to give it my best shot."

"Without any mind-control?" Shinji laughed.

"Not much." Cupid replied happily. "I promise. If this works, I want you to have no doubt in your heart that it is real, and not just an Angel's powers."

Shinji felt like he needed to hug something. "How can I ever repay you?"

A pause. "Can we swing by the music store on the way back?" Cupid asked innocently. "You have no idea how hard it is to get a good radio station back home."

"Deal."

Misato didn't dare bother Asuka when she came through the door that evening. Her hair was messy and her eyes glared like particle beam weapons. She looked on the edge of "berserker" herself. "If you need anything, just ask." Misato offered, then quickly ran off in case the redhead exploded.

It had been hours since Asuka got home. Almost five on the clock. "Where IS he?" she fumed as she ate another bowl of ice-cream. It was chocolate chip. Not really her favorite, but if she didn't occupy her mind with something, she was going to go insane.

She could almost feel the air shift outside in the hall as the elevator a few apartments away finally opened and a body came walking towards the door. She gasped, realizing she probably looked pathetic, and started to straighten out her hair quickly.

As the door opened, however, and Shinji walked in... every well rehearsed lecture and loud rant she had planned were vaporized in an instant. Shinji glanced over to her, with those dark blue eyes and his smile that had been the talk of the entire student body that day. The smile that actually caused Rei Ayanami to stop being a vegetable for a few moments.

Asuka, before that point, never wanted to be Rei Ayanami so much in her life.

Shinji noticed the strange look on her face and raised an eyebrow. "Asuka?" he asked, kicking off his shoes before he entered on the carpet. "Are you okay? Sensei told me you left just after lunch started."

"I...I'm fine." She nodded, looking down at her ice-cream.

Cupid noticed Shinji's hesitation and smiled. "Go on... trust me."

"Did you see Rei today?" he laughed. "Ooh, and look at this." He reached into his book bag and pulled out the carefully preserved paper airplane Rei had made.

"I didn't know Wonder Girl was so artistically inclined." Asuka said coldly, never looking up. "Pretty amazing." Her spoon scooped another bite of chocolate chip into her mouth. Something passed over her body, however, and she shivered.

Shinji blinked, then walked over to her, bending down a little to look at her closer. She frowned. "WHAT?!"

He smiled, raised his finger, and wiped a small dab of ice-cream off of the tip of her nose. "It tastes better if you get it in your mouth, Asuka-chan..."

She watched him walk off, and a moment later, heard the door to his room close shut. A full heartbeat passed before she dared to breathe again. Her hand came up and touched her nose. "Shinji...?" she whispered to herself.

Shinji gasped out the breath he had been holding when he was certain his room was locked. "Why did you make me do that!?" he asked quickly.

"Why?" Cupid replied, obviously pleased with himself. "You seemed to enjoy that."

"I thought she was about to KILL me!" Shinji gasped. "The last time I accidentally brushed up against her, she grabbed my arms, twisted my neck, and almost dislocated my shoulders!"

Cupid just laughed quietly.

"And I thought I told you!" Shinji said, absentmindedly putting his finger into his mouth. "I don't want her a part of your tricks."

"I did nothing." Cupid said. "I just told you to do what you wanted to do."

"I didn't want to do that!" Shinji protested, not really noticing he still had the taste of chocolate-chip-Asuka in his mouth. "Are you SURE you know what you're doing?"

"Trust me." The Angel replied happily. "I know what I'm doing. Now, where's that lovely music you promised me?"

He sighed, ignoring the strange craving he felt for ice-cream, and then smiled as he pulled some music SDAT tapes out of his bag. "Maybe you're right. A little music would be nice."

Asuka lay on her bed that night, not remembering to get undressed. Her mind felt like a tornado had come to visit for the weekend, then departed only after it was sure she was completely tossed around.

Shinji... what was happening to him? What was happening to her? Every time she was around him, it was like her tongue wouldn't move. Her average day consisted of no less than twenty instances of calling him 'baka' or 'hentai.' Sometimes, when she was bored she'd try combining those two words with German. It made for some wonderful evil-sounding phrases. She loved watching him squirm when she cursed at him in German. Most of the time, she never even had to say something bad. She could say 'That's a nice shirt, Shinji' in a menacing tone of voice and he'd cringe like she was about to hit him.

But lately? Ever since Misato told her about the Angel battle? There was something on his mind. He had gotten... sturdier? Yes, that was the word. Instead of looking into those eyes she loved to tease until they glanced away, she now found them looking right back at her.

They weren't angry. They weren't threatening to retaliate. They were

simply asking her something. Questioning her on something. Letting her know that if...

No.

No!

This had to be a trick! Something Shinji and the other Stooges had been planning to get back at her for all those months of her grace. Little boys who wouldn't know a REAL woman if she walked up to them and smacked them across the head.

Asuka lay on her bed that night, trying to believe herself. Eventually, she did, but only enough to get some sleep.

"Baka..." she sighed.

Morning.

DA DA DA DA DA DA DAH!

Misato and Asuka, both unable to sleep, looked up in surprise as music filled the tiny apartment. Again, the music came. Heavy, rock N roll piano.

DA DA DA DA DA DA DAH!

Shinji came sliding out through the halls, wearing socks, a long white shirt, and sunglasses. In his hand he held his SDAT next to his mouth like a microphone.

"JUST TAKE THOSE OLD RECORDS OFF THE SHELF!! I'll sit and listen to them by myself...!"

Misato and Asuka's jaws dropped on the table as Shinji continued to sing, not quite noticing they were already awake. In his arms were two tiny speakers connected to his SDAT. "Today's music ain't got the same soul!! I like that old time ROCK N ROLL! OOOWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW!!!!!!!!!"

He never even noticed the girls as he slid down the other hall in his socks, then closed the bathroom door behind himself.

It was dead silent in the apartment once again. Misato silently got up, walked to the fridge and grabbed herself a beer. Without asking, she grabbed one for Asuka as well. Both of them downed their respective beers, cringed at the taste, then continued to stare at the wall.

"I didn't know Ikari could sing...?" Misato asked.

There was a long...long pause.

"He wasn't half bad." Misato said finally.

Asuka began to hit her head with the ball of her palm again. "I must be dead..."

Touji and Kensuke finally caught up with Shinji as the EVA pilots arrived at school that day. "Since when do YOU wear sunglasses?" Touji gasped, almost not believing the pair of simple, yet very cool looking shades on his friend's nose.

"Since I noticed the future's so bright, I gotta wear shades." Shinji laughed.

Kensuke just blinked. "Well, I guess it is a little bright outside..."

"Never mind." Shinji sighed. "I've been listening to oldie songs all night."

Both his friends blinked. Kensuke began to examine his friend closely. Shinji finally got annoyed. "WHAT??"

"What have you done with the REAL Shinji?!?"

"Check his eyes! I bet you can see the alien implants from his eyes!"

"Hey!" Shinji frowned, taking off his shades. "I'm still the same Shinji! I still like opera and blues... I just felt like it was time for a change of pace."

Both his friends finished looking him over for any type of alien presence, and seemed satisfied. "Okay." Touji said. "But... if you're the REAL Shinji... where's Asuka?"

Shinji blushed, but only enough that someone looking for it would have noticed. "W...what do you mean?"

"Devil-Girl is always smacking your head on the way to school!" Kensuke explained. "Or have you forgotten already?"

Shinji felt the back of his head, then looked very worried. "You're right! There are no lumps!" he looked around quickly. "I don't know where she is!"

"THAT must be why you're so happy." Laughed Touji.

Shinji frowned. Touji blinked, then stopped laughing. "Actually," he said, "she's been really nice to me lately." He scratched his head.

"Maybe Misato gave her a lecture or something?"

"Misato could give ME a lecture any time she wanted." Drooled Kensuke.

That prompted swift 'bad joke' slaps from the other two.

"How do you mean 'nice'?" inquired Touji. "She only calls you a perverted idiot twenty times a day instead of ninety?"

"Or lets you kiss her feet without breaking your nose in the process?"

Kensuke added.

Shinji blushed... this time quite noticeably. "Well, she didn't try to kill me after I... uh... touched her nose..."

"YOU DID WHAT?!" Touji gasped. "My GOD MAN! Are you MAD! HUH? ARE YOU!? MAD?!! That's fooling around with Death! Like tying Lucifer's shoe-laces together and telling him the ice-cream truck is coming and watching the fun! It's downright INSANE!" he paused his ranting.

"She... didn't try to kill you!?!? Did you do it on purpose??"

Kensuke gasped as well. "You mean you PURPOSELY touched her?!? On a non-sexual body part? That's simply not worth the risk! I could understand if you went for the breast and then ran...but her FACE?"

"There's nothing wrong with her face." Shinji said quietly. The blush had crept all over his body.

Both Kensuke and Touji looked over at each other, then back at Shinji.

In their eyes was a look he had never seen from them before. They both sank down on their knees and began to bow up and down like praying monks. Shinji suddenly felt the stares of everyone in the school yard as his two friends began to worship him like an idol.

"LORD IRON-BALLS IKARI!" they began to chant.

Half of the girls around them began to blush and giggle, whispering amongst themselves. Shinji finally grabbed his friends and hauled them to their feet. "What are you DOING?!" he gasped.

"What do you mean?" Touji said. "Anyone who faces certain death like that has some bloody big balls, I'll tell you right now."

"I wasn't facing death!" Shinji said dryly as he drug them behind himself, walking into the school to avoid all the eyes still in the school yard. "And if you ever do that again, YOU'LL be facing death!"

Cupid had been pretty quiet all day, and finally laughed a response.

"Lord Iron-Balls, eh? Should we put that on your locker-tag?"

"Oh shut up!" Shinji replied.

"Who's he talking to?" Kensuke laughed.

Noticing only a few more minutes of freedom existed before class started, they hurried down the hall and into homeroom. Their conversation moved to the usual matters of who was going to bring chips and pop to their next Godzilla VS Mothra watching, and how the latest Angel battle was so cool that Shinji killed it all by himself. Shinji still couldn't remember much of the battle, so he just changed the subject as quickly as he could.

"Do you humans really hate us that much?" Cupid asked suddenly.

Shinji focused his thoughts. "Today is a nice day. If you saw this city after or during an attack, you would know why we don't like your bigger brothers."

"I suppose so." Cupid sighed. "So much hate..."

Shinji could only agree.

Suddenly, the room's mood seemed to darken. That meant only one thing. Asuka walked through the door. Shinji looked over to Touji and Kensuke and glared them both in the eyes. "If either of you even scratch your nose, she's going to notice and kill us all."

They both nodded. While gossip was fine and dandy, it wasn't worth getting killed by Devil-Girl... er... Asuka Langley. She walked in the door, however, and the Three Stooges almost fell over when she simply walked past them, nodding a brief hello to Kensuke and Touji, and then turning to go to her desk.

"Strike that, reverse that." Touji whispered. "Shinji's not the alien!" he turned to Kensuke. "SHE is!"

"I would have to agree." Kensuke gasped, pushing his glasses up on his nose. A moment later, he had his camera out. "Time: Oh-Eight-Hundred. Subject: Asuka Langley, Alien Abduction report."

"Put that away!" Shinji grumbled. His eyes softened when he saw her face. She was obviously tired. Though she had caught just enough sleep to prevent circles from forming under her eyes, she looked due for a nice, long nap. Every movement was tired and lacking her usual exuberant energy. "I... I wonder if she's feeling okay?"

Both of his friends looked at Shinji like he had just given birth to a dozen live lobsters. Cupid, however, seemed equally concerned. "You'd better go over and see if she's okay."

"Right." Shinji frowned.

"Shinji?"

"Shinji!?!?"

Both of them gasped as Shinji stood and walked over to Asuka, who had since lowered her head in her arms and looked like she was about to go to sleep.

"She's going to flip..." Kensuke gasped.

"My god! This is going to be horrible..." Touji sighed, holding his head in his hands.

"What did I tell you?" Cupid said. "No matter what?"

"Stay cool. Use the Force. That type of stuff." Shinji thought back.

"Yeah. Stay Fonzie. What's Fonzie again?"

"Cool."

"Yeah. Cool."

And so, as Shinji walked over to Asuka's desk from the corner of the room where the Three Stooges often hung out, he drew looks from everyone in the room. His shoulders were back and his stride was

confident. Those who were privileged enough to see the Evangelions in action would see that he strode like his EVA-01. Asuka looked up and saw him kneel down across from her.

"What the hell do YOU want?" was what she meant to say...but it came out more like

"Wh...ohh...?"

"Asuka-chan? Are you okay? Do you want me to call Misato?" Shinji asked with genuine concern. "You don't seem to be yourself today." He said with a tiny smile.

"Leave me alone, baka." She said quietly. "I'm just tired."

Shinji looked worried. "You're flushed." He stated. "Give me your hand."

Asuka almost jumped backwards. "W...what?"

"Give me your hand." He repeated softly. "As Third Child, I'm asking if I can see if you are in good health."

Despite the warnings in her head blaring, she gave him her hand. Her breath caught as he took it and gently pressed his index finger against her wrist. He looked confused for a moment, then looked up. Their eyes locked.

"Oh god... her eyes... they're so... blue..." Shinji found himself thinking.

"Oh god... he can see it... I know he can..." Asuka's mind told itself.

"Shinji! Focus!" Cupid urged.

"Your..." he cleared his throat. "Your heart is racing..." he said.
But as he said those words, he realized that might mean she was sick.
"I'm going to get you back home and into bed."

Jaws dropped within earshot.

Asuka's entire face was red. Shinji FINALLY realized what he had said and was about to correct himself, when Asuka's personal defenses managed to kick in just in time to save herself from agreeing that he should take her to bed.

"HENTAI!" she gasped, yanking her hand back.

"Oh dude." Touji sighed. "He's a dead man."

"We will think well of you, brave Shinji!" Kensuke added.

Sure enough, a resounding SLAP echoed around the entire room. Everyone who had been pretending not to notice the exchange was now gasping at the sound. She had hit him.

Hard.

He lay, half fallen on the ground, barely keeping himself up from the floor with a shaking arm. "SHINJI!" Cupid gasped. "Are you okay!?!"

"I'm fine..." Shinji whispered to himself, his other hand coming up to try to steady his shaking body.

Asuka finally realized how hard she hit him, and almost fell to her knees to help him up herself. "Sh..." she started, but realized she

couldn't finish. Her own stubborn pride now acting as a cage she couldn't back out of now.

Everyone gasped as he stood. His entire left cheek was burning red. A tiny trickle of blood was at the corner of his lip. Slowly, though, as he regained his composure, he almost looked like nothing had happened. Though it was a little muddled, he smiled slightly and bowed his head. "Asuka-chan... I'm not a hentai." He said flatly. "I was just trying to help."

"Y..." she gasped, looking for words, but finding none. She pointed to the other Two Stooges. "Oh yeah? They put you up to this?" she growled. Her voice was hardly convincing, yet it was enough to make the two cower.

"Why would they?" Shinji asked, touching his hand to his cheek. It hurt. A LOT. But... if he backed out now... "Asuka-chan... everyone here knows that if they act perverted toward you in any way that you will kill them."

The entire class nodded quickly. That didn't help her resolve.

He took a deep breath and nodded. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay." The young Ikari said warmly. "Obviously, you're feeling fine enough to kick my ass." He touched his cheek again. "I'll leave you alone now."

And he bowed.

The professor wondered what happened as he walked in the class, and Shinji walked past, bowing briefly and then out into the hall. "What's going on here?" he frowned at the class, who were mostly looking at the door where Shinji had just left.

Touji and Kensuke looked at each other and couldn't believe what they just saw. They immediately got down to their knees and began to chant. Asuka ran out the opposite door before the glares could turn to her. Rei, if she had been paying much attention to the whole scene after Shinji left, would have noticed tears in her eyes. "School is strange." Rei sighed to herself.

All the male students had since joined the tribute to the man who faced Asuka Langley and lived to walk away. "ALL HAIL LORD IRON-BALLS!"

The sensei actually had to call in the principal to stop the chanting.

Shinji didn't feel like he had balls of iron, though. He walked home, upright and proud, but he felt like absolute shit. The throbbing pain on his face felt worse than anything he had ever experienced inside EVA-01. At least when his arms were ripped off or his stomach slashed open inside the EVA, it was just physical pain. This was also emotional, though.

"You're quiet." He grumbled in his mind. "Whatever your plan is, I bet it just hit a brick wall named Asuka."

"No." Cupid replied. "I'm not worried."

"Why not?" Shinji sighed. "I just got humiliated in the middle of class and got slapped by Her Royal Bitchiness for my trouble."

Cupid was silent as he considered a response. "Did you ever hear of the term 'you can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs?'"

"No!" Shinji frowned. "What the hell is an omelet?"

Damn! "Uh, okay, how about egg-noodles." Cupid sighed. "Anyway, the point of that little saying is to say that sometimes, to make one thing, you must break something else."

"Like my JAW?" Shinji yelled out. "Or..." his voice faded. "How about my heart? How many noodles will that make?"

"Shinji..."

"Cupid." He interrupted. "You..." he cringed slightly. "You knew how much I cared for Asuka. But, you have to realize that... it's never going to get any better between me and her." His eyes stung from the tears. "She hates me. She barely wants to talk to me unless it's to insult me. My fondest moments of her are when she calls me names."

Cupid could say nothing in reply. Maybe these two were stuck to be less than lovers. Timing was a bitch when it came to Love.

"Unless you feel this is our last day together, I'd like to have some time alone." Shinji whispered.

There was a pause. "Very well. Just tell me when you need me. I'll be listening." Another pause. "I'm sorry, Shinji."

"It's not your fault." He sighed weakly. "You didn't push anything that wasn't there already."

Alone, in pain, yet... still... somehow better than before, poor Shinji Ikari made his way home. Back to his familiar ceilings and his music. And Misato. At least he could get fussed over by Misato.

Somehow, Asuka had been expecting something like this. Misato stood... actually stood... in front of the door. Waiting for her return. Her eyes shot icicles into Asuka's already aching heart. "Get out of your school clothes. Then, you will join me in the kitchen, Second Child." Her voice gritted as she said that last word. Child. "I suggest you hurry."

She nodded and walked to her room, throwing her stuff on the floor and getting changed as quickly as she could. Her eyes were dry from crying all day. She didn't have the strength to argue against Misato right now. On her way out, she heard music coming from Shinji's room. Her heart sunk as she realized what song it was. An old song from before the Second Impact. "Something I can never have."

The older woman was seated at the kitchen table. A beer was in her hand, and even though it was open, not a sip had been taken from it. Misato wanted to be perfectly sober and clear during this... discussion. Asuka sat down across from her, hanging her head meekly. "I... I don't know what to say..." the redhead whispered.

"Three stitches."

"Wh...?"

"I took Shinji down to the infirmary to get him checked out." Misato said flatly. "He had been acting strange ever since the last battle with the Angel, and I wanted to make sure it hadn't gotten into his mind or something."

"And?" Asuka asked.

"Nothing. No blue patterns. No strange brainwaves." Misato frowned, leaning back. "Shinji is perfectly fine." She crunched the can in her hand slightly. "Except for the three stitches we had to sew up his cheek with."

Limp, red hair hid Asuka's eyes as she lowered her head onto the table with a soft thump.

"Some of your friends called from school." Misato said, finally taking a swig of her brew.

"Oh?" Asuka asked quietly. "What did they want?"

"They wanted to talk to Shinji." Misato smiled purposely. "Five young ladies called and wanted to see if he was okay." She shook her head and took another long belt of beer. "They seemed very concerned. I had no idea he was developing such a fan club."

A long pause.

"What's going on, Asuka?" Misato asked finally. "You are ALWAYS complaining about Shinji. How he's a coward. How he's stupid. How he's a pervert. How he's a wussy." She leaned over the table. "And when he finally changes, you are the FIRST person to flip out and almost fracture his jaw."

Asuka could say nothing. Not when she knew it was right. The stubborn core of her defense still tried, though. "He... he... glommed... Wonder Girl..." she said between ragged breath. "Hentai..."

Misato's eyes narrowed into razor-sharp-slits. "Ooh... I see now..."

Asuka looked up. "What??"

"Shinji can't change... unless it's for you... is that it?" Misato said with true disgust in her voice. "YOU have to be his goddess and queen and all of that shit. Not Rei. Not the other twenty girls in your class who realize what you don't seem capable of. Not me or..." her voice caught suddenly. Asuka's eyes were wide. Misato sighed and continued. "Did you ever think that maybe Shinji wanted to change for HIMSELF? That maybe he was tired of people putting him down all the time?"

Another very uncomfortable pause. Shinji's music could be heard in the background... just barely audible.

"Maybe you hate him for what he's become." Misato sighed, standing. "Maybe you hate him for leaving you behind. I don't care." She leaned down so her face was an inch away from Asuka's. "If I EVER see you hurt that young man like you did today, I will personally lick the stamps to mail you back to Germany." She stood quickly, downing the rest of her beer. "Good night, Second Child. I hope it's long and lonely for you." She grumbled and walked down the hall to her room.

A tiny scratch could be heard from outside. Shinji had fallen asleep to his music long ago, though, and didn't quite catch it. Outside stood Asuka Langley. She slumped against the door, sobbing quietly. Misato's words kept crashing through her brain, over and over again.

"Shinji..." she whispered, hoping on the one chance in a hundred he could hear.

There was no answer. She shuddered as another round of sobs wracked

her. "Shinji, please answer..." she said. "You... you don't have to open the door... just... just listen."

Nothing. Just the eerie midnight silence of Tokyo 3 around them.

Cupid was listening, though. Waiting for the words. Hoping against hope... "Come on..." he whispered to himself.

"I..." she whispered. "I'm sorry, Shinji..."

Cupid would have fallen over if he had a body. "Well...it's a start." He sighed.

Asuka closed her eyes and gently lifted herself off the door. But just before she left to go to her room, she carefully pressed her lips to the cold door. Just light enough to leave a tiny moist mark. "G...night, Shinji-kun." She whispered, then walked to her room.

A byproduct of Cupid's occupancy, Shinji was beginning to realize, was the ability to ward off bad dreams and promote good ones. That morning, Shinji woke early after having a very nice dream of flying over Tokyo 3 with a flock of birds. Despite the numb pain in his cheek, he found himself smiling and looking forward to another beautiful day.

On his way to the bathroom, however, he ran into Asuka, who had also just woke up. They almost collided into each other while reaching for the door. Asuka growled, but looked up to see Shinji. Her face immediately softened and she averted her eyes. "Y... you can go first." She said.

Shinji almost fell over. Asuka usually fought for bathroom rights.

"What? No!" he said, also trying not to look directly at her. "It's okay... you can go first."

Asuka shook her head. "Please..." she sighed. "It's the least I can do to make it up to you."

"Make what up to me?"

While they were arguing about who was going to NOT use the bathroom first, they failed to notice Pen-Pen walking towards them with a towel and a small tray of toiletries in his flippers.

"You know what I mean, baka!" Asuka grumbled. "I shouldn't have hit you so hard yesterday... I..."

"It's okay." Shinji shrugged. "I should have picked better words. It was probably pretty embarrassing..."

Her face was completely red. "I... no... it's okay..."

They both were interrupted by the door slamming shut behind the little penguin who had slipped between them undetected. Both their eyes were wide as they heard the shower start up inside. "Well, looks like he gets it first." Shinji smiled... then winced.

Asuka noticed this and frowned. "Come on, baka," she grabbed his arm and dragged him into the kitchen. "I'll get you some ice for that."

The pain-killers that the doctors gave him had since worn off, and though the swelling had been kept down, some ice was starting to sound like a good idea right about now. He made no objections.

She looked in the fridge and emptied a portion of the impressive ice

supply Misato kept for her drinks into a sandwich bag, then wrapped it with a dishcloth. He accepted the cold-pack and placed it against his jaw. Almost immediately, he let out a long, happy sigh and sunk into his chair slightly. "Mmm...perfect." He mumbled. "Domo."

She sat down across from him and watched him for a moment. "I... I really am sorry, Shinji. I didn't mean to hit you that hard..." she sighed.

A phrase came to Shinji's mind, and he smiled. "No worries, my dear Miss Langley! With a good night's rest it has been all but forgotten!"

She regarded him in a strange light. He was smiling. Brightly. "Shinji... did you get a spine implant or something lately?"

"W... what?" he stammered.

"I mean... even Misato noticed. She said you checked out fine, though." She looked at Shinji with a critical eye. "Are you sure you're feeling okay? Did that Angel do something weird to your head?"

His eyes were wide, and he looked around. Misato was still sleeping... or so he hoped. "No... no... it's just that..." he sighed. "I just look at life differently now."

Asuka, despite herself, was curious. Her look told him to continue.

"I... can't explain right now, Asuka." He sighed. "One day, probably soon, I will... but not now. It isn't appropriate."

"Not even to me?" Asuka asked before she realized what she had said.

Shinji nodded. "Especially to you. You'd think that I'm just doing

all this for attention or something." He said. Asuka was noticeably embarrassed, but knew it was probably true. "I want you..." his voice was softer suddenly. "...to know that this is me. Not some joke."

Asuka was blushing. "I believe you."

He blinked. "You do?"

She looked up with a smile. "You didn't notice us watching you sing yesterday, so you must be doing this for yourself."

He blinked. "What?"

"You like that old time rock-n-roll, eh?" Asuka said with a grin.

Shinji went beet red. "W-WH..." he almost fell backwards. "You SAW THAT??!?!!" he held his head. "Ugh..."

"Misato was sitting with me."

Shinji tried to bury his head in the table. "Oh..."

The shower stopped. Asuka smiled. "I think you deserve the shower." She frowned and raised a scolding finger. "But no funny business. I don't want you relieving yourself before I have a chance to shower."

"Don't worry." Shinji stood and shot her a look she couldn't quite place. "I won't start without you."

He laughed and bounded off to the shower as Asuka gasped and began to throw ice cubes at him. "HENTAI!!!"

Nobody could believe it as they saw Shinji walking up the school steps that morning. Touji had wagered that, at the very least, Asuka would have broken his legs. The fact that Asuka walked beside him like any other normal day was even more astounding.

Shinji began to hear whispers about "balls of steel" and rolled back his eyes, moving past the crowds as quickly as he could.

Asuka, however, stopped in front of Touji and Kensuke, noticing their looks. She frowned as they just stared at Shinji, then pushed both of them over with a finger to their foreheads. "Baka." She sighed, walking past them to class.

The two Stooges lay on the ground, in shock.

"Maybe we're the only humans left, Touji." Kensuke whispered.

"Must be alien-abduction-season." Agreed Touji.

Class started. Boredom set in, and instantly, Shinji realized his brain was much too quiet. "Cupid? Still hanging around?"

"I assume you're talking again?" Cupid asked quietly... still only half-a-voice.

"Yep."

"Shinji! You are amazing!" Cupid laughed. "What's gotten into you?"

"Besides you?" Shinji smiled. "A nice young lady smashed some sense into me."

"I see." Cupid replied. "And what sense would that be?"

"That I don't feel like running anymore." Shinji smiled to himself.

Cupid, at first, didn't quite get the choice in words. Few people would. However, he could feel Shinji's smile. "I'm glad." He said happily. "I can leave knowing at least I helped."

Shinji smiled to himself. "I hope not too soon."

There was a pause. "I... I think I have maybe two more days with you. I'm not sure... but I can feel more and more of myself getting ready to... go somewhere."

"Good. We can at least hang out together on Saturday. Enjoy the weekend a little." Shinji promised. "I'll buy some better speakers, and we'll blast some Smashing Pumpkins so loud the neighbors will complain."

"NOW you're talking!" Cupid whooped happily. "I LOVE Cherub Rock..."

Asuka, despite the tiny part of her brain that was yelling her to stop, found herself glancing over at Shinji all through class. Instead of hunched over his computer, half goofing off and half paying attention, he had actually tilted his chair backwards, and was relaxing with his arms stretched out behind his head. Though she was just a few desks away, she wished she could be closer.

He looked like he owned the world. Like he had some kind of invisible jacket that was shielding him from all the violence and mental pressure they faced. Some kind of armor, that for now, gave him the confidence he needed to open himself up to the world instead of hiding behind the layers of protection and isolation he always had wrapped around his heart.

Even when she had been stupid enough to lash out at his kindness, he took it in stride. Never recoiling and pulling back into his shell like he normally did. Almost to say, I can take what you can dish out. Not a challenge, just an accepting posture. She was the first person that the REAL Shinji seemed to worry about, and seemed to care about.

Asuka found herself falling hopelessly in love with him.

Of course, the moment she considered thinking that thought, her face became red and her brain blared all the German curses she knew against her 'Baka Shinji'. That portion of her mind got a swift kick to the head.

Misato had said something last night that was bugging her. About the other girls. Even now, she noticed. Half of the female population in class was glancing at him with blissful looks on their faces. Shinji, baka, didn't even notice, though. Still, it would only take one pretty face with the inquiry if he was free for dinner to start something. For once, the part of her mind that was bitching for her to start acting more subversive gave in, and offered the thought that Shinji was STILL a male, and would eventually find those offers appealing.

Her fingers were flying on the keyboard before she could give it a second thought. She inspected her message. It looked right. She read it again, then was struck by the thought that maybe she shouldn't send it. Maybe... she was just being fooled. Maybe these feelings weren't

real and...

A warm wave passed through her, and she pressed 'SEND' without a second thought in her mind.

Cupid grinned evilly to himself. "Damn I'm good..."

Shinji was just about to ask what Cupid was talking about when a line of text appeared on his terminal. "What's this?" he thought.

"Read it and find out. That's usually how these things are done."

Cupid
chuckled.

He leaned over to his monitor and blinked. It read:

MEET ME ON THE NORTH FIELD AT LUNCH. UNDER THE OAK. WE HAVE
TO TALK.

-ASUKA.

Shinji blinked, then frowned. "That doesn't sound like her." A second later, came the message:

P.S.) AND COME ALONE, BAKA! WONDER-GIRL ISN'T INVITED!

He paused, then looked over to Asuka. Asuka was smiling, but trying to look like she was paying attention to the lesson. He blinked again, rubbing his cheek. "Cupid? You sure you're not controlling anyone's mind?"

"Very sure." Cupid replied happily.

Shinji blinked again. Asuka turned slightly, frowned, and motioned to the front of the class with her nose. He blushed and turned his attention to the lesson. Asuka smiled to herself. It was only a few more seconds until Lunch...

Three cell phones rang.

Everyone turned to the three Children, who looked at each other, then took out their phones. Cupid frowned. "That's strange...I don't sense any of my bigger Brothers attacking."

The sensei sighed as the lunch bell rang. "Okay class, keep near the shelters in case this is an attack. Otherwise, enjoy your lunch."

[This is an automated NERV message. Please report to *click* Dr. Ritsuko *click* immediately. Transports will be waiting outside. Thank you.]

Seven hours of tests.

Any Angel that would have attacked at the end of those seven hours would have regretted it. Asuka probably would have simply HATED it to death. Her sync level was fine... in fact, it was a little higher than usual. Wonder-Girl's even was up a few points.

But Shinji was still in his entry plug. They hadn't even been testing the First and Second Children that day. They were simply along for the ride to make sure the tests had control data.

Whatever annoyance she still harbored for Shinji was very apparent in

the locker room as she completely demolished three lockers next to her own. Rei watched idly, waiting for the fists and cursing to stop so she could safely stow away her plug-suit. "It's not his fault." She mentioned simply.

That didn't help. Asuka growled. "I KNOW it's not his fault!" she sighed, slumping to the bench. She looked up. "Do you think maybe Shinji's in trouble? I mean, they must have found something..."

Rei sat down next to her and casually begun to get undressed. How she could do it without shame whatsoever was beyond Asuka. "Ikari has changed." She said simply. "Maybe not by his own will."

"No!" Asuka yelled. "I KNOW he's not just a fake! I KNOW this new Shinji is still Shinji!"

Rei's red eyes found Asuka's and seemed to share understanding. "Commander Ikari may not think so. Doctor Ritsuko may not think so."

"And?" Asuka demanded. "What do YOU think?"

Rei seemed surprised by the question. Especially coming from Asuka. It took her a moment to formulate an answer. "I think he is still Ikari-chan." She said simply. "I look forward to talking to him."

Asuka regarded Rei silently as she slid out of her plug-suit and into her clothes. "You do, don't you?"

Rei nodded. "I like paper airplanes. I like making paper airplanes for Ikari-chan. I like talking to him."

Asuka lowered her head slightly. "He seems to like it too."

Rei, in a rare moment of insight, picked up the small hint of distress in the redhead's voice. "Like is not love." She replied quietly, then headed out of the change room.

"This is NOT funny." Shinji grumbled to himself. "I swear, Ritsuko, I will get you for this."

"Just concentrate, Shinji!" Ritsuko's voice ordered over the intercom.

"I DON'T HAVE TO!" Shinji finally yelled.

Unit 01 sat, slightly crouched in a seated position, with a determined look on its face. The purple armor on its back-side had been unbolted, and the mysterious organic buttocks of the Evangelion were left open for the world to see.

Below, a large holding tank waited for whatever excretions came. The technicians were laughing their asses off.

"We've been here for two hours, Ritsuko." Misato grumbled. "It's not going to take a shit."

"Shinji..." Ritsuko said into the com link. "Some of that Angel's body is still organically active. It may be able to regenerate. If we can't get it out of EVA-01's system, there's no telling what might happen! You've got to do this!"

They watched from the control room. The EVA looked like it was trying to copy "The Thinker" in the way it was seated on the support beams. Finally, however, the massive robotic weapon stood defiantly without depositing anything into the holding-tank.

Shinji was furious. "Listen, dammit. Listen like you have never listened to anyone before in your entire life. My sync rate is not going to get any higher today. I don't have to take a shit. My EVA does not have to take a shit. Therefore, WE WILL NOT SHIT! Now GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

Ritsuko sighed and pressed a button, muting the connection. "I say we flood the LCL with laxative."

Misato, having quite enough of it, reached over and pressed the technician intercom switch. "Return EVA-01 to it's holding position. Get the pilot out of there."

"What are you DOING!?" Ritsuko demanded.

"Ending Operation Number-Two." Misato replied. "Go ahead. Try to stop me."

The blonde-haired scientist finally conceded, and slumped in her chair. "Fine. We'll try again two days from now."

None of the three said a word as Misato drove like crazy through the city streets. Everyone seemed to be in a very shitty mood. Or... lack of a shitty mood...

Cupid resolved to make his last two days with Shinji count.

As they got back home to the apartment and Shinji began to fix some instant dinners, Cupid decided he'd been quiet long enough. "Shinji. Hope you're not mad at me."

"No... not you." Shinji thought back. "Any chance you can help me cause Ritsuko any mental anguish?"

"Maybe later." Cupid replied.

"What's on your mind, Cupid?" Shinji asked, taking a deep breath to calm himself down. "Hungry?"

"As much as instant egg-rolls and tofu-fries sounds yummy, I think I'll pass." Cupid chuckled.

"Yeah. I think I will too." Shinji sighed to himself. All that LCL was still in his system. It, unfortunately, made for a very filling meal, though an unwelcome one.

"I want you to talk to Asuka tonight." Cupid said.

"What? After I made her wait seven hours in LCL because I couldn't take a dump?" he laughed. "She really WOULD kill me this time."

"Trust me on this." Cupid persisted. "Only microwave one meal. I'll tell you the rest as we go."

"I'm signing my own death warrant..." Shinji sighed gravely. "Refusing Asuka's food? I must be insane."

Asuka and Misato sat, looking equally pissed off at their jobs. Misato had explained there had been little she could have done, and the Children seemed to know this. Still, Asuka looked like she had little sympathy for Misato.

When Shinji returned from the kitchen with food, though, their faces brightened. "Ahh, that's more like it!" Misato sighed happily as the paper and plastic container was placed down in front of her.

Asuka waited happily for the same to be done for her, but instead, was shocked when Shinji walked over to the door and put on his jacket.

"W...HEY! Where are you going?"

"Aren't you coming?" Shinji smiled mischievously. "I thought we were going to the North field. We can pick up something to eat on the way" He paused. "Unless you're too tired."

Asuka fell for that like a ton of bricks. "Tired?! HA!" she jettied to her feet and grabbed her coat. "I'd race you there, but you'd probably get lost and I'd have to come back to get you!"

Misato watched the exchange with a grin behind her noodle-filled-mouth. Pen-Pen seemed unimpressed by the simple rouse, and got himself a beer. "Wuaaagh."

"Don't wait up, Misato." Asuka warned as she grabbed Shinji by the collar to pull him out of the door with her. "With baka here slowing me down, who knows when we'll be back."

As they walked down the stairs and out into the twilight streets, Asuka finally realized something was up. "Baka!" she smacked him playfully on the arm. "Now you made us miss dinner!"

"This way." Shinji promised. "Convenience store food is surprisingly good for growing minds and bodies." He chuckled.

They entered the local 7-11, looked around for a brief moment, then

both decided to get an order of chicken wings and some sodas. From there, the school was only a few blocks away, and they arrived just as Tokyo 3 began to shift its more vital structures from the Geofront to the exposed sky above. As they started walking towards the large oak on the field, however, Asuka began to remember why she invited him out there earlier on that day. Her walk became slower, forcing Shinji to take his time as well.

"I suppose you're wondering why I told you to come here." She said quietly as they picked out a seat under the huge tree.

"It had come across my mind." Shinji shrugged. "But I don't care where we are." He smiled. "I always enjoy talking to you."

"Yeah." She said in a mocking tone, yet she was hanging her head. "When I'm not beating the shit out of you."

Cupid was silent, so Shinji had to take a deep breath and adlib. "We've had a few conversations!" he promised. "And each time, I've enjoyed them." He said, unpacking their food in a makeshift picnic.

"Oh yeah? Like when!?" Asuka frowned.

Shinji faltered for a moment, but managed to remember one. "Do you remember last week? When we were watching that show on bats? And you kept saying how disgusting they were and I was saying they weren't so bad?"

She smiled warmly. "Okay...I suppose that was a discussion."

Shinji almost dropped the chicken wings as he saw her smile. Her face, totally relaxed and happy, was lit by the thin orange band of sunlight that was left of the sunset. Her hair, though messy from the tests

earlier on, framed her face perfectly... even tossing a few strands across her cheeks. She raised an eyebrow as she watched him falter for a moment. "You okay?"

"Wonderful." Shinji said, a little too quickly. He just shook it off, though. No time for day-dreaming, Ikari! Not when you can spend time with the real item!

Asuka, on the other hand, was having quite the internal dilemma. Shinji's eyes were still locked onto hers, and they seemed perfectly content to continue to gaze at her with the peaceful force that had been buffeting against her defenses all day. She wasn't sure if she was feeling scrutinized, or becoming aroused from the attention she was receiving. "Don't look at me like that." Asuka whispered quietly.

Shinji turned away quickly, but then, on retrospect, turned back. "Why not?" he asked.

She really hadn't expected him to say that, and had no reply ready. "Uh..."

Shinji waited patiently with a smile.

"Because." She said, returning to her usual posture. "It's not polite to stare."

"Mmmph." Shinji pouted playfully. "You're no fun." He turned away, taking the box of chicken wings with him.

"HEY!" Asuka frowned, then sighed. "Fine. You can look. Just not anything lower than my neck." She said with false anger. "I can never be sure with you, hentai Shinji."

He turned back around and they began to munch on the chicken quietly. Shinji made good his promise, and was all too happy to gaze at Asuka's face. When she wasn't huffing and puffing about something, she was truly one of the most beautiful girls in school.

"Shinji? Can I ask you something?" Asuka asked after she had nibbled on a few of the pieces of chicken.

He nodded.

"Why do you put up with me?"

Shinji swallowed hard. "W...wha?"

Asuka frowned at him. "Why don't you at least get mad at me? Why don't you hit me back? Why don't you tell me to get away from you when I do all these horrible things to you?" she hadn't realized it, but she had started crying somewhere in the middle of her questions.

He waited a long time before answering. Asuka finally noticed her tears and quickly wiped them off of her face with the back of her hand. "Because I know..." he shrugged. "I know you do all that because it's your defense."

Asuka raised an eyebrow.

"Like me and my music." Shinji sighed, moving to sit next to her against the tree. "I try to pull myself away from all the bad things we have to face in life. You, however, at LEAST have a constructive defense. How many Angels have you saved us from because you simply wouldn't give up?" he smiled as he saw her blush. "Asuka Langley...too mean to let anything through."

She nodded to herself, mostly. "Thank you."

Shinji said nothing.

She turned to him. "Maybe you're not such a baka after all." She grinned.

"Anything's possible." Shinji offered.

A long pause as the words came to her. "But...Shinji...you survived my attacks."

Shinji blinked.

She turned to him again. They were seated with their shoulders touching. She cocked her head and looked right into his eyes. "You managed to get through, Shinji. You're the only man that ever has."

He swallowed hard as he saw the look in her eyes.

"While monsters the size of skyscrapers couldn't even get through..." her voice was barely over a whisper. "...you stood your ground. Shinji Ikari... you've seen my heart." Her eyes closed. "You've touched it."

Her hand reached over and caught his. Shinji almost developed a nosebleed from the action. Instead of the face-smashing grip that she usually had, her hand was soft and warm. Long, smooth fingers wrapped themselves around his own and squeezed gently.

"Shinji..." she said slowly. "...if this is all a joke, then I won't mind. If this is all a trick, please tell me now." She looked up, into his eyes. "But if you are the Shinji that has touched my heart, then I

have something to tell you."

Her expectant look forced Shinji to examine himself. Had he really done all this? Was this all an Angel's trick? How could he be sure? In two days, would he be as confident?

"Shinji?" Asuka asked again. There was a genuine look of fear in her eyes. "Please, tell me...?"

He took a long, deep breath. "I am..." he nodded slowly, squeezing her hand back. "A... Asuka... please, don't think I'd ever trick you."

She let out a long, sigh of relief. "Shinji Ikari..."

A bright, horrible, white light flooded their vision. Both of them raised their hands to protect their eyes. A gruff, angry voice called out. "HEY! You kids! Get off my grass!"

Both of them had large drops of sweat on their foreheads. When it was clear that the annoying school groundskeeper wasn't going to stop shining the flashlight in their eyes, they stood reluctantly. "Don't you know who we ARE?" Asuka stormed over to the man.

He was unimpressed. "I don't care! You kids are WAY past your curfew! How would you like me to call your parents!?!"

Shinji walked over to the man and, with a slight smile, handed the man his cell-phone. "Be my guest. It's on speed dial five."

The caretaker, an elderly old geezer with a shaved head, regarded Shinji with a scowl. "I'll just do that! What's your name, brat?!"

"Ikari Shinji."

"That better be your real name." The man dialed.

A second later, the phone connected to the head office at NERV. A very angry Commander Ikari answered. Yelling could be heard from the other end of the line. Commander Ikari did not like being called at so late an hour, and made it very clear he did not consider his son a valid excuse to be woken like that.

The caretaker handed the phone back a few seconds later. His face ghost white. "S...Sorry..." he whimpered.

The caretaker almost ran off.

Shinji smiled as he pocketed his cell phone. Just the look on that man's face was worth a little of his father's horrible treatment towards the Children. At least he wasn't biased, and generally regarded EVERYONE with the same disinterest and intolerance.

"Did you see the look on his face, Asuka-chan?" he laughed, turning around... only to find air.

"Cupid!" he gasped.

Cupid replied. "Down the street. Hurry..."

Asuka was almost breaking into a sprint by the time he even saw her. Her eyes lowered in a very angry look. Shinji caught up to her. "What's wrong!?!"

She kept walking. "Nothing."

Shinji wasn't about to be shot down so easily. "Tell me what you were going to say."

"I can't." she choked. "Just give me a moment. I can't just summon up those kinds of words any time I need them."

Shinji frowned, honestly not knowing what she was getting at. "Asuka! Would you just slow down for a second!"

She kept walking. "What does it matter anyway? I talk too much." She said. "You never do."

"I'm talking now!" Shinji cried out. "Dammit Asuka! Don't do this! Not now!"

"Shinji! I can't just blurt out something like this!"

"Try!"

"I can't! I can't be like you and turn into a super-hero whenever I want!"

"I never said I was a super-hero!"

"I know! And that's what makes it so much harder! You don't even know how much you mean..."

"Why can't you be the hero?!! I'm not stopping you! Please!"

"I know you're not stopping me!"

"Then just SAY it!"

"WHY? It's not like it will matter." There was a defeated tone in her voice that made Shinji's heart ache.

"Yes it will! Asuka! Please!"

"Shinji...! Shut up! I can't..."

"NO! I won't let you push me away! Not this time!"

"WHY?!!!"

"Because..."

"WHY?!? You wanna know what I have to say?!?! WHY?"

"BECAUSE!"

"WHY!!!? Dammit! All I have to say is..."

"Because! Because..."

"I'M FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Shinji and Asuka looked at each other with wet eyes, breathing heavily from their argument. For a long time, they just looked at each other. Neither was too sure if the other had said those words. Eventually, each of them slumped over, hands out on a nearby wall for support, catching their collective breath. Asuka was first. "Did...you just say..."

He nodded, wiping back his hair with his hand. "I'm falling for you, Asuka." He said quietly. "I have been for a long time. I'm not even

sure if I'm fully in love with you yet, because each day I wake up and it feels stronger than the day before." He sighed, looking up at her stunned face. "You're the first thing I think about when I wake up, and the last thing I see when I close my eyes." He said softly. "Even then, I've been dreaming about you a lot." He groaned slightly. "And I can see by the look on your face I'm going to have to continue to do so..."

He was interrupted by Asuka running over to him and wrapping her arms around him so tightly that he couldn't breathe. Shinji never complained, though. He rested his head on her shoulder as she did the same. Each of them were afraid to let go.

"Baka." She said sweetly. It came out almost like how someone would say the name of their lover. "I'm falling for you too." She suddenly looked very sad. "I cried all day after I hit you." Indeed, she had tears as she spoke. "I saw how everyone was looking at you, and I felt like if I didn't do something, they were going to take you away from me." She looked up at him. "I attacked. I didn't know what else to do." Her voice cracked. "I... Shinji... you're my sweet baka. I don't want to lose you. You're the only guy who knows who I really am. How I feel..."

Shinji was suddenly very aware of her heart beating against his chest as they shared their embrace. It felt very nice. So nice, in fact, that he felt his knees begin to get weak. This all had to be a dream. A horrible, sick dream to taunt him when he woke up. Oh well, he thought. May as well enjoy it.

Slowly, so slowly, did he finally begin to move his head. Asuka's eyes widened slightly as she found herself doing the same thing. Their cheeks, burning red and blushing, brushed up against one another. Though their arms were still wrapped around each other's bodies, soon,

they were looking into each other's eyes.

They found so much in each other's eyes. Both had seen too much. Suffering and death surrounded them, while the scraps of life that were left pleaded for their constant submission to those images. Both were haunted in so many ways that neither would ever be fully free from those demons. Each of them had long since given up being Children. Their names mocked them in that respect.

And yet, as they looked into each other under heavy lids, they found peace in their shared connection. Something Shinji never thought he could have with Asuka, and something Asuka never even thought she wanted with anyone, let alone him. The connection was there, however. Undeniable and pressing their lips to follow their eyes' lead.

"A...Asuka?" Shinji whispered.

"Mmm?" she could only hum a response as she blinked slowly, refocusing her eyes into his.

"I..." he said. "I know you'll probably think me a hentai for asking, but would you mind if..."

Even Cupid hadn't been expecting this kiss. Had he a mouth to let drop to the floor, he would have. Asuka was kissing Shinji. Not only kissing him, but rather passionately. Not many people truly notice the differences in kisses, except those who are kissing. An observer often will never think one kind of kiss is any different from another. Cupid was an expert on these matter, however.

Some kisses are quick and friendly. A kind of intimate handshake reserved for the best of friends and family. Usually on the cheek, but not limited to it. Back in the days before the Second Impact, it was

even quite commonplace to greet everyone with a brief, fanned kiss on each cheek. A very happy, professional gesture. Even grown men in a homophobic times would gladly perform two kisses to say hello to colleagues and old friends.

Then, there were the kisses in the middle. Ones performed with care and real attention. Though there had been more emotion than usual behind Misato's kiss earlier that week, she kept it within those boundaries. Warm, lasting, and real. A real experience, instead of something that faded in one's mind. That had been Shinji's first REAL kiss since Asuka was bored that one day.

Another kind of kiss. Where the parties involved are testing the waters, or absolutely terrified. When faced with a real life dream come true, as her lips came closer, Shinji had locked up that first kiss. Asuka didn't help, keeping his nose plugged, but at least she hadn't stood there like a brick wall.

Then there were the kisses like THIS one. Where kissing, though focused on the lips, was not confined to just those body parts. Where kissing became an embrace of the entire body. A kind of non-sexual lovemaking... that usually lead to something more. Passion took over the mental processes of worrying about where your lips were, where their lips were, and what had to happen next. Shinji, always the worry-wart, found himself blissfully ignorant of such thoughts as they not only kissed, but tasted each other.

She tasted spicy. Hot. Probably from the chicken wings, though Shinji could guess a lot of the taste was coming from his own mind's excitement. Asuka was feeling the same thing as well. Each of them focused only on each other. Every sense and touch and breath made to heighten their connection, driving them to scramble for more.

It was probably just pent up energy, Asuka figured. Shinji couldn't have learned how to kiss THIS well from anyone she was aware of. Her proud mind forgot to mention how new she was at this as well. So long as Shinji wasn't complaining, she didn't seem to remember, though. If someone were to ask her something like her name, she would have had problems remembering at the moment.

Asuka jumped a little as she felt herself being moved against the wall, but didn't protest. Not even as she felt Shinji's hands glide along her back and neck. She was so scared. Fear was always nipping at the back of this rush of sensation and warmth, yet it never threatened to take over. So scared to let any of this go. Now that she had it, she wanted it to stay so badly it hurt. Hungrily, she drank every bit of his mouth like it was the most precious liquid on Earth. It was intoxicating. Blissful. It made her forget about all the bad things she had seen and done. All of it. It made her heart want to reach out and take Shinji into itself. Wrap herself in the mighty Invincible Shinji's protection and enjoy his warmth. Her hands came up to the back of his head, begging him not to stop.

One week ago, if Shinji had seen a couple on the side of the road kissing like this, he would have promptly passed out due to the massive nose-bleed the sight would have caused. That thought stuck in his mind for a moment, though, and he realized where he was again. His hands retracted slightly, though not completely, from Asuka's body, and he forced himself to pull away from the kiss.

He almost expected Asuka to be angry at the sudden stop, but she simply looked up at him with a glistening smile and a soft light in her eyes that almost made Shinji forget where he was again. "We..." he said weakly. "...better get... home..."

"Mmm..." Asuka nodded as they both caught their breath. Her voice,

though brief, was soft and dripped with honey. "Okay..."

He shivered slightly as they walked. No amount of confidence would be able to stop him from doing so. Just a few... long... sweet... moments ago, he had found out Asuka loved him. Not only that, but he had confessed the same. Such new, uncharted territory... he felt very much like a child again. "Asuka..." he asked, managing not to sound too worried. "What now?"

She could help but smile as they walked. Her arm was still wrapped around his waist and she was clinging to his arm. "I don't know..." she said. "And I don't care..."

The implications of those last words hit Shinji and he felt a nosebleed coming on. Asuka leaned over and gently kissed the side of his face. It had a calming effect on the young Ikari, and he was able to keep walking for the most part.

Shinji resolved that, if needed, he could muster up enough courage to stop anything that went too far. He hoped that he wasn't just kidding himself, but he could still feel Cupid around, and hoped that he would make sure.

"Just enjoy your evening. I'll keep an eye on you." The voice came as they stepped into the elevator.

Asuka smiled, looking around as the doors closed for the long ride up. "You look very cute in this light." She whispered casually.

He blushed slightly, but returned the smile. "You look beautiful in any light." He cocked his head. "Mmm, no, maybe not right now..."

Asuka frowned, then pinned him up against the far corner of the car. "Oh yeah?" Despite the rather unconvincing scowl, she was still gorgeous.

Shinji smiled to himself. Maybe all those months of teasing him would be good for something after all. Asuka was rather fun to tease when the reward was a kiss instead of a smack to the head. "I don't know..." he replied as she began to nibble on his ear. "This light makes you look a little dumpy."

He yelped as she 'nibbled' a response. "Baka!" she whispered. "Then that is your punishment! You must kiss me when I look dumpy! Hahahhaaa!"

"Yes, your majesty." He replied happily, kissing her on the nose, then on her lips, gently catching her tongue and tugging on it with his mouth.

Asuka returned the favor, and they found themselves getting deeper into the kiss like before. Their mouths dueled for position, taking in each other's breath, but also trying to touch and massage the other, giving as much as they took.

They were interrupted by a loud DING! The door opened on the apartment's floor, and they stumbled out, still kissing. There was nobody else on this floor, so they never worried about an audience. As they got to the apartment door, however, they stopped. Shinji frowned. "What if Misato is still awake?"

Asuka, still a little intoxicated from the kiss, smiled sweetly. "Ooh, I don't know. That might be kind of kinky."

"Asuka-chan!" Shinji blushed furiously.

She noticed this, then remembered what Misato had let slip a few days ago. She blushed too. "I.. I was just kidding..." she said. "You're right... we don't want to make a scene..."

Shinji nodded and relaxed noticeably. The last thing he wanted to do was start making out in front of his guardian... and friend... and whatever else Misato was. Both Children straightened out their clothes, then wiped their mouths free of any extra moisture that had been... gathered... there. Shinji tried not to look like he had to re-arrange his pants, but Asuka noticed. She blushed slightly, but said nothing.

He leaned over and gave her one last kiss. "Just in case..." he promised with a smile.

"Shinji-kun... you are a sweet little baka..." Asuka replied with a smile. "Or should I call you Iron Balls?"

Shinji grumbled something under his breath and they opened the door. Misato was sleeping at the dinner table, a beer in her hand, and a tiny smile on her lips as she snored quietly. Both Children were as quiet as possible as they kicked off their shoes and tip-toed around to the living room.

However, just as they were about to consider themselves home-free, a loud burp filled the silent apartment, and Misato sat up, startling herself awake. "WOAH!"

Asuka and Shinji both sighed and developed large sweat drops on their heads. Misato finally noticed they were back. "Oh! Hey you two!" he yawned and rubbed her eyes. "I didn't hear you come in."

"That would be the idea..." Asuka whispered, just loud enough that Shinji could hear her.

"You kids have fun?" Misato asked, standing up on wobbly feet so she could 'clean' up. "Oh, Shinji, someone named Keiko called for you. Then some girl named Nami came by, but I told her that you were out."

"Oooh, Shinji the Mega-Playboy!" Asuka teased.

"Soo..." Shinji said, ignoring Asuka. "You off to bed?"

Misato was about to nod when her jaw dropped and her hand came up to smack her head. "ARGH! I forgot about those reports!" she sighed.

Both Children sighed too. With Misato awake, even when she was drunk, she'd notice anything they did. "I'm off to bed." Asuka stated. "Good night, Misato." She turned and caught Shinji's eyes. "Goodnight, baka-kun."

Though Misato would never pick up on it, Shinji did. The tone in her voice was that same, loving voice he had heard almost all of last hour. He nodded. "G... night..." he replied, his voice catching in his throat as she winked and walked off down the hall.

Misato was already scrambling around the kitchen, filing papers and trying to find where she put her "freaking pencil!" "Good night, Shinji!" she said quickly. "Do you all have school tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Can you wake yourselves up on time?" Misato pleaded. "I have a feeling I'm not getting to bed for a while."

"Don't worry, Misato." He smiled. "Good night."

"Thanks, you're a sweetie." She smiled and then hunkered down to get her reports done. Interrupting 'Operation Number Two' hadn't been without its consequences. "Good night."

Good Night?

That night was pure torture.

They had spent seven hours at NERV doing tests. Shinji had been exhausted. Asuka had worn herself out just being angry for so long. However, neither felt really tired after the chicken-wings. Must be the mysterious chemicals they put in it.

Or, it was the fact that they could almost feel each other through the walls like two magnets trying to connect. Yeah, that was probably a little closer to the truth.

Cupid began to laugh as Shinji jumped out of the bed and paced around the door, almost opening it for the tenth time that hour. "This isn't funny." Shinji replied sharply.

"Compared to what you'd be doing a week ago, I think it is." Cupid offered. "You'd be huddled in the corner, listening to Sad-Sad Shinji Part 3, terrified at what was going on."

Shinji stopped pacing, thought about it, and nodded.

"Now you're almost jumping out of the door." Cupid continued. "Now,

did I tell you I'd help you find love or didn't I?"

"That's great, Cupid. Really great." Shinji smiled as he gently thumped his head against the wall. "And now I'm going absolutely insane."

"You have got to learn how to relax." Cupid replied. "You're only fifteen, remember?"

"I'll be sixteen next month." Shinji replied.

"That's not the point."

Shinji nodded, then opened the door. "I don't care."

Asuka lay, face down in her pillows. Every ounce of her being wanted to be with Shinji, and she had to make a real, honest battle out of it. "It's not like we have to do it tonight..." she said to herself. "I can handle just being with him." She sighed, hoping it was true.

Even then, that was tonight. Would she still be able to prevent herself after there had been thirty 'tonight's? How about a hundred? A year? That was three hundred and sixty days, and even then, they would still be underage. Panic began to strike her. This was bad...

One day, during one of those thirty, or hundred, or whatever, their kisses would get a little too deep. Their hands a little too fast. Their bodies a little too close. That would be it. One of those days, even if they were few. Even if the rest were always interrupted. One day, they would be alone, without an Angel to fight. There would be no Wonder Girl to hinder their touches. There would be no Misato to wake

up and wonder where her charges were.

And it wasn't going to get better, either. Asuka had the sinking sensation that she was going to feel love towards Shinji Ikari for the rest of her days. How could she not? Not when she began to think of all those hidden glances he stole. All those smiles and smiles returned. The way he would act when she was in danger, and how he would get even worse when she tried to stop him from helping. All those little touches they shared. The way he would look so hurt when she was running after Kaji.

"In two years..." she thought out loud. "We'll be eighteen almost." Her eyes were wide. "Can I wait two years?" Her eyes closed. "Seven hundred days. Ugh..." it sounded even worse when she thought of it as seven hundred nights.

Asuka Langley, though a college graduate and normally very bright, now found herself exhausted as she calculated those numbers in her head. All that waiting was making her tired, and she finally managed to nod off to sleep.

That was about the same time that Shinji opened the door and peered inside. He looked at her sleeping form and blinked. "Oh..." he sighed, then smiled. "Oh well..."

Cupid smiled to himself. "Looks like you tired her out, Lord Iron Balls."

"Shut up." Shinji thought back. "God...she looks beautiful." He sighed, gently padding his way through the door. The only light in the room was from the window. Pale moonlight made her delicate white skin

look like china. She was gently tucked around one of her pillows, hugging it for warmth.

He knelt down next to her bed and gazed at her face for a moment. She looked to be having a nice dream. A smile was on her face, and she nuzzled the pillow every once in a while.

"Cupid?" Shinji asked inside his head.

"Yeah?"

He sighed. "I know it's against your rules..." he whispered out loud. "But... do you know what she's dreaming about?"

There was a pause. Shinji waited patiently, however. "I'll give you a hint." He finally replied.

"Mm?"

"Do you remember your dream about how you wanted to take her on a camping trip, but only remembered to bring one sleeping bag so you two had to share?"

Shinji nodded, blushing. "Oh yeah..."

Cupid chuckled. "Well, let's just say you'll probably be a very happy camper."

He stood silently, leaning over her to kiss her cheek. Asuka smiled and hummed something that could have been a word, but was lost in the throes of sleep.

Shinji left, just as quietly. "Thanks, Cupid."

"No problem, Shinji."

Morning found two very tired Children walking to school. Shinji had been late, and had forgot to set his alarm. They only had time to get quick showers and dress. Shinji, fortunately, was able to focus and made their lunches while Asuka was in the shower. Misato was still asleep on the kitchen table, and didn't seem to mind the noise.

Either way, they both looked pretty rough, and had stayed on auto pilot through the morning. They did, however, steal a quick kiss in the elevator down to street level. "Now I bet I really DO look dumpy." Asuka yawned.

"Who says you didn't last night?" Shinji smiled as he received an elbow to the gut for his troubles.

Shinji found Kensuke and Toji waiting for him at the front of the class where they usually distilled earlier on in the morning. "You look like you've been up all night!" Kensuke said. "Were you watching those H-rated Sailor Moon tapes I lent you again?"

"You haven't lent me any porno." Shinji frowned. "I never asked for any."

"Oh, that's right." Kensuke nodded, then turned to Toji. "You know, I may have to start collecting late charges."

Toji looked around nervously. "Fine...I'll get em back to you today." He whispered.

The other two laughed. "He wants to know how to practice for..."
Kensuke waited for Shinji to join in.

"Hikari!!"

They both laughed as their friend got impossibly redder. "I swear, after I get done with you two, you'd WISH you tried to fondle Asuka!"

Shinji's mood literally SUCKED the energy out of the area. He never even said anything... just stopped laughing.

Toji immediately regretted those words. "I... didn't mean it, Shinji... you know that." He said sincerely. "It's just habit..."

Ikari nodded and sighed, shaking his head. "Sorry... I know it was just a joke."

There was a long pause. "You feeling okay, Shinji?" Toji asked, noticing his friend's look.

"I'm fine." Shinji sighed. "I'm just feeling a little tired. I think I need more sleep."

Suddenly, a light WHAP! Sounded in the air and Kensuke was holding his head. Asuka stood proudly behind him. "You stooges talking about me again?" she said with a smirk.

"Why would we want to talk about you?" Shinji smiled. "When we can fantasize about Sailor Scouts?"

Taking cue to the sudden Iron Balls behavior, Toji smiled. "Oooh, I never knew Sailor Venus could bend like that."

"Venus?" Kensuke laughed a mighty laugh. "Jupiter could whip her any day of the week!" he grinned. "And she HAS! Oh, that was a kinky episode."

"You're all a bunch of perverts." She sighed, walking past Shinji, but not before giving him a quick smile.

Shinji nodded to the surprised looks of his friends. "The secret to avoiding Asuka's wrath is to make her so disgusted she leaves before doing bodily harm to you."

"Thank you, Lord Iron Balls." Kensuke bowed respectfully. "We have seen the light in your wisdom!"

"My savior!" Toji added with a bow. "Wow..."

They all began to laugh, even Shinji, who had decided to enjoy the Iron Balls thing while it lasted. Oddly enough, Cupid stayed silent all morning. Shinji was having too much fun to really notice, though.

The conversation about Kensuke's plan to make a home-made N2 mine dropped off suddenly as someone approached. A young woman by the name of Sonoma Keiko. Shinji had seen her around class for a while, as had the other boys. She was quite a beauty. Somewhere along her schooling, she had failed a grade, so she was a good year and a half older than most of the 'girls' in the class. The results of the faster female development inherent in human DNA showed quite obviously. Not only was she filled out, beautiful, and quite a prize in the minds of the young men of the class... but she was also one of the only people that even Asuka avoided conflict with. Not that Keiko was mean or tough, but she was overly intelligent for the grade, and could match wits with anyone in the school... even some of the teachers. Asuka only preyed on the easy targets, not this woman, though.

Shinji's mind struggled to remember something from last night, finally getting past all the kissing and touching. Misato had told him that a girl named Keiko had called. He almost fell out of his seat. THIS Keiko?

"Hello, boys." She said sweetly. Her voice was very... VERY... nice. Kensuke found himself unable to close his mouth. Keiko turned to Shinji. "Hey, Shinji. I called last night. You weren't home?"

Shinji found the glares from his two friends making rational thought extremely difficult. "Uh, well, I didn't get home till late." He replied. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

He wondered where the hell Cupid was with backup, but decided this was a test. He had to get through this on his own.

"Oh, just wanted to see what you were up to." She said, sitting down next to him on one of the desks. Kensuke was drooling at this point. Some part of his mind remembered to turn on his camera. Without proof later on, he would never believe this was happening.

"Don't mind Shinji." Toji smiled nervously. "He's always busy. You have to stay ready for the Angels at all times. Very important stuff." He nudged Shinji. "Right?"

"Uh, yeah." Shinji replied.

Asuka, of course, was not enjoying this. She watched over the edge of her computer screen, glaring at the conversation. Hikari watched with a raised eyebrow. Asuka would cast Shinji jealous glances on occasion,

but what she was doing now was as rare as Ayanami jumping out of her seat and yelling "I AM THE PUMPKIN QUEEN!"

What was more surprising was that Asuka was not muttering 'Baka Shinji' under her breath. She actually TRUSTED Shinji not to be swayed by this woman? Keiko was at least on par with her and Rei. Why wasn't Asuka making a big deal about it? Maybe she was putting too much faith into the jealousy thing. Maybe it was just a competitive urge. Maybe, just maybe, a protective instinct.

"What?" Asuka asked as she finally noticed her friend's stare.

"Are you feeling okay?" Hikari asked. "I mean... you look like you're about to... I don't know... DO something..."

"Just great." She replied quickly, returning back to her glare at Keiko as she talked with the Three Stooges... or Shinji, as the other two drooled. "Baka..."

Hikari sighed in relief. At least she's back to nor...

"Baka Keiko..."

Never mind.

"So, Ikari..." Keiko smiled sweetly. "I was wondering if you'd like to join me and my friends at the movies tonight?" she motioned over to three other, smiling, blushing girls. "If you want, your friends can come too."

Shinji almost swallowed his own throat. How that was possible, he

wasn't too sure... but the surprise was sufficient.

"I hear the old Godzilla 2000 is being replayed." She grinned. Keiko had obviously done her homework on the Three Stooges. "I would... love..." she leaned a little closer "...to hear your thoughts on the movie..."

Kensuke was about to make a mess in his pants.

Shinji was pretty lost himself. Finally, however, he glanced over to Asuka. She was looking at him with very uncertain eyes, but was actually staying at her desk. "I'd love to." He said.

Keiko smiled happily. The three friends began to giggle and discuss plans about Iron Balls Shinji Ikari.

"But..." Shinji coughed.

"But?" Keiko blinked.

"But?!?!?!!" Kensuke and Toji both gasped.

"But?" Asuka found herself whispering.

Shinji nodded. "But I have a lot of things to do today." He continued. "I wouldn't be able to stay too long..." he turned to Kensuke and Toji. "But if you want a Godzilla commentary, these two are the men to talk to."

"Oh." Keiko said, obviously disappointed. "Well...maybe on the weekend?" she smiled sweetly.

"Maybe." Shinji lied. The class bell rang. "I'll have to discuss it

with my associates here."

"Okay." She smiled, standing back up. "I'll talk to you later, Ikari."
She walked back over to her friends, one of them was waving at the group.

"Dude!" Toji blinked. "She's waving at you, Kensuke!!"

"No way..." Kensuke blinked, then waved shyly back.

The girl blushed and smiled, hiding behind her friends as they dispersed to their desks.

Shinji caught Asuka looking away, as if she had been uninterested by the whole encounter, but she had a small grin on her face. Class started a few moments later.

Rei had been teaching Shinji how to fold the 'Eagle' style paper plane all morning as the sensei rattled on about his experiences on an trip to what was left of Antarctica.

"The wings are very important." She whispered, letting her skillful hands glide over the paper, leaving exact folds in their wake. "If they're at the wrong angle, the plane will stall."

Shinji smiled, watching Rei work at it. "Where did you learn about all this?"

"From Commander Ikari..." she said. "And I also found a book about them in the garbage."

Asuka, who was well within listening range, couldn't help but laugh. "You root around in the garbage, Ayanami?" It wasn't nearly as cruel as her normal comments...in fact, it seemed to be in an almost joking tone.

"I spotted it on my way to school." Rei replied. "Someone had thrown away a box of books. There was no other refuse."

"What other books did you find?" Asuka asked.

Rei paused. "Instruction manuals."

Shinji blinked. "Instruction manuals? What for?"

Rei began to blush. "The process of becoming One."

Asuka frowned. "Becoming 'One'? Like how? Math? Or do you mean two people..." her eyes widened.

"At least, I assume they were instruction manuals." Rei continued. "They had curious folds of paper in the middle that expanded to a larger picture. And the beginning of the books all started with customer testimonies."

Shinji hadn't quite figured it out yet. "Oh? What was the product?"

"Something concerning a 'Rim Job' in one." Rei stated casually, and loud enough to draw gasps from the class. "But I'm not sure I understand the context of 'Giving Head'. How does one remove their skull and..."

Kensuke, who was sitting behind Shinji, promptly offered his two cents worth. "Oh, you mean Penthouse's 2011 July special." He stated.

Everyone turned to Kensuke. Asuka had a look of horror on her face.

"Hentai!"

"That's the one." Rei nodded.

"CLASS!" the teacher finally interrupted. "If you would all settle down, Lunch is only twenty minutes away, and you'll be able to talk all you want then."

The class sheepishly turned their eyes to the front and let the sensei continue.

Kensuke raised an eyebrow and leaned over. "Did you keep them?" he whispered.

There was a long pause. Rei glanced around. "Of course." She had a curious grin on her lips.

Shinji began to type random characters on his laptop to look busy, when an instant message came up. He accepted it.

WHAT THE HELL IS A RIM JOB?

-ASUKA

He almost burst out laughing...but instead, began to type a response.

I'M SURPRISED YOU DON'T KNOW. I THINK THE GERMANS INVENTED IT.

-SHINJI

The response came soon enough.

SHEEEISSST! I JUST LOOKED IT UP! REI'S A PERVERT TOO! OH WELL, AT

LEAST WE DIDN'T INVENT TENTACLE HENTAI. HA HAHA!

-ASUKA

Shinji smiled, relaxing back in his chair. His thoughts turned back to Cupid. "Man, this is weird." He thought. "Having a real conversation with Asuka... I could get used to this."

He waited.

And waited.

"Cupid?"

Nothing.

Shinji began to get worried. "Cupid? You still in there?"

That's exactly when all hell broke loose.

A bright, blue flash of light filled his mind. Before Shinji could even figure out what was going on, he was screaming in pain, holding his head. Everyone in the class jumped. The sensei was about to ask what the problem was, when he saw that there was, indeed, a problem. Shinji launched himself out of his desk, scrambling for the door, but tripped and fell over, smashing into and collapsing his chair.

Asuka was terrified, but already at his side. "SHINJI! What's wrong!?!!" she pleaded as the rest of the class gasped in horror. He was beginning to convulse. "Shinji! Oh god... please don't do this!"

she grabbed his shoulders, steadying him on the floor. "REI!" she looked up. "Call NERV!"

Rei nodded calmly and took out her cell. Behind her practiced cool air, however, she was just as terrified. She hadn't even pressed DIAL when the Angel Attack sirens began to blaze outside. Nobody had any idea what to do. The entire class just stared at Shinji, who was giving Asuka quite a run for her money as she tried to keep him still.

"Students! Get to the shelter!" the sensei finally ordered. "NOW!" he added when nobody moved.

Rei looked up from her phone. "The Major is on her way, she's five minutes from here."

"That's not QUICK enough!" Asuka screamed. She turned back to Shinji, who was finally calming down a bit. "Shinji!? Can you hear me?"

He nodded, but was still shaking. "He's coming out..." he whispered. "I don't know what to do!"

She looked around. Most of the class still hadn't moved. Her pleading eyes met only shock. "SOMEONE DO SOMETHING!" she growled, looked down at Shinji, then gritted her teeth. "Get up, Asuka..." she whispered to herself, wrapping her arms around Shinji's shivering body.

Everyone watched in amazement as she lifted Shinji up into her arms and then began to stumble for the door. Shinji couldn't quite believe it, either, but was in too much pain to voice his gratitude. "ARGHH! GET IT OUT!" he pleaded.

Asuka could barely see where she was going. Tears ran down her face and onto Shinji's shirt. "Shinji... don't die on me now!" she demanded

in her meanest voice. "Not now, not EVER!" she gasped as sobs began.
"Promise me!"

"I..." Shinji grunted as another wave of pain slammed into his mind.
"Asuka... please... get to NERV... if there's an Angel..."

"Wonder Girl can get it! Spare me this 'leave me behind' sheist!" she replied, swallowing back some of the tears and regaining her strength.
"Baka Shinji... I always have to save you..."

He smiled weakly, still shivering. "Asuka... you're beautiful when you're stubborn..."

"Good." She nodded. "That explains why I'm so beautiful."

They got to the street outside just as Misato's blue sports car screeched to a stop in front of them. Her eyes were wide as she saw Shinji's limp form in Asuka's hands. "Oh lord..." she whispered to herself.

"HELP ME!" Asuka yelled as she limped towards the car. "Something's wrong with Shin-kun!"

Misato got out and ran to the other side of the car, opening the door.
"Drop him in..."

"NO!" Asuka demanded. "I'm carrying him. We'll fit."

She nodded. "Fine. Just hurry! There's a blue pattern somewhere in the city. We can't pinpoint it."

"He was saying something about 'Him' coming 'out'" Asuka cried as the car launched forward, barely missing a phone booth.

Shinji looked dazed, and didn't offer anything more besides an occasional grunt of pain. Misato said nothing, and just drove like a bat out of hell. Bats out of hell would have been jealous at the speed she drove, actually.

Ritsuko and the team of techs were already at the main Car-Train station, waiting for them. A team of twenty armed guards were also waiting. "What's going on?" Misato demanded.

"The blue pattern has been discovered." Ritsuko said. Her face was grave. "It's inside Shinji."

"WHAT!!!"

"If Shinji starts flipping out in any way, we'll have to kill him." Ritsuko said, slightly dazed. "By order of the Commander..."

"I..." Shinji gasped. Everyone jumped, thinking he was unconscious in Asuka's arms. "...I need to get... Eva... Unit... One... inside...!"

The armed men all frowned.

Ritsuko cringed. "We can't risk it! You could infect the whole EVA! If you go inside, you could end up destroying half of NERV..."

"LET HIM IN!" Asuka screamed.

Everyone took a step back. Has Shinji been able to stand, he would have taken a step back too.

"If you DON'T let my Shinji get into his EVA, he is going to DIE!" she cried. Suddenly, though, her brow crumpled up and she looked very... VERY... dangerous. "I will kill each and everyone of you who let that happen!"

"We CAN'T!" Ritsuko pleaded. She was on the verge of tears herself. "Unless we know the Angel can't control Unit 01, we can't risk it!"

"It's not an angel!" Shinji yelled out, voice wracked by pain. "He's not going to do anything! He just wants to go HOME!"

"Shinji! That isn't good enough!" Ritsuko begged. "Please forgive me!"

Shinji gazed up at Asuka with desperate eyes. "He... just... wants to get out... has no... whe... where to go... can't... get... out..." he cringed horribly. "It's killing us! He can't stop it!"

"Give me a gun!" Asuka demanded.

Everyone blinked.

"I'll go inside the plug with him!" she said, trying to clear her mind. "If anything happens, I'll kill him and destroy the plug."

Ritsuko was rubbing her eyes. The blaring sirens in the background were automatic, and they couldn't shut them off. "We can't risk two pilots either! You're just as valuable as the Evangelions."

Desperate, Asuka turned to Misato. "Give me your gun!"

She took a step back. "A..."

"I know you have one! PLEASE!"

"Major! No!" Ritsuko shook her head as Misato, also shedding tears, took her sidearm from her jacket and placed it in Asuka's hand.

The guards looked very nervous, but kept their automatic rifles on safety. Asuka shifted Shinji to one arm and brought the gun around to her temple. Ritsuko shook her head. "Asuka! Don't! This is crazy!"

"LET US THROUGH!" she screamed. "Or you'll lose both pilots anyway!" her entire body was shaking, but she looked perfectly capable of pulling the trigger. After that, Unit 02 would be a very large paper-weight.

Shinji was too stunned to move. He watched everything through a thick layer of pain. A part of him wondered if it was all a dream. Asuka was risking her life to save him. Not only that, but going against all of NERV.

"Let them thought!" Ritsuko ordered quickly. "Prep Unit One."

Asuka lowered the weapon, but did not relinquish it. "Out of my WAY!"

No time for plug-suits. While the plug was dry-docked outside of EVA-01, Asuka helped him into his seat, standing on the bare capsule floor. "Shinji... are you still there?" she whispered.

He nodded weakly. The pain seemed to be almost constant now. He could barely even breathe.

Misato and Ritsuko watched nervously from the control room as Asuka sealed the hatch from the inside and stood next to the main seat.

"She's ready." Misato whispered.

"Inserting the entry plug." Ritsuko commented as the white cylinder screwed itself into the spine of the giant, purple Evangelion.

"Filling with LCL."

Asuka breathed in deep as the LCL filled the pod. Shinji hacked violently at first, but then relaxed as Asuka floated up next to him and pressed her hand against his face. "I'm right here, baka..." she whispered.

In her other hand was Misato's gun, though. Asuka wondered briefly if she'd be able to use it on him if the time came... or if she could refrain from using it on herself afterwards. This was the only way.

He opened his eyes as the white metal walls turned into colors and rainbows and lights. "A...Asuka..." he looked up at her. "Why are you here?"

"I have to." She said. "They wouldn't let me come in unless..." she pointed at the gun.

He nodded, understanding. "I... I can hear you..." he blushed slightly. "I can hear you thinking."

"I'm talking, baka." She smiled.

"Oh..." he smiled. "No... I can hear you..."

Can you hear me?

Asuka almost jumped backwards. "Yes..."

Images began to flood her mind. Smiles. Frowns. Times on the couch, watching TV. She began to recognize them as from his point of view. Kiss. The kisses they shared last night. Him giving her a kiss on the cheek when he found her asleep. "Shinji?" she blushed as she gazed into his eyes. "These are all of me?"

He nodded weakly. "I told you." He replied hazily. "You're the first thing I think of when I wake up..."

"And when I dream, I dream of you..." Asuka completed the sentence.

They smiled at each other for a moment. Then, Shinji's eyes went wide. "Oh god..." his teeth gritted together and he nearly tore the arm rests from his seat as the pain wracked his mind.

"Something's coming out!" Ritsuko yelled over the intercom. Her voice was ignored, though. "Get the tank ready!"

Asuka just held Shinji in her arms as he shuddered. "Please, Shinji... just relax. Let it out." She cried. "I love you... please don't go... not now..."

"I... love... you... too..." Shinji shuddered. The pain was getting worse. He could barely speak. "I... want... eat... chicken-wings... with you..." he laughed weakly. "I... it was... fun..."

"Everyone! Stand by!" someone yelled through the link.

Misato watched the screen, as the two Children huddled together. Her own tears were coming just as fast now. Her hand was wrapped around her cross. "Please let them get through this..." she whispered,

knowing that if Shinji died during this ordeal, Asuka would probably not be alive much longer. "I'll never badmouth another angel in my life... just please..."

Pain hit Asuka as their sync ratio increased with the Eva. For the first time, she could see what Shinji was going through. Both of them began to cry out.

There was an awful crash. The entire Evangelion jumped from it's restraints, tearing pieces of the wall down with them. It roared in pain, matching Shinji's desperate howls inside the plug.

BOOM!

And then, there was nothing.

Everyone dared not to breathe as they watched Eva-01 relax and shift back into it's usual position. It's eyes flickered.

Inside, Asuka let out a long gasp as she realized the pain was gone. The walls were still showing the outside, though. They were still synced. Panic crossed her mind as she realized Shinji had stopped moving. SHE was still synced... that didn't mean he was too.

"S...Shinji?" she whispered. Her voice was heavy in the LCL. She floated back away from him, looking him over. "Shinji? Are you okay?"

In the tiniest, weakest voice she had ever heard, came: "What... ever..."

Her eyes went wide and she dropped the gun. "Shinji!!"

He looked up at her with tired, but very alive eyes. "What ever happened to baka?" he asked.

She was already crying. "BAKA! HOW DARE you make me think you were dead!" she yanked him out of the seat in a tight embrace. "If you ever do that again, I'll KILL YOU!" Shinji coughed as he was squeezed tightly, but had a smile on his face. "Sweet baka..." she whispered into his ear.

Misato had passed out on the floor, needing to catch her breath. A tech was handing her tissues as she cried into them. "Thank you..." she sighed, mentally exhausted.

Ritsuko, however, looked worried. "The EVA left a present for us. It's in the holding tank..." her expression turned grave. "The angel..."

Misato nodded, re-composing herself. "Okay! Launch that tank somewhere we can use an N2 mine on it. We have to make sure the pilots are safe!"

"Moving the tank to the launch pad!" replied one of the techs.

Shinji blinked. "Oh no!"

"What is it?" Asuka asked, looking around.

"They're goinna kill him!" he gritted his teeth, closed his eyes, and allowed his mind to connect to the Evangelion once more.

The control room jumped as Unit 01 reached over, turned around, and grabbed the crane that was being hoisted into position to transport the holding tank. Its boom crumpled like a tin can, warping under the mighty grip of the Evangelion's hands.

"Crane malfunction!" the techies reported.

"Good observation." Misato sighed. She ran over to the com. "Shinji! What's going on?!"

The image of Shinji and Asuka huddled together came up on the screen. Shinji looked very determined. "I can't let you kill him! He's my friend!"

Misato had no idea how to respond to that.

Asuka just nodded. "Don't worry, just let us have a moment." She reached over to Shinji's chair and pressed a button. The screen went blank.

Shinji, as the Evangelion, knelt down and looked into the large metal bowl that had been placed on the floor. Inside was a squished up, yet recognizable body. The Angel he had fought only last week. The Angel he now knew as Cupid.

Cupid, in Shinji's mind, seemed to be smiling. The red creature slowly climbed out of the toilet. Though battered, it seemed to be able to function. Misato and Ritsuko were amazed when the tiny Angel appeared

as if it WASN'T going to resume it's attack.

Eva-01 held out it's hand, letting Cupid walk over onto it. Then, it stood, lifting the Angel to it's face.

Asuka watched in amazement from the plug with Shinji. "He's... not attacking?"

"He's my friend." Shinji said. "He's not like the others. He was just..." a smile "...having fun."

Asuka frowned. "Well tell him to play with someone else next time. He almost killed you!"

The sharp eyes of Cupid gazed back at Eva's glowing, unblinking stare.

"It's okay." Shinji smiled.

"Thanks, Shinji," came a voice. Asuka was startled, but realized it was the Angel.

"Who are you?" she asked suddenly, hoping her sync with Shinji would let her talk too.

A pause. The angel outside cocked it's head, as if to think of a response. "I will let Shinji explain it to you." It said in a soothing voice. "You may not understand it if I say anything."

Asuka frowned, but accepted the explanation.

"Will I ever see you again?" Shinji asked quietly.

"Maybe." Cupid said. His voice was hopeful. "This universe is full of

surprises. I think it would be amazing if we never crossed paths again."

Shinji nodded sadly. Suddenly, though, he clicked on the Comm channel. "Misato?"

"Shinji?" she replied quickly. "Is everything alright?"

He nodded. "Yes, but...I need to ask a favor."

"Anything." She replied.

Asuka raised an eyebrow.

Shinji smiled as he looked at Cupid. "Can you play some music over the intercom for us?"

A long pause. "Uh... I suppose so." Misato blinked, turning to Ritsuko, who nodded after a moment. "Yeah... uh... what song?"

"Anything by Barry White." Shinji smiled. If he didn't know better, Cupid's mouth-less face moved into what could be a smile as well.

Asuka laughed as 'I'm Gonna Love You' began to play in the entry plug. Cupid's physical form began to move to the rhythm. "You are a true friend, Shinji." He replied happily.

The entire control room watched in amazement as the Eva and the little Angel perched on its arm began to bob their heads to the lyrics.

"It feels sooooo goood..." came the deep voice. "Lying here, next to me..."

Ritsuko just watched the scene with an open jaw. "This is incredible."

"Oooh baby..." the song continued. "Give it up... Ain't no use... I can't help myself if I wanted to." The music began to get more excited. "I'm hung up... no doubt... I'm SOOOOO in love with you... for me... there's no way out!"

By now, the Evangelion was moving in a little groove to the beat. Asuka, though never being much of a fan of the slower, romantic kind of music, found herself liking the song more and more. Shinji looked a lot better from a few minutes ago, and they were holding each other in a comfortable embrace.

"I'm goinna love ya... love ya... love ya... more and more! Deeper and deeper!"

As the song was finally finishing, Asuka and Shinji were caught in each other's eyes once more. This fact was not lost on the Control Room, or Cupid. "Maybe..." Misato smiled reaching over to the com. "We should give them a minute or two."

The screen blinked off.

Cupid smiled to himself as he saw the two. "Shinji... I shall take my leave of you now." He said, interrupting the two Children who turned back to the front of the plug.

Shinji nodded sadly. "I know. If you don't go, they'll start thinking about nuking you."

"Exactly." Cupid replied. "I have stories to tell my Big Brothers, so I don't want to wait too long." He laughed. "They are going to be SOOOO jealous. Barry White music is rare as true love where I come

from."

Asuka looked at Shinji. "Big Brothers?"

"I'll explain it all later." He promised.

Cupid began to float, glowing red. The Evangelion lowered its arm.

"I'll put in a good word for you humans." He promised. "And, Asuka?"

Asuka blinked. "Y... yes?"

"Take care of my friend." Cupid said. "I suggest you both go on a camping trip and do some... talking."

Both of them blushed.

"Sayonara, Cupid-san!" Shinji whispered as the Angel turned into a bright ball of red light and then zipped up, through the roof.

Asuka turned her attention to Shinji. "CUPID?????"

He smiled innocently. "We only talked. No mind-control." He whispered. "I promise."

She looked up at him with questioning eyes. "Oh? Are you sure?"

Shinji gently took her into his arms and closed his eyes. She did the same. Their minds met half way. Her eyes jugged open as she felt his mind, listening to the days of conversation with the little Angel, and what had happened. How Shinji had turned down the offer for sex, how he felt towards Rei's friendship. How he felt after getting flattened at school, but also how he never held it against her. How Shinji had expressed his desire to keep Asuka out of any strange manipulations...

even if it meant he could never be with her. She swallowed hard.
"It's the truth..." they both whispered to one another.

She sat in his lap like that for quite some time, both just testing out their partial connection to each other through Unit 01. It wasn't direct. They only saw images, not full thoughts. Both of them remembering their time together from the eyes of one another. Each of them glad that, somehow, all the little things they wanted to keep private were never shared. Almost as if... a mother was watching over them... making sure they didn't get too dirty or strange. After all, a little mystery is good in a relationship.

"You know something?" Shinji said casually.

"Mm?" Asuka smiled mischievously. "What?"

"You look very sexy in a plug-suit..." he mentioned as she drew herself closer. "Ever wonder what it would be like to make-out in LCL? It would be very..."

"Slippery..." Asuka whispered. Her finger came up to his lips and slid across them easily with LCL around everything. "Mmm..."

Shinji nodded.

"Warm." She continued, leaning over to kiss him.

"Oh yeah..."

"Wet..." she pressed herself up against his chest.

"Mm mm..." he said weakly. "Ever wonder about it?"

Asuka smiled. "All the time."

"Is it just me?" Ritsuko frowned, squinting her eyes. "Or is the Evangelion getting a nosebleed???"

Misato blushed. "I think we'd better get them out now."

There was a nervous tension the next day at School. Nobody had heard from any of the Eva pilots since the horrifying events from the previous day. When Shinji and Asuka walked into the class, they were greeted with a collective sigh of relief.

Asuka loved the attention, of course. "Ha! I'm a trained professional! Not like you children, I actually know what to do in an emergency!"

Shinji was greeted with the most hardy "Iron Balls" chanting yet. The sensei even joined in for a while. Toji and Kensuke each gave Shinji a warm welcome back hug, and demanded to know what happened.

As for Cupid, the event was to be classified up the wazoo, because of the implications it would cause if the public knew there was ACTUALLY a cherub of love floating around. Not to mention it would probably change the public's views on the Angels, and the last thing NERV wanted was a lobbyist group supporting Angel Rights. Shinji just told everyone that it had been Misato's cooking.

Nobody thought he was lying.

With sixteenth birthdays approaching rapidly, both Shinji and Asuka decided to wait at least that long until they tried out their fantasy involving the plugsuits. It was still going to be torture, but they figured that they owed poor Misato and their other guardians at least that much time before things got too serious.

Rei was absolutely giddy to have both of them back. She even smiled for one point three seconds as they walked in, causing massive brain damage in the surrounding students, who hadn't been expecting such a display of emotion.

Still, Shinji and Asuka had to stay at the hospital for observation that night. In separate rooms. Their pacing around almost wore holes in the floor. It was hard to sleep when you wanted to grab a bucket of LCL and play 'slip-n-slide' with one another. They both, again, looked rather tired.

As class was about to start again, after Lunch, they sat, half awake at their desks.

Everything seemed normal.

Of course, there was a loose end that had to be tied up. Keiko decided that it would be a wonderful time to steal the desk in front of Shinji's, and see how he was doing.

"Hey." She said in her amazingly smooth, sultry voice.

His brain woke up enough and he smiled. "Oh, hey."

"How are you doing?" she asked, genuinely concerned.

"Good." Shinji promised. "Just needed to get something out of my

system." He hiccuped.

She smiled. "That's great." She leaned a little closer to him.

"Listen, I want to celebrate your safe return." She developed a slight blush. "How about if I take you out on a date. Just the two of us."

He blinked. "A date??"

She nodded. "I've wanted to for a while..." she admitted. "And well... I was really worried about you yesterday. I kept wishing I got to know you sooner... and..."

Someone coughed.

No, not just someone. It was an official, grade A, Asuka Langley cough. Keiko sighed, half-expecting one of her little attention-getting stunts. "Excuse me?"

Asuka glared down at them. "Oh, I'm sorry." She stated in a tone that proved exactly the opposite.

Keiko nodded. "If you don't mind...I'm having a private discussion with Ikari."

The redhead crossed her arms. "Well, you'll just have to tell that to NERV. I have a bit of very important business to discuss with PILOT Ikari." She said in her most regal sounding voice.

The older girl frowned. "Official business?"

"It will only take a moment... then I can let you get back to flirting with this perverted baka." Asuka said angrily. "Fine by you?"

Keiko got slightly redder in the face, but shrugged. "Fine."

Shinji stood and frowned. "What is it?" he asked, wondering if there was indeed something important on her mind.

Her hand came up and grabbed his collar. However, instead of shaking him around like she used to do, she pulled him into an embrace. Their lips met instantly and they began to kiss. Their mouths parted slightly after a moment, and each let out a very deep, content sigh.

Jaws dropped.

If Kensuke hadn't already been taping the encounter, he would have forgotten to press the record button.

Rei even blinked in genuine surprise.

Not only did they begin to kiss... but they were STILL kissing. Very tenderly. The world around them was gone except for this kiss. Though Shinji's mind was fogged over with desire for this beautiful young woman in his arms, he couldn't help but feel the smile of Cupid somewhere above.

Finally, they parted, leaving each other in a soft, wet sound. Shinji flopped back down to his seat, completely dazed, and not due to any sleep deprivation. Asuka's blissful smile quickly changed into her mask of a tough and unyielding scowl. "And don't you forget it, Third Child!" she scolded, then walked back over to her seat, ignoring the stares of the entire class.

"Oh... kay..." Shinji replied happily. "I'll keep that in mind."

Keiko was blushing furiously as he turned back to her.

"I'm sorry... were you saying something?" Shinji asked, honestly not remembering.

"Uh...no...that's okay." She stood and walked back over to her side of the class, trying to hide her red face.

Asuka just kept smiling, focusing her attention at the front of the class as Shinji gazed at her from a desk away. "You know..." she thought to herself. "As weird as it sounds..." She laughed as Kensuke and Toji began to chant again. "I could get used to this."

End?

Somewhere, not too far away from the school that was having to call in security to stop the "Lord Iron Balls" chanting, Misato sat on one end of the kitchen table, looking at a shot-glass full of a caramel-colored liquid. "Ready?" she asked.

On the opposite end of the table sat a brightly colored, semi-tropical penguin. Though there are only a few species of penguin that ACTUALLY live in cold weather, this penguin was adapted to Tokyo-3's summer-weather almost exclusively. In his extendable claws was a similar shot-glass, filled with the same liquid.

"Wuaaagh." Pen-Pen replied with a nod.

"One two three!" they both slammed back their glasses, swallowing as quickly as they could, then cringing at the taste.

"Wu-AAAAAAGH!" Pen-Pen whooped. Once he managed to make sure the alcohol was going to stay down, he gestured to Misato with his other flipper.

"My turn still?" Misato sighed. "Fine." A smile crossed her lips.
"Well, I accidentally..."

"Wuaaagh!" Pen-Pen laughed.

"Okay okay..." Misato coughed, pouring herself and the penguin another shot. "...anyway, then, Shinji managed to find some frankfurters for dinner, and I couldn't stop thinking about it..." she dipped her finger into the little glass and cleaned the drop or two of whiskey that lay at the bottom with it. "Man, that was a rough night being all alone."

"Wuaaagh!!!" Pen-Pen gasped, then chuckled.

"Yeah, okaay, that was pretty baaaaaad." She replied, slightly buzzed. A smile crossed her lips. "Why don't you ask me about my feelings for Ritsuko instead? Ready?"

"Wuaaagh!"

They both tilted their respective glasses back and downed the hard liquor. That action was finished by another round of loud whooping.

"Wuaaagh?"

"Yes, your turn." Misato hiccuped... she had just barely managed to beat Pen-Pen to the draw with that shot.

The penguin nodded. "Wuaaagh...wuaaagh." He paused. "Wuaaagh!"

Wuaaagh wuaaagh!" he grinned slightly, in the way that only a penguin can. "Wuaaaaaaaaaaagh!"

Misato promptly blushed. "Asuka?!? Did she even notice you?"

Pen-Pen shook his head.

"Whoah..." Misato tilted her glass and toasted him. "Must have been quite a view."

"Wu...aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagh..." Pen-Pen agreed.

End??

Deep within the protected, spooky bowels of NERV HQ, there was a small desk in at the center of the most guarded and hard to reach room in the entire complex of Central Dogma. In event of an attack, was probably the hardest place to get to in the entire building, let alone pacify. Strange, orange light filled the room, illuminating the massive etching of the Athanasius Kirchner Sephirotic System that spanned across the entire floor.

Ikari Gendo sat next to his desk, seated on his chair. This was how he always sat at his desk. Not like those hippies upstairs with their legs crossed or their arms behind their heads in a relaxing manor.

Gendo sat with his elbows on the desk. His feet straight, in an ergonomically approved fashion. His gloved hands were crossed in front of his lips as he glared into space ahead of him. His tiny, tinted

sunglasses reflected little flashes of light at random intervals, in no way dependent of his actual physical movement whatsoever.

This was the Gendo Position, TM.

He used the Gendo Position (registered patent numbers 2910192928-99930 and 22941830-18383) whenever he was plotting and planning his great plots and plans.

Today, he was plotting a great plot, and hatching a plan of amazing skill and infallibility. This one plan could mean the unhappy demise of everyone on a continent of his choice, in order to increase funding for NERV.

However... one thing was stopping him. It wasn't a very well known piece of information. Rather just a little variable that his plan had not counted on, and therefore, could cause major problems with. It had only come to his attention in the last few days. Perhaps it was just a rumor, and perhaps it was just whispers and folklore. However, Gendo did not believe in coincidences, and this mysterious "Lord Iron Balls" had begun to show up on his reports at the exact moment he started to plan his horrible plan.

The references were vague, but already, had such force and conviction behind those simple, three words. Perhaps it was a secret code? Or a NERV resistance? Maybe a SEELE group that had branched off.

Whatever this "Lord Iron Balls" was, though, it was enough of a concern to make Gendo scrap his Evil Plan. "Oh well." He sighed, relaxing from the Gendo Position. "Maybe tomorrow."

He stood from his desk and grabbed his coat, not forgetting to shut off the lights before he went home.

The End...I promise. ^_^

The Canadian Dietary Supplement Committee has required a detailed description of this fanfiction's nutritional contents, as according to Maximum Daily Allowances

WAFF (Warm and Fuzzy Feelings) ***** %30
Romance (Passion, True Love) ***** %45
Action (Explosions, blood) ***** %18
Angst (Oooh, the poor characters! ARGH!) ***** %82
OOC (Out of Characterness) ***** %75
H (HENTAI SHINJI!!! <smack>) ***** %15
Violence (smack, ouch!) ***** %50
Original Content (how much didn't I swipe?)***** %96
SeriesFuck (Ignoring ACTUAL timeline & plot)***** %85
Weirdness (As if NGE wasn't weird enough) ***** %4702900002

INGREDIENTS: 100% Pure ASCII text, Tears, Shot-Drinking Penguins, Dookie-jokes, Shinji's new Backbone, Lord Iron Balls, Wonder Girl, Sound Effects, People Freaking Out, More People Freaking Out, Chicken Wings, Jolt Cola, Ambient Electronica BGM, Cherubim, Barry White's greatest hits, biodegradable plastic diapers, 11 Herbs & Spices.

Special thanks to the city of Bumfuck Idaho, who we did NOT film this Fanfic in, but liked the name so much, we had to include it in the credits.

Elephant effects by MoronGraphicx INC. Monkey Assassinations courtesy

of the Penguin Self Defense Force. Guy In Background played by Rick Tubkicaovskivich McGreggorick. Tokyo 3 sets built by Miss's Sholdtz's 3rd Grader Class with a grant from United Balsa-Wood and Pipe-Cleaner.

No angels were eaten in the filming of this Fanfic... only nibbled on... I swear!

Well, okay... just one or two.

But damn! Don't they taste heavenly?

Strike Fiss, Ninja Crowbotics 1999, Khattam Shud-EOF