

“Zettai get down!”

An explosion ripped through the air towards a rag tag group of soldiers as they ducked into littered fox holes. The man yelled at -Zettai- was quickly dragged down by his sleeve, an arm from below snaking up, the quick action saving his life.

The man next to him wasn't so lucky. Bullets ripping into his chest like it was tissue paper. He was dead before he hit the ground.

The sounds of gunfire and cannons continued as the soldiers on both sides carried on in their bid for control of the town, a strategic location in the war that would allow for whoever controlled it to gain a strong advantage in the coming months. Who won here, could very well win the war. At least that was what the upper command told them. The ground troops knew better though.

Looking around with a wild eyed look at the brush with death, Zettai gained his bearings as he realized where he was. The gravel of the foxhole brushed against his thick battle cloak as he reloaded his gun, head ducked down. Looking to the right he watched as a building nearby was rocked with cannon fire from a stray shell, the plaster covering the soldiers beneath it, painting them white like chalk.

“Ammo count!” Zettai heard from the commander nearby. Checking his ammo - both in gun and on waist, Zettai barked out the number. Numerous other voices checked back as more bullets whizzed over head, some moving close enough to cause a soldier to duck another inch down.

“Alright! When they go to reload that cannon again I want covering fire on the left side, the right side we're going to move up to that covered spot over by that torn wall. Now hold!” The commander barked out again, his pistol in hand, knife hand giving orders.

Another cannon ball roared overhead, hitting another portion of the street. Dust pelting Zettai's head as he grimaced.

Grim eyes scanned his comrades' faces, the dirt and dust making their facial features stand out more. The battle gained an eerie quiet just before his commander yelled out for the charge. Bullets ripped out on both sides, one of Zettai's fellow soldiers having a bullet tear through his chest, his gun flying out of his hand as his body dropped like a rock.

'Another grave' Zettai thought as he took cover ahead, sliding down behind a low brick wall. Pulling his gun around he fired a few more shots to suppress the enemy, the pot shots missing, but still enough to scare them. When this cannon fell they would be in the prime position to finally finish the fight for this town. The only task now was to stay alive long enough to see that happen. He fired another shot, taking the chance. The man ahead of him whipped to the side as a bullet ripped through his side, not rising again.

'He's down.' Zettai thought with apathy.

Hearing his commander throw out more orders, Zettai rushed even further ahead, firing off more shots of suppression. Ducking quickly behind a blown wall he dodged another wave of fire. Before he could move from out of the hiding spot he heard the ear shattering sound of a cannonball landing next to him, the explosion pushing him down and further into the destroyed shop. Ears ringing and blood dripping down his forehead Zettai looked around dazed. Confusion marred his features as his comrade -'Zeni?'- rushed over to him, mouthing words trying to tell him to move. None of them were heard however as Zettai's hearing slowly failed to return to him. A calloused hand reached down and grabbed the collar of his jacket and dragged him up roughly. Pulling him away from the active zone, Zeni brought him to a more secure position before checking him over. By this time Zettai's hearing had finally begun to return and he could hear the sounds of war come rushing back to him.

"Zettai! Zettai!" Zeni barked at him as he kept a watchful eye around them. Another explosion ripped men to shreds nearby as the cannon fired again. Peeking over the cover Zeni's grimace turned into a slight grin as he realized that it wouldn't be long now. The commander and his team had finally moved within reach and close to grenade range. Zettai peaked up now as well, his eyes looking on as they watched a grenade get lobbed over to the cannon emplacement. The yell of surprise from the men reached their ears just as the explosion did. Shrapnel ripping apart anyone close enough, if they weren't instantly killed, they were at least seriously maimed.

Zettai couldn't bring himself to care however, all he knew was that with this cannon out the rear forces could push forward and spear head through the enemy forces in the rest of the town.

This battle was all but theirs.

Post meal rations were always the best. It was a way that the commanders tried to give some sort of victory reward to those that made it through a won battle. It helped keep morale up as well. No reason to keep fighting if all you get at the end is a dry ration bar.

When they lost it was another story.

Zettai however couldn't bring himself to join in the cheer for the better quality food. At the start of the war he had but by now...well by now what was the point? The rinse and repeat had grown stale after the first few victories. The new recruits however would rejoice. But not him. The bittersweet taste of victory came with a cost, and no amount of good food would bring back the dead.

But the rookies could have their fun. They would learn the price soon enough.

Zettai ran forward, sliding down on the right knee pad that covered his leg to avoid the incoming fire. Raising his rifle he fired off two shots in quick succession, their bullets ripping into the man before him. Rising out of his slide, Zettai rushed forward, ducking under a fallen timber before coming to a halt in the destroyed building. The attack last week on the cannon emplacement hadn't gained the advantage that was expected. Reinforcements had arrived soon after and bolstered the enemy ranks. While the town was still going to be theirs, the fighting would continue for at least another week. Which just meant more dead bodies to Zettai. Had you asked him years ago if he feared death he would have responded resolutely with a yes. Now? Now that fear was replaced by apathy. Maybe he'd make it out of this hellish war. Maybe not.

Honestly he could care less either way.

His town and family were already gone. Destroyed in the early days of the fighting. So what did he have to return to? A burnt down house and the graves of his parents and siblings?

He peered around another corner and took a shot, missing but causing the enemy to reconsider moving towards him. Satisfied he was safe for the moment, Zettai took a breath and checked his ammo. With a click, he reloaded his rifle. Huffing three times, he pumped himself and turned the corner, taking aim in a split second and firing off three rounds before dashing at the enemy hiding spot. Boots crunching across the broken plaster and rubble, Zettai roared as he brought the butt of his rifle around like a club, the enemy yelling in surprise as the club smashed into his arm. Dropping his rifle, the enemy soldier scrambled away in pain to escape his would be killer, but his actions were in vain as Zettai was on him before he could get away. Knocking the man over with another blow, knocking his helmet off, Zettai was on top of him, his hands dropping the club and thrusting down, wrapping themselves around the soldier's throat. With a gurgle of spit the soldier's eyes slowly turned red as the life was literally choked out of him.

Zettai barely felt the life leave the man.

Standing up and dusting himself off, he grabbed his rifle and slowly walked out towards the street. The body behind him paid no mind. Just another death in a pointless conflict.

Sitting on an abandoned chair in a small cafe Zettai munched on a ration bar. They had been fighting all morning and it was time to recover some energy. The enemy had been pushed into the deeper parts of the city and the fighting was beginning to get more and more fierce. They would fight tooth and nail to keep this city, and it was Zettai's job to make sure that didn't happen.

Click

Zettai's pistol was pulled out as he pointed the gun at the presence he sensed approach his rear. Whipping around he pointed the pistol fully at the person...or rather child.

Child?

Before him, standing at no more than 4 feet tall (which was rather small considering he was almost seven feet tall) was a little...boy? Girl? He honestly couldn't tell under the rags and dirt that the child was covered in. Leaving the pistol out, Zettai slowly lowered it, not entirely sure the child wasn't a clever assassin.

"What do you want?" Zettai asked with a downward gaze. If the child was lying he would know, and he had no problem teaching the street rat a lesson. His only response however was for the child to retreat back into themselves. They had clearly encountered either side in this war. That and by the look of things, this child had been living in the rubble of this town for some time.

A war orphan perhaps?

Realizing that the child wasn't a threat (or at least a threat he could handle) Zettai went back to sitting down and eating his ration bar. The silence continued on for a few moments, Zettai content with the quiet. However he could feel the stare boring into the side of him. With a sideways glance he looked over at the little orphan, their gaze leveled right at the ration bar he was eating. Taking a moment to watch their gaze, he breathed out an annoyed sigh. Apparently he wasn't as cold as he thought.

Breaking off half of his ration bar he handed it over to the child. A confused glance reached his eyes for his efforts, only for him to reaffirm and shake the bar at the child. A little hand reached up and slowly reached out, as if not quite sure it was real, and as the fingers touched the bar, quickly snatched it back. Coveting the piece of ration bar like gold, Zettai's only payment for the ration bar was a beaming smile from the small child.

And for the first time in a long time. Zettai's mouth turned ever so slightly upwards.

Returning back to the camp, orphan in tow, was not what Zettai had expected to be doing with the rest of his day. It wasn't that he wanted to take the child, he tried to just leave it, but when he tried to leave it behind he would turn around and find them following him. Which was not conducive to fighting a war. He very well couldn't have a child tagging along, even he wasn't that heartless. So now he found himself back in his tent quarters with a child no older than ten.

"Do you have a name?" Silence was his only answer.

“You don’t speak much do you?” Was his next question. Again only silence.

“Sigh...Alright have it your way. Let's at least get you cleaned up.”

Dragging the small child along with him, Zettai grabbed a towel and a some soap. The showers in the base camp would be empty this time of the day. Everyone not on guard duty would be on the front lines deeper in the city. A perfect time to avoid all the questions from everyone. Zettai hated questions.

Turning the water on he ushered the child towards the shower, leaving the towel just outside of the curtain.

“When you’re done the towel will be here. I’ll see about finding you some proper clothes...”

That was going to be hard...this was a war camp, not normal place by any means. Going to inventory Zettai began trying to piece something together. Most everything was oversized, but maybe, with a few cuts and snips, bingo! Before him was a makeshift child's outfit. Cut pants, a belt, and a trimmed shirt. It would look weird but it would have to do for now. Returning back to the shower room he came back to a rather surprising sight.

The child before him - standing stark naked mind you - was very much a little girl. With a large blush Zettai's eyes quickly moved upward to give the girl some form of respect.

“Ah..ah your towel!” He quickly exclaimed. Reaching over he threw the towel at the little girl, nailing her with more power than he wanted but he couldn't really see where he was aiming after all. With a cough he lowered his gaze once she was covered.

Now able to get a proper look at her, he could see that beneath the dirt and grime was a young girl. Her hair on the shorter side - most likely not of her own doing?- and her baby fat still sitting on her cheeks. Her hair was a deep red color, easy to miss if it was covered in mud. It was slightly curly, and draped around her face like a wavy curtain. Her eyes were a deep blue, like two sapphires. Said eyes were currently and curiously staring up at him in question. Most likely from his examining eyes. It wasn't like he had seen her true appearance yet so he was a little thrown off. Realizing she was waiting for some sort of action from him, he brought forward the outfit he had created earlier, though he was realizing now that it may have made more sense to make a dress of some sort.

‘Ah well’ He mused. It was better than what she had been wearing. A smile came across her face as she grabbed the rag tag outfit he had made her. Happy with it beyond measure. It seemed that for her the simple outfit was worth its weight in treasure.

'A sad byproduct of her life...' Zettai thought. Orphans like her never really had a chance. They were either conscripted into the war effort or met other terrible ends. Some of them not necessarily just death. Brushing aside the dark thoughts Zettai realized that one part of this little child was still missing.

"You never told me your name, you have one right?" Zettai asked the mute little girl. She shook her head in response, the head shake letting him realize how sad that made her. She made have tried to smile more often than not, but he could see the pain below the surface. The trials and struggles bared by little shoulders.

"Hmm.." He said rubbing his chin. Trying to figure out a name. Looking outside the window of the shower room, he saw the early blossoms of spring forming. This island being one of the normal ones that had four seasons in this world. And then, like a sudden blossoming flower, the name came to Zettai's mind.

"Haruna! How does Haruna sound?" He asked, surprised by the vulnerable tone he had, the hint of desire for a yes. Looking at the little girl he saw her muse on the name, as if tasting how it would sit on her tongue. Opening her mouth once or twice she seemed to hesitate, until finally her eyes lit up in a slightly wet shimmer.

"Haruna!" She shouted out in glee, her hands and body leaping forward to hug Zettai's waist. The leap caught him off guard and while he barely budged, he was still surprised at the force she could muster. With an awkward head pat he tried to respond in some manner.

"Aha...Haruna it is then."

He had a feeling this was going to be the start of an interesting chapter in life. And for a brief moment, Zettai completely forgot about the battlefield that loomed nearby.

The months, and even years, passed by quickly enough. The appearance of Haruna had given many of the soldiers with him pause when they first came back. A little orphan girl on a front line post? It was only by the proxy that Zettai was a veteran with a high level of respect and clout that she was able to stay. And even then some had dragged their feet against it, but in the end they had bowed before the might that was Haruna. After breaking out of her silent shell - a byproduct of keeping silent for so long to avoid potential death- she was actually quite the vocal little girl, and it was often that she was seen with her hands on her hips arguing back and forth with one of the other soldiers.

This had also had a strong impact on Zettai's own interactions with the people around him. Before Haruna he had been a pretty big lone wolf. Never saying a ton, and while loyal to his comrades, never really the type to partake in team activities. Haruna however had slowly broken

his shell. Make no mistake he was still the big silent type, but a smile would grace his lips far more often now, usually from Haruna's antics and when they would blow up in her face. Sometimes literally. Reason being Haruna was somewhat of an explosives lover. Whether it was from some sort of result of living in a war zone or maybe just in her genetic make up (which honestly wouldn't surprise him) she loved the sight of things going boom. Problem was she wasn't very good at them yet.

Read: At all

The kaboom she loved, the detail to make sure kaboom went off without problems? Not so much. In fact when she had first set something off, under the supervision of some of the younger soldiers, well...quite a few hearts stopped when that happened. It was also the introduction to another one of her little quirks.

The fact that she was made of paper.

Literally.

When the explosion had gone off -luckily without much fire- Haruna had had her entire left arm blown off. Everyone present had quickly began to run around like headless chickens, many sliding between horror and fear of retribution. Zettai may have not made it formal, but she was as close to a daughter the man had. The fear quickly turned to more horror though as she sat up -slightly singed- and watched as her arm quickly reformed from sheets of paper.

A few soldiers fainted as this time.

When Zettai had found out her little quirk, or rather big one, he took in the information like all things and processed it as he did. Calmly asking her how long she had this power he found out the story behind it. Apparently she had been rummaging for food through the town. Searching high and low she had eventually found her way to a run down old mansion that sat on the edge of town.

Searching through the torn apart rooms and ruined furniture she eventually stumbled upon a treasure chest sitting slightly pried open in a closet of one the lesser rooms. Perhaps someone had tried to hide it? It seemed to have worked as the only reason it seemed slightly unlatched was due to the damage it sustained from the war. Using what little strength she could muster she pried open the chest, her little arms straining under the weight of the lid, but she was pushed on by the promise of something that might take her away from the pain in her stomach.

With one final heave the lid of the chest popped open and the clank of metal against metal rang out, causing Haruna to cower for a moment, fear of being heard in the empty house ringing out. Peeking her head up she waited to hear if anyone had heard her. With a sigh of relief the small girl stood up and looked into the large chest, only to see one item. A strange shaped fruit. Weird

looking... but still a fruit! With a wide smile she reached into the chest and grabbed the fruit, examining it for a brief moment before she sat down next to the chest. Without taking another moment she bit into the fruit before grimacing at the horrible taste. Apparently the fruit was rotten! Sticking her tongue out she began munching down on the fruit once again, the taste not getting any better. In fact it tasted like eating a wad of paper. With one final gulp Haruna finished off the terrible tasting fruit and patted her stomach. It didn't taste good but she was at least full. With a content sigh she decided to go search for some sort of bed for the evening, made even a proper blanket could be found!

Had she turned around she would have noticed the pieces of paper she left after wandering away...

After that event she had carried on living as best as she could. It was only a couple days later that she found her way into Zettai's life. And the rest after that was history. So now Zettai found himself as the caretaker for a young girl, who loved explosions, was made of paper, and currently lived in a base camp near the front lines of an ongoing war.

An annoyed sigh left his mouth as he considered all of this.

Things used to be so simple.

His helmet felt heavy on his hip as he made his way back to the base camp. He had been on the forward push for the past three days before he was relieved by a new team. His left arm hurt from the weight of holding his gun in a firing spot so many times. Well the bullet wound might be the main reason, but his pride said otherwise.

Three years had passed since he had found Haruna and the war for the town. He had forgotten its name by this point. Hilarious considering that town had seemed like the final straw to break this war's back. It seemed however the world had other plans. The enemy soon after they took that town gained a fresh source of equipment and reinforcements, which quickly brought their rear guard up to a stronger and refreshed form. Since then the war had stalemated. Hard. It was now a war of attrition, both sides backed by outside sources who wanted the influence over whoever won. Honestly Zettai could care less about the politics, by this point he just wanted things to be finished. He had taken his pound of flesh three times over by the amount of people he had slain.

Haruna had grown more over those three years as well. She in fact had just turned 14 in the past month. When he had found her she had just turned 11, not that she would have known seeing as how she was living in the ruins of a town. She had grown into quite the strong young woman though, considering her past and the traumas of it. A few months after the whole paper incident Zettai had begun to train her as best he could in how to use the power. He wasn't an

expert by any means though so the best he could was make her feel more in line with the power. The explosive love she had also grew as she did. While she couldn't go to the front lines she still felt the need to help any way she could. Thus her helping hand was added to crafting parts for the grenades and explosives of the war. Of course, she only crafted the non-explosive parts, no matter how much she protested she was still only 14, and Zettai would be remiss to let his ward die before 18 from his own mistake.

"Zeti!!"

A voice ripped him from his thoughts as he looked up from the path before him. Waving her arms in joy was said little paper girl, excited beyond measure at his return to the camp. Zeti, the name she had called out, was her little version of a nickname for him. In retaliation he had taken to calling her Haru-chan. Which the girl loved. He couldn't say the same about his nickname...

Maybe he liked it just a little bit.

"Zeti! How was the front!? Did you see any explosives go off? Were they big!? Did you use any!? What aboutalloftheother..." Her face turned bright red as she tried to get out all her questions in one breath. Placing a hand on her head as he finally reached the gate he silenced her before she passed out from overload.

"It was fine Haru-chan." Was his only response. Most people would have been dejected by simple reply but not Haruna. After the years spent here Haruna had learned what Zettai's simple phrases meant. This one meant that nothing terrible happened, and he did not see anything crazy occur, just another few days on the front lines.

And she was ok with that answer, because either way her Zettai came back to her.

"Now let's go get some dinner and I can rest up ne?" Zettai continued.

And as long as he came back, then she was ok with whatever response she got.

"Ne, Zeti, why don't you smile more?" Haruna asked, laying on her bed while Zettai cleaned his rifle on the floor. With a click Zettai put his gun together and set down the pieces.

"There's not much to smile about anymore Haru-chan." Was his simple reply before he went on to his side arm. Haruna seemed to muse on the answer she was given, the words passing around her mind for a bit before she peered over the bed and looked at Zettai.

"That's not true! You have me!" She said with a toothy grin. He chuckled a little bit to himself at the enthusiasm she showed with her answer.

“Well then maybe I just forgot how?”

That response only made her smile larger, as if fueling the fire of her joy.

“Well then, I’ll just have to smile so much you remember how to!” With a laugh she leapt off the bed straight for Zettai, a strong attempt at hugging the man before he could avoid her. Crashing into him Zettai grunted at the little ball’s attack. Laughter reached his ears as she continued to hug him even as he propped himself up, the laughter causing him to smile just at the corners of his mouth.

“I’d like that very much Haru-chan.” Was his simple reply. “You keep smiling and I’m sure mine will come back too.”

“You hear the rumours? Apparently the war might end soon.”

“Over my dead body! They said the same thing years ago, and look what happened.”

“Yeah but this time might be different! Apparently the higher ups have a super weapon they’re going to use. Some secret power!”

“Hah! Sure they do.”

Zettai sat in a foxhole listening to the idle chatter as they awaited another wave of cannon fire from their side to begin bombarding the forward lines of the enemy. He was on rifleman duty so once the smoke cleared it was all long range for him this time around. The talk amongst the men was that the war might end soon. He doubted it, but he couldn’t deny he wanted the same thing. Maybe then he could finally put down this blasted gun and move on with his life. It had been four long years of combat. Four long years of hacking and slashing. Four long years of comrades coming and going, the light leaving their eyes over and over. It wore on a man. Even one as stoic as him.

And maybe if this war ended he could find somewhere for him and Haruna. A place where she could grow up in a normal way. Not living on a military base learning more about combat than anything else.

Maybe he could find some peace in this life himself.

A roar of cannon fire from the rear brought his attention back to the battle at hand, readying his rifle he looked down the scope and prepared for something to walk within range of the intersecting lines. With a click he readied the rifle to fire at a moments notice.

Yeah...maybe he could find some peace in this life...that would be nice.

The sound of a mortar shell whistling above was the last thing he heard before it went black.

“Make way! Make way for the wounded!”

Haruna watched with baited breath for the fifth day in a row. She hadn't seen Zettai come back when he was supposed to, and now she had resorted to watching for him in the wounded lines that came back everyday. Wringing her hands around the hem of her shirt, the young girl couldn't help but feel the panic that was making its way through her. She had to keep up hope. She had no other choice.

“Corlas! Corlas is he here!?” Haruna said with tears at the edge of her eyes. She couldn't keep this up much longer...she was going to break soon if she didn't have some sort of answer. Good or bad. A shake of the head was her only response as Corlas continued carrying the bodies further into the camp. Haruna's eyes looked out into nothing for a moment before she shut them, hot tears spilling out. With clenched fists and choked sob her feet turned almost on their own, and before she knew it, she was running towards the front lines as fast as she could.

She knew he had to be alive still. There was no way anyone could kill her Zeti. No one in the entire world!

She repeated this thought in her head like a mantra as she kept running.

It was the only thing keeping the storm of poisonous thoughts from tearing apart her fragile mind.

The front lines were no place for a girl at the age of 14. Not unless she was some sort of human soldier that had been trained to be. Which she wasn't. She may have had weird powers and a very healthy love of explosions, but that didn't mean she was combat driven. Far from it in fact, she normally avoided any sort of aggressive action. Her life had had enough of those kinds of feelings already. So when the sound of gun fire began to reach her ears after her journey to the front lines she couldn't help but falter for a brief moment, the fear of what she was running to overcoming her love for Zettai. Biting her lip she felt disgust rise up in the back of her throat as she realized that she almost turned tail while Zettai was still out here somewhere. All because she was scared.

Coward.

Another crack of a rifle reached her and she shook her head before dashing forward again. She didn't know how she was going to find Zettai, but she was certain that she would be able to if she was able to search. She just had to find a lead.

Reaching the first trench line, she hopped in, ducking under the wooden support structure much to the surprise of the soldiers in the trench, she began to search for a familiar face, anyone who could tell her a place to start.

"Haruna!"

She turned around tracking the voice to spot one of the men from camp. Anton if she remembered correctly.

"Haruna what in the world are you doing here!? This is no place for a child!"

"Anton! Where was Zettai last seen?!" She wasted no time in ignoring his comments. She didn't have time to argue why she was here. Every minute was a minute Zettai could be dead. Or closer to death!

"Uh. He was last seen on the eastern side of town in trench line B. But that area is a cratered warzone Haruna. No one made it out of there after the enemy unleashed a massive artillery barrage." Anton replied.

She didn't respond before rushing off towards the eastern trench line. Anton tried to call out to stop her but she was already gone before he could try. It seemed without her even realizing it she had lightened her weight to be carried along the wind easier. She was subconsciously using the nature of her fruit to sit in between some sort of middle paper human hybrid. No question that she wouldn't be able to do it if she wasn't panicked.

It took her almost half an hour to reach the site of the former eastern trench line. And it truly was former. Everywhere she looked she saw nothing but destruction. Craters, blown buildings, snapped trees. It was as if the heavens themselves had rained down destruction. There was nothing...

"No!" She said out loud with a shout. She wasn't going to be deterred! Running down the slight hill she was on, she ran towards the peeking edge of the eastern trench. She would get as far as she could through the trench, and dig or listen or search when she found any signs of life! Maybe he was buried in a cavern!? Maybe he was hiding out, biding his time!? She didn't want to think otherwise. He had to be alive still. He wouldn't leave her.

Right?

Her hands began to claw at the first obstacle she came to. She found nothing below, only destroyed radio equipment. Biting her cheek in frustration she continued on, her dirt covered hands quickly becoming raw and bloody as she searched through rubble pile after rubble pile.

It was three hour of searching before she heard something. A raspy cough beneath a pile of dirt and wood beams, the support structure for the trench. Haruna rushed over with wide eyes. Someone was still alive. Someone was still alive! Her bloody hands quickly torn through the dirt and lifted wood pieces away.

Only to find that the person was not her person.

And was already on their way to death's awaiting embrace.

She had dug and dug to only be greeted by a dying man.

She stumbled back as the man's last breath escaped his lips. His eyes were already glazed over by the time she was able to meet them. A single sound left her lips as she felt tears began to pick up in her eyes, the world going blurry from the water. Slipping down to her knees, Haruna began to silently sob as the crushing fact of reality reached her.

She was never going to find Zettai in this destroyed pile.

Not even his body.

Wait.

Her ears perked up as she heard the whisper on the wind. The faint sound of her name being said. With wide red rimmed eyes she looked around frantically. Left to right, right to left, her head swivelled to try and find the source of the whisper. Hearing it one more time she quickly stood up and ran towards its potential source.

Arriving at a still partially constructed part of the trench, Haruna listened again for the words but she heard nothing. With a dropping heart she began to look around, to see where it could have come from, and then she spotted it. The collapsed section that had caved in. Sticking out from it was the a single arm, with rubble covering the rest of the body. Not wasting a single second she was instantly on the pile ripping wood and stone alike off of the top.

And when she got through enough of it...

There he was.

Zettai.

Bloody, dirty, and in terrible shape, but it was her Zeti. Her father in all but blood.

Something was wrong though...this didn't feel right. Something was very wrong...And then she saw it. There was a large stake of wood sticking right out of his left side. Dried blood covered the splintered support beam, evident that he had also been bleeding out at some point. It had been days...he by all means should have been dead by now!

"Zeti don't speak! I'll...I'll get help! Don't worry it won't take me long, I'll grab the medic team and they can bring and they can..." She began to stumble upon her own words as they came out more and more jumbled and fast.

"Haru-chan...I want you to promise me something."

"No no no no no NO! You can't say that! You have no right!" She replied with tears rushing down her face. She knew what he meant beneath those words. She knew down to her core.

How cruel to get so close.

Tears were cascading down her face as she cradled his head in her lap. It was so large compared to hers. Her hands seemed so tiny as she held it. So small.

So weak.

"Promise me Haru-chan...promise me you'll keep smiling. For both of us. Promise me." Zettai said through blood stained teeth. His face was pale and weary. The years of war finally seeming to catch up to him in this moment. As if the reaper had finally come to collect his dues.

"I promise! I promise Zeti! Just don't leave me! ... You can't leave..." She whispered the last part. The silent begging there in her voice. No sound moved between the two of them for a moment, the sounds of the wind whistling nearby touched their ears before moving on.

"I was never good at showing it was I? How much you meant to me...I'm sorry for that Haru-chan...I... Thank you... Thank you for everything... Thank You."

And with that, Zettai let go of his last breath.

And Haruna wept. She wept for a long, long time.

The years seemed to blur by for her after the death of Zettai. The war eventually ended when a shichibukai was brought in to crush the other side. Tales of their power reached her ears, not

that she really cared by that point. She instead began to travel the land of this country. Meeting people and finding out about herself.

She had returned to the camp before embarking on her quest. Zettai's body in tow. He had been given a proper burial, deep in a forest where she had wrapped his body in paper and laid him to rest. Clearing out his room in the camp she had also found numerous items of his. Including a final letter from him. One meant to be given upon his death. It had detailed further all of his personal trials, the emotions he battled with and the feelings of letting her down. He had also laid out what to do from that point and on. That he wanted her to find what she wanted to do in life. He wanted her to live a life that was free, away from being used as a soldier to fight battle after battle, but most of all he wanted her to be happy.

So she set out to find what that meant to her. And it took her four long years before she realized just what she wanted to do.

It came to her when she saw in a news coo the adventures of a band of pirates who had saved a town from some warlord. And in the photo that was taken she saw how many people were saved from the suffering and tyranny of their ruler. That photo spawned an idea in her head that would guide her from that day forward.

She was going to save people just like Zettai saved her. She was going to be a beacon of justice to those that needed saving. And she would have a smile across her face while she did it.

Just like Zettai wanted.

That's how she would keep his memory alive.

Waiting for the next pirate-y ship to land in the port, Haruna used her paper abilities to slip aboard unnoticed, her goal to be a stow-away until she was able to land on another island. She was sure that these pirates would either be good or bad, and that she would end up in an area where someone needed help or saving.

And when that time came, Haruna would be there.

Smile and all.