

Your Melody



YOUR MELODY

Kenichi Sobu

The BBB : *Breakthrough Bandwagon Books*

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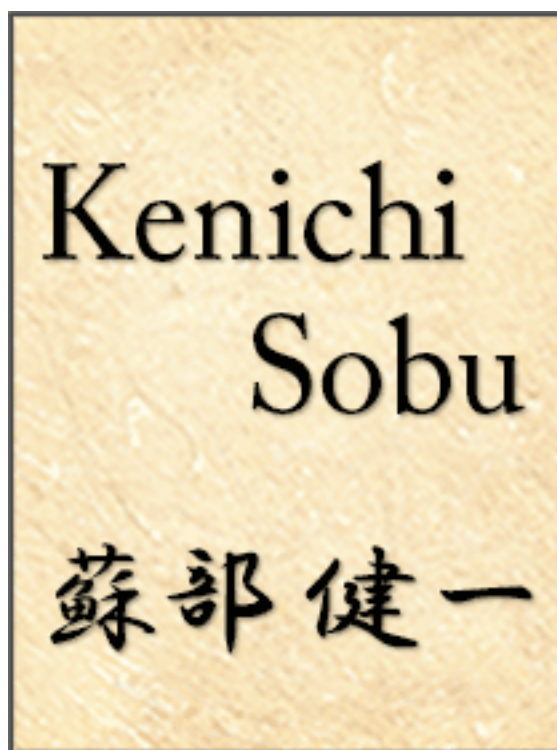
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The BBB website

<http://thebbb.net/>



Kenichi Sobu Author Page

<http://thebbb.net/cast/kenichi-sobu.html>

It was one Saturday in the middle of October, 2001.

In a reception room on the sixth floor of the building of Queen Records in Tokyo, Masayuki Seno, a pianist and composer, looked down listening to Takei, a producer, sitting opposite him.

“That’s why we are terminating the contract with you. Granted, it has been a short-term relationship. We have released just one CD album, which didn’t sell at all. So, it can’t be helped.”

“No ...” Masayuki nodded pensively.

“You are young and have good looks, so we kinda expected that the album sales would be boosted by the photograph on the CD jacket. But, I was being a bit too Pollyanna-ish. As long as you composed all tracks in the album, we need at least one really great, catchy tune to make the album hit the chart.”

“Yes, I understand that. When I composed these numbers, I thought all of them were great. However, after the album was released and I repeatedly listened to the tunes, I started feeling that each one was actually mediocre ...”

“Right. The melodies you composed are not convincing and don’t have the power to move the hearts and souls of the listeners.” Takei said pungently, scratching his crew-cut head.

“I hate to admit it ...”

“We have an option to release your second album that consists of standard numbers, instead of an album with your original music. But, honestly, your skill in playing piano is not that good.”

Masayuki smoothed his long, front hair backward, and said flatly, “Umm, I think there is no point of releasing an album, if I cannot present my musicality with my own music.”

“If you think so, then I do regret having to announce to you right now that our contract is now terminated ... Is it okay?”

“It is just too bad. Thank you very much for everything. Releasing my own album has been my dream since my childhood. Mr. Takei, I really appreciate your support.” Masayuki stood up, and bowed deeply.

“I’m relieved to hear that. Of course, although the contract is terminated, you don’t have to give up on your dream. Feel free to contact me again, if you complete composing a convincing masterpiece.”

“Thank you. Well then, I’m leaving now.” Masayuki bowed again and walked toward the door.

“Oh ... Hey.”

“Yes?” Masayuki stopped, and looked back at Takei.

“I forgot to tell you that we received a fan letter for you.” Takei picked up an envelope and handed it to Masayuki.

“What? I have never received a fan letter before, though ...” Masayuki received the envelope, while feeling somewhat uneasy.

“Even so, it must be for you because it is addressed to you.”

Masayuki touched the envelope, and said, “Hmm ... there is something in it.”

“Ah. It might be an audio cassette tape. Perhaps, a budding composer sent it to you in order to get your feedback. If it is a masterpiece, let me know and listen to it.”

“Okay, I will. Then, see you.” Masayuki left the room and then the building.

-2-

As soon as Masayuki got back to his apartment in Arakawa Ward in Tokyo, he started getting drunk in despair.

His dream of becoming successful as a composer was shattered. Takei said to him, “Feel free to contact me again, if you complete composing a convincing masterpiece.” But, the business environment in music industry was so hard that a composer could not possibly make a quick comeback soon after having a contract being terminated.

In addition, he had to accept that Takei’s opinion was right, although he didn’t want to admit it. To sum up, every number he composed was somewhat similar to famous musical pieces in the past. They were too mediocre to move hearts and souls of the listeners.

Yes, a great melody should make anyone feel its splendor just by listening to it only once.

But, 27 year-old Masayuki was getting conscious of his limitation, and he was beginning to accept the harsh reality.

In order to compose a graceful melody, a composer has to possess a natural ability. No matter how long he sits at a piano, a masterful melody may never come down to a person who isn’t chosen by a muse.

It appeared that Masayuki had to give up on his unrealistic dream to be a famous composer. Then, he should get a permanent position at a lathe factory, for which he now worked as an apprentice, and marry someone in the future to settle for a small happiness in his life.

He sighed with resignation or some kind of relief, when he happened to look at an envelope sticking out of the pocket of his jacket that he had taken off.

He extended his hand and picked it up. On the reverse side, he saw a name of an unknown city in Ehime Prefecture and a feminine name Chihiro Miyashita, apparently the sender of the letter.

If it was a fan letter, then that meant it was the first and last fan letter for him. If so, this person might not have good taste in music. How could anyone be moved by his tunes that had been deemed mediocre? While scorning himself so, he opened the envelope.

Only an audio cassette tape was found in it. There was no letter paper. It surely did not look like a fan letter. Rather, it was more like a promotional material from a budding composer, as Takei made a guess. Masayuki sighed with disappointment.

If this Chihiro person wanted Masayuki to listen to her music, then he could send her an ill-natured letter as a diversion, after listening to the tape. He would tell her that she should give up on her dream because of her lacking a musical gift. As he thought such a thing, he inserted a tape into a cassette deck.

Right after that, he heard a cute voice of a teenage girl from the speakers.

“Well, I’m sending a letter to you for the first time ... Um, this is not a typical letter but a tape letter, though ... I have a reason to do this and will explain it to you later ... By the way, I’m Chihiro Miyashita and a big fan of Mr. Seno’s music. I’m 15 years old ... Well then, this is my first time to send a fan letter to someone ... So I cannot speak smoothly because of the nervousness. I would be very happy if you will listen all the way to the end. Thank you for your understanding ... First of all, let me explain why I am speaking like this instead of writing a letter ... I was involved in a car accident about three years ago and lost my eyesight ... I had the address and things like that on the envelope written by mom ... I mean, my mother. Second, I will talk about the reason why I am sending Mr. Seno a fan letter ... Sorry, I’m not speaking too

well ... But to tell you the truth, this is my fifth take after four failures ... I don't want to retake again, so I am speaking all the way to the end this time around ... If it is hard for you to listen to what I am saying, you can stop this halfway ... Mr. Seno, you are the one who composed such a beautiful tune. You have got to be so kind of heart as to listen to all of this. Am I putting too much pressure on you? ... Then, the reason why I love Mr. Seno ... I mean, I love the piece you composed ... Well, you or your tunes makes no difference here, right? ... Although a few years had passed since I lost my eyesight, I hadn't gotten accustomed to my life as a blind one, and had had thoughts of dying occasionally ... But, during the moments of despair, I heard Mr. Seno's music on radio ... After I listened to just a part of it, I felt as if electricity ran through my body ... Sorry. It is such a typical expression ... Anyway, when I listened to 'Melody', I realized that I was blessed enough to be able to listen to such wonderful music even though I was blind ... I realized that I could still find hope in my life ... I managed to call the radio station and ask for the name of the music and the performer. Then, I had mom, I mean, my mother, buy the CD ... After that, every time I listen to the CD, I can get energy to live ... It made me reevaluate my attitude toward my life. Then, I made a vow. I will never make any excuse, and will live positively ... Before that, I felt excruciating pain just by having a meal. I couldn't recognize what I was eating unless I had mom explain ... Uh, can I call her mom? Humans' sense of taste is as unreliable as that ... Now that I get energy by listening to Mr. Seno's 'Melody', I even help my mom cooking ... You might think that a daughter helping her mother in cooking is nothing special, but I couldn't even do such a simple thing before ... So, if I hadn't happened to listen to your music titled 'Melody', I might have died already by now ... Um, I have to be careful not to talk about anything negative. Although I should have done so sooner than this, finally, let me introduce myself to you ... My name is Chihiro Miyashita as I said so before ... I go to school for the blind instead of high school despite my being 15 years old ... And then, umm, what shall I say? ... Well, if I talk about what I have just come up with now, let me say this. I eat sunny-side up eggs with soy sauce, not Worcester sauce. I love to eat fine-grained *natto* (fermented soybeans) with soy sauce, *natto* sauce, mustard, and Welsh onions. I put no egg in *natto*, because I want to enjoy *natto's* actual taste. I love sweet red-bean jam containing bean skins. Pork curry is my favorite among curries ... This sounds like the movie *Sekachu*, right? By the way, I went to an almost empty movie theater when the screening period of the movie was about to be over. I listened to the movie as mom explained the scene in whisper ... Ah, further information about my eating style. When I went to an elementary school, way before I became blind, I was surprised to see a boy dunk rice into miso soup and eat the makeshift porridge. I thought people usually pour miso soup onto rice, right? But, now I am blind, and cannot put miso soup onto rice without spilling anything. For that reason, nowadays, I put rice into miso soup as the boy did. It is beginning to sound a bit depressing. Ah, I forgot to tell you one important thing. Actually, I used to take a piano lesson when I was younger. I could not get better at playing piano, and eventually gave up on it. When I was in the fourth grade, I came to love participating in sports. I played baseball and soccer with boys. Then, I started playing badminton seriously in junior high school ... Of course, I now cannot play any ball games. Oops, it is getting a bit depressing again. So, I am ending this recording soon. Mr. Seno, I bet you that you are getting bored. If you didn't dislike this tape and can reply to me, could you send me back a tape with your voice recorded in it? ... I know you already have many fans, so I just keep my fingers crossed. If you are too busy, you can just forget what I just said ... I would like you to keep composing many great pieces like 'Melody'. I'm looking forward to your new release ... Good bye. Thank you."

As the girl's recorded message ended, Masayuki stopped the tape.

What he received was the first fan letter in his life. What's more? It was from a blind, 15-year-old girl ...

However, he found something strange in her message.

First, if Masayuki himself couldn't have full confidence in his music, how could it be so electrifying as to be able to provide the girl enough energy to live?

Besides, she referred to a composition titled “Melody” several times, but the only album he had ever released up to that point didn’t include a track with that particular title.

Maybe, she was impressed with another composer’s music, and mistakenly sent a fan letter to Masayuki instead.

However, her visually unimpaired mother bought the CD and wrote the address on the envelope. It was not too likely that that kind of mistake would happen.

If the girl was only getting the title wrong and actually loved his music, then Masayuki might be really more talented than he and Takei (the producer) had assumed.

At least, Masayuki was indeed getting a fan letter for real. It made him feel so good that he stopped drinking for the night. He was able to sleep more happily than usual.

The next day, on Sunday, Masayuki woke up a little past noon. Since he had nothing to do in particular on the day, he came up with the idea of responding to the Chihiro’s recorded message.

He wanted to know the exact title of the composition that she said had moved her soul. Besides, she said she wanted his reply.

He had this feeling that he would not send her a reply if he put it off till later. After finding a new tape in his room, he inserted it into a cassette deck and started recording his voice.

“Well ... Hi, I’m Masayuki Seno ... Ms. Chihiro Miyashita, hmm, shall I just call you Chihiro? Thank you so much for sending me a letter ... You’re right. Recording my voice like this makes me feel nervous. I am just too lazy to keep on repeating the recording session until I get it right, so I am going to go all the way to the end in this recording attempt while ignoring minor flaws ... Well, first of all, let me introduce myself to you. My name is Masayuki Seno. It’s also my real name. I am 27 years old ... I want to say my profession is a pianist and a composer, but honestly, my contract was terminated by a record company just yesterday ... I was really depressed. I have fully recovered from the depression, thanks to your encouraging message. You said you loved my music. That made me solidify the new resolve. Now I want to compose new numbers and send them to record companies ... So, it is you, Chihiro, who gave me energy to live ... As I don’t want to make you feel sad, let me get back to introducing myself to you. Currently, I work for a lathe factory as an intern ... A little while ago, I played piano for living at a nightclub in Kita-Senju area in Tokyo. But a drunken customer said to me, ‘You stink.’ It surely made me angry. I punched him, and I got fired ... Oh, this episode isn’t too cheerful, either ... Then, I will talk about my favorite food as you did. I eat sunny-side-up eggs with soy sauce. I eat *natto* in a similar way as you do. I choose long green onion, not Welsh onion ... I, too, love sweet red-bean jam containing bean skins, of course. Let me tell you that chicken curry is my favorite ... To tell you the truth, I, too, was laughed at by others during a school trip because I put rice into miso soup. I’m glad Chihiro is now on my side about the eating style of miso soup porridge ... By the way, I have one thing to ask you. What is Sekachu ...? Is it the brother of Pikachu (of Pokemon fame) or something ...? I guess I am not too much of a hipster. Oh, one more thing. You said my music titled ‘Melody’ encouraged you, but its title isn’t correct, is it? Because my only album doesn’t include a track titled ‘Melody’ ... If possible, please have your mother confirm the title and tell me again about it ... I guess I have to go soon. I will wrap it up now ... Good bye ... No, I want to talk to you again ... If you send me a letter again, I will definitely reply to you ... Then, talk to you later ...”

Masayuki stopped the tape, rewound it, and took it out. He wrote her address on the envelope and went out to put it into a mailbox on the way to a convenience store.

After buying a lunch box and a stamp, Masayuki headed for a mailbox about 50 meters away.

The mailbox, whose cylindrical shape was out of date nowadays, seemed to have been standing there from ancient times. It was so severely weathered that the red paint was peeled off here and there.

Masayuki put the stamp on the envelope and dropped it into the relic mailbox ...

-3-

About a week had passed. Masayuki received the second letter from Chihiro.

As soon as he got back home from the factory, Masayuki opened the envelope, took out the audio cassette tape, and started listening to it.

“Mr. Seno, good afternoon, this is Chihiro ... Ah, you work for a factory in the daytime, so I should say good evening ...? Now I feel like I’m soaring to heaven because I just received a letter from that Mr. Seno I love so much. This is like a dream ... Mr. Seno’s voice is sweet and cool. Next time, you should not only play the piano but also sing with lyrics ... My mother told me that Mr. Seno has good looks, too. I wish I had gotten a chance to see you before I got blinded ... Oh, I have to be careful here. My story tends to get depressing ... I noticed a few strange things in your message. Mr. Seno, you told me that you were 27, but you must be 30 this year according to your profile written in the liner notes of the album. My mom told me so. You are not fudging on your age, are you? In my opinion, it makes less business sense to officially announce the age that is more elderly than the actual age. If you are doing it just for me, then I would gladly accept it ... Then, you said your first album didn’t include ‘Melody’. Of course, it did not. ‘Melody’ was released as a single CD this summer, coinciding with Athens Olympics. By any chance, did you forget the title you named ...? As I said before, I was an athlete and was looking forward to watching Olympic games on TV. But, this year ... it’s boring because I cannot watch it with my own eyes ... It is not very fun just listening to the commentators. So, I decided not to watch Olympic games at all, and instead started listening to FM radio. At that time, Mr. Seno’s ‘Melody’, which was just released, was played on the radio ... I listened to the tune, when I was feeling down and depressed. That gave me energy to live ... Then, after listening to ‘Melody’ on the single CD many times, I asked mom to collect information about Mr. Seno. That was when I learned that you released an album before the aforementioned single CD. I had mom purchase the album, and I listened to it ... I do not want to sound rude, but, I’m afraid that each track in your first album didn’t suit my taste ... I’m so sorry about sounding so saucy. Despite the fact that your contract is terminated for the time being, you are going to compose great masterpieces like ‘Melody’ again ... I know you can do that definitely. Since you have a great talent, you will make a breakthrough in the very near future. I can guarantee you that! ... Lastly, you said a very funny thing, which made me laugh. I cannot believe there is a person who thinks Sekachu as Pikachu’s brother. Sekachu is a well-known abbreviation for the best selling romance novel named ‘Sekai No Chushin De Ai Wo Sakebu’ (“Crying Out Love, In the Center of the World” in English), selling more than three million copies in Japan. I guess Mr. Seno must be leading a life fully focused on music ... By the way, we share similar food preferences, right? I will try eating chicken curry whenever I get a chance. I still want to eat *natto* with Welsh onion, not long green onion, though ... It’s time to wrap it up now. If I send you this letter, you will reply, right? I look forward to it. I don’t have any e-mail friends. So, I would be glad if you could be my pen pal ... Am I putting too much pressure on you? Then, good bye ... no, I should say I will talk to you ... Talk to you later.”

After listening to the tape all the way to the end, Masayuki frowned.

Judging from the innocent tone of her voice, he didn’t think Chihiro was telling him a lie. Then, how could he explain the several contradictions in her message?

If she was telling a lie, then how the heck did she come up with the idea that Masayuki released the single CD titled “Melody”? He had never released a CD in a single format so far.

She said the CD was released at around the time of Athens Olympics. That was going to be held three years into the future.

In addition, why did she suspect that Masayuki fudged his age?

Masayuki took his album CD from the shelf, and made sure that his profile printed in the liner notes included in the package contained the correct information about his birth year (1974).

How could he be 30 years old? He had to wait for three more years to reach that age.

Three years ...

He was reminded that Athens Olympics was going to be held in about three years.

In other words, at least Chihiro was making the chronological numbers make sense with each other.

Masayuki checked the postmark on the envelope.

It was not stamped firmly on the envelope, and the information that was supposed to indicate the year in which the package was handled was illegible.

In addition, the envelope for the first letter had already been thrown away after he copied her address to his address book. He had to wait for her next letter in order to prove she was full of lies.

He also noticed one strange thing in her message. It was about the novel abbreviated Sekachu.

Masayuki read two or three books a month but he hadn't heard of the novel. If it really sold no less than three million copies like Chihiro mentioned, he had to at least have heard of the title. He had heard of a similarly titled short-story collection in English, titled "The Beast that Shouted Love at the Heart of the World" ("Sekai No Chushin De Ai Wo Sakenda Kemono") by Harlan Ellison, but there was no way that it would sell that many copies.

Perhaps, the blind girl had developed a habit of fantasizing about unrealistic things, while trying to visualize things that she could no longer see. To give her delusion reality, she might have chosen Masayuki, a struggling composer, as her pen pal. A big-name composer would be too busy to deal with what might be the figment of her fantasizing.

That hypothesis seemed to make sense. Besides, she might not be blind at all, to begin with.

On the other hand, she honestly commented that she didn't like any of the tracks in Masayuki's album. If Masayuki had not composed "Melody" that allegedly gave the girl energy to live, it meant that he didn't have any musical gift.

As he started feeling depressed, Masayuki took the tape out of the cassette deck and slammed it onto the floor violently.

~~-4-~~

Next Sunday, however, Masayuki started recording his voice to send the tape to Chihiro.

If she was really blind, then he should not treat such an unfortunate girl rudely.

Masayuki decided to play along with her joke.

"Hello again, Chihiro ... I'm happy that you are glad about our sharing common food preferences. However, I'm afraid I have noticed a few discrepancies in your last recorded message. I mean ... What I am about to tell you may surprise you, because you sound as if you are living in the year 2004. Actually, I'm now living in 2001. Specific date is Sunday, October 28th ... If you cannot believe what I am saying, ask your mother to

take a look at the postmark stamped on the envelope. She should see a date in the year 2001 ... I dropped the previous letter into a very old cylindrical mailbox. It might possess the mystic power of some sort, and somehow sent my letter to you ... By the way, the other day I went to a bookstore and requested, 'I want to buy Sekachu'. The clerk replied, 'We don't sell a book with such a title'. Then, I told him the unabbreviated title, 'Sekai No Chushin De Ai Wo Sakebu'. The clerk found the book and handed it to me. I checked the colophon. The book was published more than six months ago, but the copy was still the first edition. Apparently, it is not quite selling like hot cakes at this point of time. I cannot believe that such a book will sell more than three million copies and be adapted into a movie in three years ... So, if possible, can you tell me about the events that happened in November of 2001, so that I will be fully convinced that you are indeed living in the timeline of 2004 ... For example, as you seem to be such a sports buff, can you tell me about the results of baseball or soccer games? Ah, incidentally, can you tell me the names of horses that have won in horse racing? I will place bets on horses that are destined to win, and become rich ... Oh, one more thing. I would like to ask you this for reference. Will my single CD titled 'Melody', which you said will be released in the summer of 2004, sell well? I don't seem to possess the talent that you believe that I have. I cannot believe that I can actually compose a musical number that can move your soul ... I am asking you many questions this time around. If you feel like doing so, please reply to this message ... If you only feel like doing so ... No pressure here. Then, talk to you later ..."

Masayuki stopped the tape, rewound it, and started writing her address on the envelope, as he thought he might never receive the next letter from Chihiro ...

-5-

Ten days had passed. On November 7th, when Masayuki came home from the factory nearby at 6:30 p.m., he found a new letter from Chihiro in his mailbox.

She seemed determined to play along with him for a little while on the stage in her imagination.

Soon after entering his apartment, Masayuki set the tape into the cassette deck and started playing it. He wanted to know how she answered the questions from him.

"Mr. Seno, I'm so sorry the reply has taken too much time ... As I couldn't believe what's going on, I needed some time to get my mind organized ... Then, as you said to me, I asked mom to check the postmarks of letters I had received from you ... Guess what? She said she saw 2001 on the postmarks of both of the envelopes ... I could not believe it ... However, mom is not the kind of person to lie to me ... By any chance, did you have your friend working at a post office use a fake postmark to trick me? But, I could not believe that the person who composed such a wonderful tune like 'Melody' would play such a cheap trick ... Then, I asked mom what type of mailbox she dropped my letter into ... She said the mailbox near my house was also cylindrical, same classical type as the mailbox you said you used ... So, I have gradually made up my mind to believe what you said ... By the way, today is November 5th, 2004 in my timeline ... I think my world is exactly three years ahead of your world into the future ... That reminds me of a movie, titled 'Il Mare', I watched before I became blind ... Simply put, it's a story about a man and a woman who live in the same seaside house but in different timelines. They exchange letters with each other via the mailbox in the house across the time differential of exactly two years ... The woman lives exactly two years into the future ahead of the world the man lives in. It is very similar to our situation ... In the movie, there is a scene in which the woman tells the man what will happen in the future. I can do the same kind of thing. I am telling you the results of baseball and soccer games that took place in the first half of November, 2001 ... Of course, I don't remember the details of the events that took place three years ago, so I went to the library with mom and had her check the archived newspapers ... Well, let me start from the results of the World Series in MLB ... Contrary to the expectations, the Arizona Diamondbacks beat the New York Yankees with four wins and three losses ... Back then I was not blind yet, so I clearly remember I watched the rerun of the game on satellite TV broadcasting. Randy Johnson, who had pitched seven innings on the previous day, appeared

from the bullpen in the eighth inning to save the team from the impending doom. I got goose bumps from watching the moment. I also remember the line-drive base hit that Mark Grace hit off the seemingly invincible Mariano Rivera. It ignited a ninth-inning rally. Luis Gonzalez eventually sealed the deal by delivering a game-winner for the Diamondbacks. So much for the Ex-Cubs Factor hypothesis, eh? ... Next, I will tell you the result of a friendly soccer between Italy and Japan on November 7th ... In the first half, Japan opened the scoring with Yanagisawa's goal, but Italy caught up with the score with Doni's goal. The game ended with a 1-1 tie ... In addition, about horse racing. I'm afraid I don't know anything about horse racing at all, and it is difficult for me to ask my mom about that kind of matter. You know, horse racing in Japan is not exactly considered a wholesome entertainment for the likes of me. So, please forgive me for my not being involved with horse racing ... The only horse I have heard of is Haru Urara (*A legendary horse in Japan, famous for being a perennial loser.) ... Then, about Mr. Seno's 'Melody', I hate to say this, but let me be honest enough to tell you that it didn't sell too well ... But, it's okay. You have plenty of musicality. After all, you are the same pianist who composed 'Melody' ... Oh, wait. From your point of view, you will be composing 'Melody' in the future ... If you have purchased the first edition of Sekachu, then you should keep it as a collector's item. Sekachu didn't sell too well around the time when it was published for the first time. It will soon become unbelievably popular. You can take my word for it ... By the way, Mr. Seno, you must have regarded me as a strange girl. Because I told you about what happened three years ahead of your world into the future ... I have my faith in you, Mr. Seno. I think you are going to believe me from now on ... If you believe all the things that I say, please continue this relationship with me ... I once hated the world because I became blind. Nowadays, I have learned to appreciate the experience, because I now get to keep this relationship with you ... I am looking forward to hearing from you again. 'Talk to you then.'

Masayuki stopped the tape, and smirked wryly.

It was natural that the postmark of his letter to Chihiro is 2001, because he sent it from the world of 2001 to Chihiro's world that also had to be in 2001.

Probably, she was also telling a lie, by saying that the mailbox near her house was also cylindrical. Anyone could say that Sekachu would become popular regardless of its eventual outcome.

Moreover, the World Series of MLB ended the day before yesterday. Anyone could talk about all the details of the results for the games that had already been played.

Her ignorance of horse racing aroused suspicion. If it was difficult for her to ask her mother about horse racing, then she could just ask her father about it instead. Masayuki hadn't heard of a horse named Haru Urara at all. If the horse would win the next race, then he might be able to believe the girl to a certain extent.

Masayuki called his friend, who was familiar with horse racing, and asked him to check when Haru Urara would run in a race.

Then, he turned on the TV. A live coverage of a friendly soccer game between Italy and Japan was about to start. The timing was impeccable.

He would know if the girl was telling a lie in about 45 minutes. She said Yanagisawa would score the goal in the first half. However, Yanagisawa was only good at post play and always missed the goal whenever he went one-on-one against the opposing goalie. Yanagisawa could not possibly score the goal against Italy, which was known for the strongest defense in the world.

Soon after the kickoff whistle, the friend called back.

Masayuki answered, "This is Seno speaking."

"It's me. I have checked Haru Urara by using the Internet."

"Oh, you did. Thanks."

“Haru Urara belongs to Kochi Racing Association. It is currently unclear when is the next time it will appear in a race. You might not be able to buy from Tokyo the betting tickets for horse races held in regional areas, unless it is one of the major races.”

“I see ...”

“Of course, if you wish, I will find the way to buy the tickets. However, let me give you some advice. You should not bet on Haru Urara, because the horse has never won a race before.”

“What? It never won? Not even once?”

“It not only has been winless but also has had terrible records.”

“Well, it’s okay. I haven’t had any attachment to Haru Urara anyway. Thank you for your information. Talk to you later.”

“Bye.”

Masayuki hung up the phone, and started thinking about many issues.

Did Chihiro intentionally tell him about the winless horse, in order to have him lose money? If that was the case, then she had to be downright wicked!

However, how did she know the name of a horse that had never won before? Since Kochi Prefecture was next to Ehime Prefecture (where she lived), there was a chance that her acquaintance owned the horse.

At the time, on the TV screen, Masayuki saw Inamoto intercept the ball and execute a cross. The player who then received the cross was Yanagisawa, who then carefully fired in a shot and scored a goal.

Japan opened the scoring with Yanagisawa’s goal as Chihiro said, at the 10th minute of the first half.

Masayuki thought he was dreaming.

It was a proof that Chihiro was not lying ...

However, Masayuki was still skeptical.

She was a young girl. She just chose Yanagisawa haphazardly just because the player was a good-looking forward.

Anyway, she said the only player other than Yanagisawa to score the goal in the game was Doni on the Italian side. So, as soon as another player scored a goal, her lie would completely be proved.

Contrary to his skepticism, the first half ended 1-0.

Then, six minutes into the second half, Doni scored the goal, which was his first career goal as an Italian national team player. Masayuki widened his eyes in front of the TV screen in disbelief.

“This is unbelievable ...”

He wondered what the probability of a girl guessing exactly the names of two goal-scoring players was. Even though Yanagisawa might happen to be the one to score by a good chance, the probability of Doni (unknown in Japan) being the correct random guess had to be quite low.

Of course, if another player scored a goal after this, what Chihiro said would become a blatant lie immediately.

As Masayuki watched the game, no one scored a goal after Doni did. The whistle finally blew to signal the end of the game.

What Chihiro said about what would happen was true, as if she was indeed living in the timeline of 2004 and already knew about what had happened in 2001 already ...

That couldn't be just a coincidence.

He was so shocked that he slowly fell down on his back. He found the envelope from Chihiro near his face.

It was too early for him to decide what the truth was.

Even though the probability of making the correct guess of who would score the goals in one game was close to zero, it was not exactly zero. If the postmark on the envelope showed the year 2001, then it would mean that whatever Chihiro was saying was just a product of a mere coincidence.

Masayuki picked up the envelope and gazed at the date of the postmark on it.

This time, he could see that the number of 2004 was clearly printed there.

So, it meant that Chihiro was really living in the world of the year 2004 ...

The common denominator between Masayuki and Chihiro was an old cylindrical mailbox near their respective homes. Perhaps, a mystical power of some sort was connecting the two timelines of Masayuki and Chihiro, to cross over the gap of three years.

That meant she had always been telling him the truth from the beginning.

In other words, the novel nicknamed Sekachu would sell no less than three million copies eventually and Masayuki would compose a splendid number that would energize a blind girl named Chihiro Miyashita.

On the other hand, what would he do about the horse named Haru Urara? Even though it might have never won a race so far, it might start winning like crazy quite soon and eventually become famous nationwide in the future.

If he somehow convinced her to keep on telling him about the results of horse races, he would become rich from the benefit of gambles with no difficulty.

However, if he did so, that would change the world he belonged to and the subsequent timeline in the future. If the change somehow affected Chihiro in some wicked ways, the twist of fate would convey her life toward different directions. As a consequence, she might not experience anything to make her decide to send Masayuki a fan letter. If she did not send him anything, it would mean that he would not be able to know the results of horse races in the first place. If he did not know the results of the horse races, then the future would not be twisted and she would be able to send him letters to tell the results of the horse races. It would be a contradictory chain of events running in circles. (Knowing the winning horses and betting on them would lead to not being able to bet on them.) That meant a phenomenon called 'time paradox' might occur.

Therefore, as a conscientious human being who was living in this world, he must not ask her about the results of horse gambles.

However, Masayuki had already learned of a horse named Haru Urara. He would have to fight against the strong temptation to bet on Haru Urara each time it would win in the future.

Come to think about it, Chihiro didn't tell him the detailed records of Haru Urara. Masayuki didn't know since when it would start winning. Even if it might eventually keep winning, it might lose a big one big time suddenly. If Masayuki would happen to have bought a betting ticket for the horse, it should not affect the future that would have already been fixed and destined to be (according to Chihiro).

Masayuki decided to buy a betting ticket of Haru Urara for 10,000 yen at each upcoming race. As if in celebrating his promised victory, Masayuki walked to the refrigerator to get a beer.

-6-

On the night of the next day, Masayuki recorded the reply to Chihiro.

“Good evening, Chihiro ... I have to say I’m sorry ... Honestly, it had been hard for me to believe that you actually live in the world of 2004 ... But, you told me about the result of the soccer game. I now completely believe what you said and what you will say ... On the other hand, I wonder if you can believe that I am living in the world of 2001. After all, I can tell you only about what you have already experienced or what you already know ... Still, if you believe me and continue this exchange of recorded messages, I would be very glad to do so ... At any rate, I still cannot believe that I will eventually compose a beautiful number that can encourage you by the time of Athens Olympics, three years from now. My contract was just terminated by the record company. I was convinced that I had no musical talent, and I was about to give up on my dream ... However, Chihiro, please do not tell me about things in the future beyond the year 2001 anymore ... If I learn of the future events and know that they will actually occur in advance, that might affect and change the future. That might adversely affect your very existence in the world of 2004 ... It might sound somewhat complicated. Simply put, I just want to say I’m sorry about not believing you before. Talk to you later.”

-7-

About one week after that, Masayuki received a new letter from Chihiro.

“Mr. Seno, good evening ... I knew you were thinking that I was crazy ... I forgive you, though. No one can easily believe that exchanging letters over the gap of three years is possible ... And, don’t worry about it. Even if you cannot tell me something new that I do not know, I still blindly believe you and believe ‘in’ you ... It’s a masochistic joke. Get it? Anyway, as I said before, the very person who composed the splendid number like ‘Melody’ cannot possibly lie. Of course, you will compose the masterpiece in the future ... You said you didn’t have enough confidence in your talent. Please do not worry about that. You will compose ‘Melody’. It is a historical fact. I can assure you that. You can take it easy, just by believing what I am saying, right? As for Mr. Seno, your dormant gift is waiting to come into flower. So, after composing ‘Melody’, I am sure that you will compose great music one after another ... Since ‘Melody’ was released three months ago in my time frame of 2004, it might be about time for me to listen to your next masterpiece. I’m really looking forward to it ... While exchanging letters with you, I have come to want to learn to play piano. I cannot see musical score, though. My message is beginning to sound depressing again, so I will just call it a wrap. Talk to you later.”

-8-

Three days after that, Masayuki recorded the reply again.

“Chihiro, please do not say such a sad thing as you cannot play the piano because of your blindness ... Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles are blind, but they are hundred times greater as pianists than I am ... I think you can find a way. For example, you can practice by using music sheets in Braille ... Actually, I came up with a radical idea while thinking about you ... So far, we have been exchanging letters with each other like this over the gap of three years. Come to think about it, the fact is that you (in your younger incarnation) are actually living in this world of 2001 ... So, I can get to meet you in 2001, and teach you how to play the piano ... But if I did so, it would change the world in the future ... You don’t have the memory of yourself having been taught by me since three years ago, do you? I first thought it might be a great idea, though ... More importantly, in order to have you get the chance to listen to ‘Melody’ in the future, I have to practice the piano strenuously. But, I wonder if I could bloom my dormant talent within three years. Although I

understand I'm destined to compose 'Melody' in the future, I'm still concerned about it, honestly ... Even if I don't practice so hard, the muse might descend upon me and I might come up with the stunning music suddenly. Heck, it might happen when I am taking a shower, say, two years later from now, for example. Even so, I should practice, anyway ... Then, this dedicated would-be maestro will start practicing after this recording. Talk to you later."

-9-

About one week had passed. Masayuki finished working at noon on Saturday, and came back to his apartment, when he found a new letter from Chihiro.

"Mr. Seno, good evening ... Umm, I'm afraid I don't have the memory of my meeting you and having been taught how to play the piano by you since three years ago ... To begin with, I was yet to live here in Ehime Prefecture in 2001. You don't have to visit the place of my current address, only in vain ... In fact, I was about to be involved in a car accident in 2001. It was so serious that it rendered me blind ... The day that I will never forget was November 24th, 2001 on Saturday. I was hit by a motorcycle that was recklessly driving and ignoring the traffic light at an intersection near Shinsaibashi in Osaka ... After that, I had to be confined to a hospital bed for many months. If you visit me living in Osaka in 2001, I won't be able to attend you. So, please do not visit me, yet ... After the accident, my dad was very concerned about my having to walk with a cane in the busy traffic of Osaka. Dad decided to give up on the opportunity for career advancement in Osaka, and moved to a branch office located in the rural region of Ehime Prefecture for the sake of my safety ... At any rate, I think your idea is great ... I, too, would have come see you living in the world of 2004, if I weren't blind ..."

The tape was still running, but Masayuki was no longer paying attention.

November 24th, 2001 ... It's today!

He wondered exactly at what time of the day she was involved in the car accident in Osaka.

If the accident was going to occur at night, he might be able to prevent the accident from occurring.

Masayuki grabbed his jacket, rushed out of his apartment, and ran to a train station as fast as possible.

He knew that it would take almost the same amount of time from Tokyo to downtown Osaka, whether by Shinkansen (bullet train) or by airplane. He decided to choose the surefire and more reliable land transportation, and got on Shinkansen at Tokyo Station.

In the train leaving for Osaka, he repeatedly punched in frustration the back side of the unoccupied seat in front of him.

Why the hell had he not noticed such a simple fact? In the very first message to him, Chihiro clearly said she lost her sight three years before her timeline (It was turning out to be exactly today in Masayuki's timeline).

If he asked Chihiro about the specific date and place of the car accident, she wouldn't have been hit by a motorcycle and become blind. Only because he was not thinking smart enough ahead of time, he had made a crucial mistake ...

However, it might not be too late. Even if she was destined to be involved in the accident tonight, she still might not have to become blind. If she could avoid what was supposed to be inevitable, then she would lead a happy life, starting from the moment of the act of his salvation.

However, if Masayuki managed to save Chihiro, how would the action affect the future?

Would Chihiro living in 2004 recover the vision in an instant?

Would her memory from the accident to November 24th, 2004 be rewritten forevermore?

If she would not be involved in the accident, her family wouldn't have moved from Osaka to Ehime Prefecture. Would it mean that she (in 2004) would be teleported from Ehime to Osaka instantaneously, as soon as she (in 2001) was saved?

In the case, she would have been watching Athens Olympics on TV in the summer of 2004, instead of listening to Masayuki's musical piece titled "Melody".

If she would never get a chance to be enlightened by a tune named "Melody", then she wouldn't have gotten the opportunity to send Masayuki a fan letter and he wouldn't know the date on which she was going to be involved in the accident. That meant he couldn't possibly prevent her accident and she would lose her sight anyway.

In short, that meant that the time paradox of the endless vicious circle was destined to occur.

He couldn't just ignore a girl who he knew in advance was going to suffer from a car accident, just because he was fearing the consequences of tampering with the time paradox and he might end up living in a new reality in which he would not compose a number titled "Melody".

Even though he was now trying to rebel against the god of time, he still could do nothing but pray to the god that he would make it to Shinsaibashi in Osaka on time.

When Masayuki arrived at Shinsaibashi in Osaka, the vicinity was getting dark.

There were so many people because it was Saturday night. He ran desperately in the crowd of people, trying to locate the intersection.

Chihiro said a motorcycle ignored a traffic signal and hit her. Therefore, the only logical thing that he could do at that point was to find any intersection with traffic lights.

She said she suffered from the accident at a location around Shinsaibashi, but she made the explanation rather simple just so that it would not confuse Masayuki living in Tokyo. He didn't know how far the actual scene of the accident was from Shinsaibashi.

He couldn't just ask the police to control the traffic of all the intersections nearby. What if the police demanded an explanation from Masayuki? If he said that a girl was going to be involved in a car accident, no police officer would believe such a seemingly preposterous tale.

Besides, he didn't know her facial features or physical characteristics. He shouted her name loudly and ran around the Shinsaibashi area, trying to take a look at every single intersection within the vicinity.

As he arrived at the fifth intersection and gasped for air, he heard a siren approaching.

Masayuki turned pale, and started running toward the siren.

Was it too late ...?

Running desperately, Masayuki hoped it was somebody else's accident.

When he reached an intersection where an ambulance was parked, he saw a girl, approximately ten years of age, being carried on a stretcher by rescue personnel.

Was it a wrong person ...?

Was the girl on a stretcher indeed a wrong person?

Chihiro said on the recorded message that she was 15 years old in 2004. It meant that, in 2001 (today), she was supposed to be younger by three years and she had to be 12 years old. What if her physiological growth was slower and she looked younger than her actual age indicated? What if she was shorter than an average girl of her age ...?

About 10 meters away from where she was, a young man with a pale face next to a motorcycle was being questioned by a police officer.

Masayuki started realizing that it was too late ...

He ran up to the stretcher, and called the name in a loud voice.

“Chihiro, open your eyes! Please, open your eyes! Sorry, Chihiro! It is all my fault. Forgive this stupid me! Forgive me ...!”

At the time, a rescue crew asked Masayuki, “Are you a member of her family?”

“No, not really ...”

“Then, let us get through. We have to hurry up.”

“Uh, sure ...”

Masayuki moved back two or three steps, and saw the stretcher being loaded into the ambulance.

He might have gotten on the ambulance to accompany her, but he could do nothing for her to save her. As he could not prevent the accident, he should not stay too close to her and affect her to end up changing the future.

The ambulance carrying the girl (who was quite likely to be Chihiro) left the accident scene with blaring siren. After that, Masayuki kneeled down and started crying, regardless of others' attention.

-10-

As soon as he went back home in Tokyo, Masayuki started recording his apology to Chihiro.

“I’m so sorry, Chihiro ... I made an irreparable mistake ... I received your last letter exactly on November 24th, 2001, the same exact day on which you were involved in the car accident ... I heard your message after I was done with the work for the day on Saturday morning, and desperately rushed to Osaka. Unfortunately, I couldn’t make it at the last minute ... You were being loaded into the ambulance ... If I had asked you about the exact date and place of the car accident, I could have saved you ... If I had done so, you wouldn’t have been blinded ... Just because I couldn’t find such a simple solution, I have ended up robbing you of your sight ... So, I am the reason why you are blinded ... Honestly, I don’t know how I can compensate for my inability to save you ... If there is one thing that I can do, it has to be to compose a tune titled ‘Melody’ to encourage and enlighten you. So, I will aggressively practice as hard as I can every day, starting from today ... You might not forgive me. If you give me a chance by any fat chance and forgive me, I would be glad if we could continue exchanging letters with each other ... Sorry, Chihiro, I’m so sorry ...”

-11-

About ten days had passed since the failed attempt at saving Chihiro. Masayuki received a new letter from her.

Masayuki started playing the tape, while expecting to be blamed and blasted for his inability to save her.

At first, he could hear unknown, fair-sounding background music in a faint volume for a while. Then, she started speaking hesitantly after about 20 seconds had passed.

“... Mr. Seno, I am sorry ... In fact, it was I who have to apologize ... Because I watched the movie titled ‘Il Mare’, I soon realized the fact from the beginning that, with your help, I might be able to avoid being blinded ... However, it also meant that the catastrophic time paradox might occur ... In addition, even though I said I believed your statement about your living in the timeline of 2001, I still suspected a little that you might actually be living in the world of 2004 ... So, you need not blame yourself ... I have to blame myself, because I am the one who could not believe you fully ... Despite the fact that you have tried so hard to save me, I even hurt your feelings and gentle heart ... I’m so sorry ... I have come to the realization that you could not save me from losing my sight because the history cannot be changed by anyone and the accident was a fixed fate that no one could tamper with anyway ... In other words, I think I was destined to be blinded from the beginning ... So, you really need not feel responsible for all the things that have happened and you cannot change anyway ... But come to think of it, I still remember that I heard someone apologizing and calling my name many times when I was loaded into the ambulance ... I had thought the one calling my name must have been the person who hit me with his motorcycle, but it was strange that he knew my name ... Could the person calling my name and apologizing repeatedly be Mr. Seno? ... If so, I could have taken a look at your fair face, provided that I had not yet lost my eyesight at that point ... Talk about a missed opportunity. Conversely, you ended up seeing my unsightly existence ... Anyway. I have got news for you. I want to tell you this. I have a hope now ... I see the light, and I might be able to see the light literally soon. I have been hesitant to tell you. I will have my eyes operated on soon ... If the operation succeeds, I will regain my sight and will be able to see your face ... Unfortunately, the doctor told me the probability of the operation being successful is less than 10 percent ... But I will try thinking that it cannot get worse than it is now. I have nothing more to lose from the operation than the sight that I no longer have. I try not to worry about that too much ... Instead, I have something else to worry about more. Mom told me that a municipal redevelopment plan will commence soon and take place in my neighborhood. As a consequence, the classical cylindrical mailbox will be removed permanently, according to the plan ... So, I’m afraid that this might be the last letter from me to you living in the timeline of 2001 ... Even if things come down to the worst-case scenario, I still hope you will keep sending me your letters as usual ... I expect you to compose the masterpiece ‘Melody’. I know you will do it. The composition will give energy to live to me and enlighten me, existing three months into the past from the point of view of me living in 2004 ... If I regain my eyesight again, I will definitely visit Mr. Seno living in Tokyo. I hope that you will not frown at me. I hope I living in 2004 am a little more beautiful than I was in 2001. I haven’t taken a look at myself in the mirror for a long time, though ... You know, it’s a joke, of course. This is where you laugh out loud. Oh, well ... Let’s see together then. This message is from the world’s biggest fan of the maestro Masayuki Seno.”

-12-

Two days later, Masayuki recorded a message of encouragement for Chihiro, praying for a successful operation.

However, as soon as he reached the location of the familiar cylindrical mailbox, he realized that it had been replaced by a modern-looking rectangular mailbox.

Masayuki wondered if the brand-new mailbox still possessed the mysterious power to deliver the recorded message to Chihiro living in the 2004 timeline.

Even so, he could do nothing about it, except for just using the mailbox. He dropped the package into the rectangular mailbox, hoping that it would be delivered to her successfully in 2004.

About one week after dropping the recorded message into the rectangular mailbox, the letter was returned to Masayuki with the stamp of ‘Addressee unknown’.

He was fearing that the package would not be delivered to her, and the fear became reality. Even if the letter was delivered to the Ehime address in 2001, her family had not yet moved to the location. Its being sent back to the sender was not surprising.

It was about time he had already received a letter from Chihiro. He was not receiving anything from her. Probably, her letter was and would be sent to the address in the future world of 2004.

That meant the connection between Masayuki in 2001 and Chihiro in 2004 had vanished completely.

When it had come to this, he would have to compose “Melody” no matter how hard it would be, to energize Chihiro living in the world three years into the future. Even though Chihiro never blamed him at all for the accident, he still felt certainly that he was partially responsible for not preventing the accident from occurring.

Masayuki sat in front of the electric piano, and started playing melodies that came to his mind haphazardly.

-13-

Even if one year had passed, Masayuki had failed to compose a short phrase of pleasant melody, let alone a would-be masterpiece titled “Melody”.

Did Chihiro not say that his dormant talent was merely waiting for the moment of blooming? If she was correct, then when would be the moment of truth?

To make matters worse, he had not received anything from Chihiro since the disappearance of the weathered cylindrical mailbox. Without an encouraging message from her, he was beginning to feel demoralized.

In the first place, if the operation to restore Chihiro’s eyesight in 2004 would be successful, and she would regain the sight again, all of his efforts would be in vain and be deemed pointless.

However, if he couldn’t compose “Melody”, Chihiro might attempt to commit suicide in despair about the time of Athens Olympics. To prevent the worst-case scenario, he had to compose “Melody” no matter what the obstacles were.

Although he understood he had to make efforts, he started spending less time playing the piano and started drinking alcohol more and more, as the days passed by.

As it became his habit to live such a decadent life, he suddenly came up with an idea.

In the background of her final recording, he heard an unknown, yet impressive melody in a faint volume. If Masayuki, a professional musician, had not heard the tune before, then the music could be the number titled “Melody”.

Chihiro must have played “Melody” many times because it was her favorite. It would not be a surprise, if she happened to be playing her favorite tune (quite possibly, “Melody”) in the background while recording her message.

If his theory was correct, it would be easy. All he had to do was to listen to the tape at full volume and create a score on music sheets.

Of course, it could be considered an act equivalent to plagiarism. Would it be wrong to be inspired by his own work? (In that case, who the heck is the original composer of “Melody”?)

He felt uneasy about such a complicated time paradox, but he couldn’t resist the demonic temptation.

One day, Masayuki finally made up his mind, and replayed the last tape from Chihiro at full volume.

Takei, the producer working for Queen Records, said, “I have been waiting for great music like this,” and happily accepted the tape in which Masayuki recorded what was supposed to become “Melody”.

However, a few days later, Takei called Masayuki and blasted angrily, “Hey! How dare you play a dirty trick on me?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“Don’t try to fool me! The director told me that the music you submitted to me was actually composed in Europe back in the 19th century!”

“What?”

“You thought you could fool me and the general audiences, just because the musical number in the 19th century is not well-known today. Do you realize that you have just plagiarized?”

“.....”

“Never contact me again. Understand?”

Takei slammed the phone.

Masayuki collapsed on the floor, clutching his head in his hands.

“I was being careless ...”

He realized that he should have done thorough research on the particular piece of music before he submitted it to Takei.

Come to think of it, a smart girl like Chihiro wouldn’t have played “Melody” to make Masayuki listen to the tune before he actually composed it.

Masayuki now realized that he wouldn’t be able to compose “Melody” unless he kept trying hard.

Even if he managed to compose “Melody”, he wondered if Takei, the only connection to the music industry, would care to listen to it.

On the other hand, the first fan letter from Chihiro was sent to Queen Records that Takei belonged to. So, there was a high probability that the single CD of “Melody” would be released from Queen Records.

In order to convince enraged Takei to release “Melody” from the label, Masayuki had to create and submit to Takei an impossibly consummate composition. He started wondering if he really could possibly be talented enough to compose such a superb tune.

Masayuki was beginning to give up on his own talent, which had not bloomed. He felt that it was just downright impossible for him to rise to the occasion. He didn’t even take a glance at the piano, let alone touch it.

He guzzled a bottle of whiskey in one gulp.

-14-

Masayuki didn’t even sit in front of the piano for one year after that.

Despite the economic recession, the lathe factory Masayuki worked for was growing rapidly because the rival company went out of business. He became a permanent worker and was given more workload. He started making his job situation an excuse for not playing the piano for a while.

According to Chihiro living in the future world of 2004, a composition named “Melody” would be released in the summer of 2004. If it was a fixed fact destined to occur eventually, it meant that Masayuki could not compose a masterpiece way too ahead of time, no matter how hard he might have tried. In other words, even if he didn’t practice at all, “Melody” would be complete at least half a year before the release date. After all, the historic fact to be realized in the future was that he would have composed the life-changing music named “Melody”.

He decided not to play the piano for one year, telling himself that he needed not hurry. However, when the end of 2003 was approaching, he came to think that he had to start composing “Melody”. Then, he decided to quit drinking too much alcohol, for his alcohol dependence had been becoming quite serious.

The factory at the end of the year was unbelievably busy. His supervisor had no regard for the Labor Standards Act or the welfare of his employees. He forced Masayuki, who was now a fulltime employee and had to be a corporate slave, to work overtime until 9 p.m. every day. He had to try composing the number after work. It became his daily habit to stay awake until 3 a.m. to compose.

Because of the heavy toll that his body was taking, he was half asleep at the factory more frequently in the daytime.

One day, when he was using a buzz saw, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in the right middle finger. When he came back to himself, he witnessed fresh blood spraying from the tip of the finger. While dozing off, he cut his own middle finger up to the first joint.

Other workers soon noticed the accident, rushed toward him, and picked up the tip of his middle finger.

It was so shocking for Masayuki that he fainted and lost consciousness.

When Masayuki received a first-aid treatment, the doctor told him that the cross-sections of the right middle finger were so jagged that they could not be connected again.

In other words, a finger that a pianist would value more than the life was now lost forever. It meant the complete termination of the career as a pianist or a composer for Masayuki Seno.

He wouldn’t be able to compose mediocre music, let alone “Melody”.

If he could not compose “Melody”, then Chihiro wouldn’t get to listen to the music and wouldn’t send a fan letter to Masayuki. If he hadn’t received the letters from her, he wouldn’t have played the piano late at night every day. Consequently, it meant that he wouldn’t have dozed off at the factory in the daytime and cut off his finger. If he didn’t lose his finger, then he should have been able to compose “Melody” and Chihiro would eventually send a fan letter to him.

Masayuki was suffering from such a complex time paradox. On the other hand, he felt somewhat relieved because he was seemingly freed from the duty of having to compose his masterpiece titled “Melody”. He couldn’t help but think that he never had the musical talent that he could utilize to compose brilliant masterpieces like “Melody” to start with, whether he had all ten fingers or not.

After that, Masayuki’s life deteriorated into that of a drunk.

His worker’s compensation was admitted, because he had been forced to work against the Labor Standards Act. Since he was a permanent employee, he was signed up for the labor insurance. He needed not to go to the factory anymore. He spent days drinking from morning till night.

As time passed, he gradually started holding a grudge against Chihiro.

If she did not tell him that he would eventually compose a beautiful masterpiece titled “Melody”, he wouldn’t have lost his finger. Even if he was not that much talented, he might have kept composing adequate music and might have led a relatively content life as a pianist.

He could not imagine what kind of life he could possibly live as a pianist with one finger missing.

The doctor told him that he could play the piano as before if he wore a plastic fingertip. However, he didn’t like the feeling when using it, and he couldn’t play the piano as before even if he wore it.

In the spring of 2004, however, desperation started creeping into Masayuki’s mind.

If he could not complete the composition of “Melody”, there was no way that the single CD would be able to be released by the summer of 2004.

If he failed to compose “Melody” by then, Chihiro might commit suicide in despair. In addition, Masayuki was surely responsible, at least partially, for her accident that made her blind.

She was the first fan to send him a fan letter. She was the only person in the world who said Masayuki’s music was beautiful, although he had not composed it yet in actuality.

Chihiro that existed in the timeline of summer in 2004 must be in despair and was probably waiting for the music that he would compose in the future.

How could he give up on composing “Melody”, and leave his only fan in despair, while making the loss of a finger an excuse? (It was surely a lame excuse.)

Masayuki stood up, and reeled drunkenly to the piano. He then put his nine fingers on the keyboard, without using the fake plastic finger.

While playing freely and naturally for a while, he noticed that he was composing mystical music he had never heard before.

The muse had finally arrived. The mesmerizing melody was like nothing that he had heard, and he could have never created it with ten fingers ...

-15-

It was December 24th, 2004.

Chihiro Miyashita was wearing headphones and listening to “Melody” over and over again in her room.

The doctor took the bandage off her eyes in the morning, after the operation intended for restoring her eyesight. However, she still could not recover from being blinded.

Movie-like or TV drama-like miracles could not happen so easily.

While she was coming back home from the hospital by taxi, she felt the entire city was in the Christmas mood even though she could not see anything. Being forced to listen to the jolly-sounding Christmas songs was too much for her to bear.

Then, she turned to “Melody”.

Since she sent the letter about her operation on her eyes, she had not received a letter from Masayuki Seno.

She had sent recording letters to him several times after that, but there was no way for her to understand if they were actually sent to him living in the world of 2001.

She wondered if the letters that she dropped into the new mailbox were sent to him in 2004, instead of 2001.

The classical mailbox in its cylindrical form still had to be existing in his world of 2001. She wanted him to send a letter to her. Could he not at least try?

Perhaps, the mystical connection between the timelines of 2001 and 2004 was cut off, when one of the two cylindrical mailboxes was permanently removed.

If her letters managed to reach the same address of his in 2004, why hadn't he responded to them?

Had he moved to somewhere else during these three years, without informing a post office his forwarding address? In that case, the letter would have been sent back to her with the stamp of 'Addressee unknown'.

Had he forgotten about the miserable, blind girl in these three years?

She wanted to believe that he would not do that kind of thing to her. After all, he was the same Masayuki Seno who composed "Melody", which had encouraged her to live and go on with her life many times.

She had listened to "Melody" countless times, and she felt she had had enough of that for the moment. She picked up the remote controller and turned the music off.

However, she was still hearing "Melody" continuing.

Because of her blindness, she might have pushed a wrong button of the remote controller.

She took off the headphones, but "Melody" still continued.

Focusing her aural attention to the music, she could hear the sound from the living room.

In the living room, there was supposed to be just a piano that no one played, not a stereo system.

She stood up and opened the door leading to the living room.

At the time, she heard the last part of "Melody" more vividly than usual.

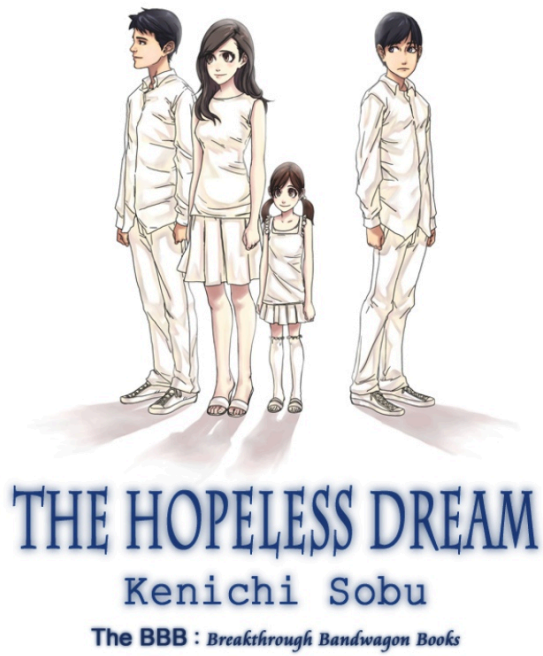
The music ended, and then the familiar voice propagated from the space around the piano. She had heard the gentle tone of the voice before.

"Now, here is my new number, titled 'Chihiro'. I hope you love this."

A beautiful tune commenced, and big tears started running down from her eyes that were now gleaming with light and hope.

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Kenichi Sobu Works List at The BBB



The Hopeless Dream

<http://thebbb.net/ebooks/the-hopeless-dream.html>
