

The Otherworldly Tale of Misaki Gatekeeper

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Misaki wakes up one day in the middle of the street with no memory but her name. But there's a reason for that - a very good reason, no matter how hard it may be for the roommate, comrade, and sort-of boyfriend in Tsubasa.

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1. Part 1 Chapter 1

Yeah, it took me a while to get back to it. Live with it.

Names mostly selected from:
www.behindthename.com/nmc/jap.php

Italics are thoughts; the chapters are the breaks, so there are no breaks; ___'s divide my own comments from the story. I think that's all that you really need to know.

I recycle my characters. These are my favorites. They will most definitely appear in more places before too long. One of them already has.

Enjoy or go away.

_____Part 1_____

_____Reorganizing_

_____Chapter 1_

Dark. Dark and cold. Dark, cold, and a cold, hard something under her shoulder, in a direction her subconscious told her was "down". Nothing else was there, nothing else could be seen, and nothing else was known to exist in this world.

And then Misaki opened her eyes. It wasn't so different now, but it did seem to be an improvement.

She was lying some ways away from the middle of a hard stream of black, hard enough for her to be lying on about five or so feet from the center. Beneath her head was another hard something, as hard as the black but a whitish-grayish-brown and raised several inches. Vague memories came to her about moving in a straight direction on the whitish-gray and avoiding the black, and of seeing great metal monsters of oh-so-many colors pass on the black. Misaki thought about these memories, and wondered if they were her own, and realized that she could definitely move as the memory-owner moved, if only she could remember how...

Remembering. That seemed to be the challenge.

Nothing seemed to happen. Nothing seemed capable of happening. The only movement detectable by Misaki's eyes didn't come for what felt to her like hours, and that was only the gently swaying fall of a few scattered white crystals from the gray sky.

By the time something real happened, the white crystals had begun to cover Misaki's

still body and she felt the stinging cold of all of these white crystals on any skin that was left exposed--very little due to the oversized black hooded sweatshirt that she wore and was most likely originally fashioned for a male person.

A person came; a person so painfully familiar yet unknown, a person Misaki thought had the same face as the person from...somewhere. Thinking back, Misaki could not really remember anything from before waking up. Not even what she did while she was cut off from this world. She had forgotten the dream, and everything along with it. But the person was still coming, and she needed to think of what to do with whoever it was before the person decided for her.

The person came over her face, blocking out the thin, diminishing light penetrating the gray in the sky, creating what Misaki knew as a shadow, which fell over her and made her warm clothes dark within its silent silhouette.

From her point of view, this person was probably in high school, an owner of a masculine body and a somehow amazingly unfortunately feminine face, long ash-black-gray hair pulled back into a low ponytail, completing the female allusion, and eyes of an undetectable color and emotion due to the shadow that he had made falling over his face doubled with the hair that had been parted and yet still hung in his face. Misaki felt something so hard to describe somewhere in her chest, and her subconscious told her what the feeling was, if only she'd listen to it. Perhaps she would have if the person hadn't begun to make a noise, a noise that made words, a noise that made words that spoke to the white-covered lump known as Misaki.

"Hey Misaki," the person standing over Misaki greeted. "You know, you should probably talk to him about the whole passing-out thing. If we don't do anything, you'll end up KIA."

"Who?" Misaki asked.

The person's mouth could be seen to curve upward in a small, half-hearted smile. "Oh, now you think you're an owl, huh? Come on, let's get home while I can still get you out of this pile of snow."

"Home? Snow? Who are you?" Misaki asked, hoping to hear an answer from the person standing over her. "Where are we? How did I get here? What on earth are you talking about?"

Misaki thought nothing above the nose of the person's face could be seen, but now she saw a muscle move, a slight raising of the eyebrows, a sign of an expression--worry? Sorrow? Confusion? Pity? Misaki did not know, and at that moment, Misaki did not care, for there were larger problems at hand. Like who this person was or how he got there or how he knew her or what to do next or--the list could take up all infinity and still be incomplete.

"Cut it out Misaki," he told her, that same expression beginning to mix in with something that might have been panic. "You're freaking me out and you're not making any sense. Unless," the person added speculatively. The area that Misaki knew as where his eyes were seemed to widen. "Unless it happened. But already? Damn, I'm going to hurt him the next time I see him. Has it happened yet?"

"What?" Misaki asked innocently and honestly. "I have no idea what you're talking

about or who you are or what this snow stuff is. Do you know what's going on?"

The person sighed angrily, and every trace of a smile had vanished in what looked like a mild case of rage. "It has. And that bastard didn't tell me! Damnit, I swear I'm going to kill him! And you don't even know what snow is--he didn't even leave you that! I swear, I will kill him if it's the last thing I do!"

Misaki had no idea as to what he meant. She just lay there, wondering what he meant while he fumed until he sighed as if to calm himself and managed to mostly contain the anger in his voice as he decided, "Well, there's only one thing to do now. I guess we need to head home and..." he released his breath again and continued, "...and think about things for a while. Before we feel the painful impulse to," he stopped to inhale and exhale before continuing again with, "to kill something in the most horrible, painful way we can think of at the time," he finished through bared teeth.

At long last, Misaki's brain finished its desperate search to remember what "kill," meant, and decided that she didn't want this person to do that on her behalf. "No, you don't need to do that," she insisted. "I don't need to be..." she stopped when she realized that she couldn't end that sentence easily.

The young man standing over her seemed to almost pretend to chuckle. "I hope you realize," he pointed out almost rudely, "that you're still curled in a ball on the ground and I'm standing up here. I don't think you're in such a great position to be telling me what I can and can't do."

Misaki realized the unfortunate truth to this and said, "Look, there's a reason for that."

"And that reason is...?" the person asking, chuckling slightly more sincerely now.

"Well, you see..." Misaki realized her inability to answer that question. "I'm down here because..." had to be voiced before she realized that it didn't work, as with, "It's simple...". Finally, she gave up and tried to stand upright and glare at him face-to-face. This didn't come out so well; she barely managed to roll sideways onto her knees before falling face-forward into an extremely awkward and painful position, with one leg somehow managing to get under her main body weight. "Um," she more or less pleaded, "I can do this...I think..."

Three more attempts were made, each more unfortunate than the last, each ending more difficultly than the last.

"I can't do this!" Misaki nearly cried after the fourth attempt, one leg miraculously ending over her shoulder and the other now bent but still under her main weight and now trapping the arm that wasn't trying to support her body weight.

The person laughed full-heartedly for the first time since Misaki first laid eyes on him, maybe even since long before that. Not that this made her feel any better--she didn't exactly enjoy being a laughingstock.

"Hey, I need help! This isn't funny!" Misaki scolded him. "I'd like to see you work

more efficiently in my shoes!"

The person sighed. "Maybe, but, you know, if you don't even remember that, then I really need to hurt a certain someone for lethally understating our situation."

"Well, in the meantime," Misaki reminded irritably, "give me a hand already!"

"Fine," the teenage boy sighed. "Just please don't question my every move."

He reached his hand down, and Misaki lost her balance trying to reach for it. Now with her face on the ground, she groaned, half from pain, half from humiliation. Nonetheless, the person reached for her hand and plucked it from the ground.

"Now duck your head and bring your leg forward," he ordered patiently when she was more so upright than downright. Unfortunately, in bringing her leg forward, she accidentally kicked the person's hand from her own, and promptly fell forward again on top of her leg.

"Owie," Misaki whined.

Her instructor didn't lose patience with her. "That's not as bad as it might seem," he encouraged. "Now push your weight backward until your back's on the pavement."

Following his further instructions, Misaki finally managed to get into a position such that someone could pull her up to her feet. "Wait," she stopped him from taking her hand with her words as a question suddenly struck her. "What's your name?"

The person smiled and told her, "I'm Tsubasa. I trust you remember yours to be Misaki?"

"Well, yes," she confessed. As if signing a pact with her words, she reached forward and grasped his. Tsubasa pulled her up to her feet and added, "I don't suppose you have a problem with going to my place, do you?"

Misaki thought this over for a short time. "I'd say no, but I don't think I have a choice, do I?"

"No, you don't," Tsubasa confirmed.

"Well then, sure, let's get over to your place."

Tsubasa took this as a "Well, I'm good now," and let go of her hand. Misaki promptly made a sound such that it isn't very easy to describe in letters, one that indicated surprise, alarm, and either being in mild pain or fearing that it is coming, as she fell to the ground sideways.

"Owww...." Misaki moaned.

"What, can't you walk?" Tsubasa asked, surprised that she didn't stand firm

when he let go.

"If I can't get up," Misaki pointed out crossly, "what makes you think I can stay up?"

"Hmm, good point," Tsubasa admitted. "Well, I guess at least now we know better than to let you get up on your own." He reached out his hand.

Misaki grasped it and began to pull herself up when she abruptly stopped with an evil gleam in her eye. She pulled with a force so much stronger than necessary to pull Tsubasa down to her level.

On the way down, Tsubasa naturally made a noise somewhat similar to Misaki's, but a little bit more surprised and hardly with any relevance to pain. Due to the nature of the pull that brought him down, however, he didn't land on the hard asphalt as planned, but instead he fell on Misaki.

Misaki made another noise like the one she made before a split second after she realized what she brought on herself.

Tsubasa fell on top of Misaki, rolled off her onto the ground next to her, and demanded, "What was that for?"

"Because I don't think I like you much," Misaki declared. "And because I felt like it, and because I'd like to see you stuck on the ground and covered by cold white crystals."

"What, snow?"

"I don't know, I forgot everything, remember?"

Tsubasa burst out laughing at this.

"What?" Misaki demanded.

"Nothing, nothing," Tsubasa gasped. "It's just...memories or no, you're still Misaki, joking without realizing it until everyone died laughing..."

"Just get up and give me a hand," Misaki ordered, not liking the idea of being laughed at.

Tsubasa stood up and helped Misaki to her feet, managed to re-teach her how to walk, if only with him as a crutch.

The whole memory thing ended up being kind of stretched a bit on both ends. As in, she remembers too much in some areas but not enough in others. Oh well. I bend rules.

And the chapters are pretty uneven, too. The idea that I originally had was that the parts would be like really long chapters and the chapters would be like the little breaks and stuff. So it's

kind of like that.

2. Part 1 Chapter 2

Italics are thoughts or emphasis; ____'s divide my story from my comments.

Names selected from www.behindthename.com

Misaki and Tsubasa (and other characters not yet appearing in this story) (c) ME

Enjoy or go away

____ Chapter 2_

Misaki sat in a kitchen chair at a foldout table in Tsubasa's apartment, freshly bathed and eating a full supper across the table from Tsubasa, about twenty-four hours after she first arrived. She was currently wearing one of many extra sets of clothes exactly like what she would have chosen to wear daily, one of many identical sets that Tsubasa mysteriously provided along with a spare room for her to sleep in. He hadn't told her why he had these clothes and room, but Misaki personally suspected that he had a girlfriend living with him who died or left or something before she came along.

By now, Misaki could sort of walk on her own, but she fell to the floor every three or four steps. Her walking skills were greatest when she leaned on Tsubasa, and as such, whenever he left, he left her locked in the bathroom with a nutrition bar or two and a few juice boxes to keep her content. Even when he was present, Misaki was hesitant to ask for help, because he always had this sad look on his face whenever she resorted to it. Once she had gone so far as to ask him, "Why do you always look that way when I walk with you?"

Tsubasa looked at her vaguely, smiled slightly, and told her droningly, "I don't know, I guess you remind me of someone I know."

"Did you look that way when I walked with you before it happened?" Misaki asked, still unaware as to what "it" was, but now certain how to use it.

He paused, for almost a minute, and didn't answered her question. Instead, he broke the silence by saying, "You know, I'm kind of hungry. How about we have supper now?"

Determined to get at least one answer out of him, she asked, "Is it the girl who died that I make you think of?"

Tsubasa opened his mouth as if to say something to divert the topic, but stopped when he realized exactly what she said. "...What?" he asked.

"The girl who died," Misaki clarified. "The girl whose clothes and room I'm using. She

died, didn't she? Otherwise she'd be here or her clothes wouldn't be here, right?"

Tsubasa hesitated, realized what she meant, and burst out laughing, nearly doubling over and as such making it hard for Misaki to stand.

"What?" she demanded.

He managed to clear his laughter enough to sigh, "Misaki, Misaki, Misaki...no offense intended, but you're not very smart."

"Why?" demanded Misaki, seriously offended now to the point where she tried to stand up straight with her hands on her hips and instead fell onto the wall.

"Misaki..." Tsubasa began, looking up, eyes still leaking mirth-filled tears, "the girl never died. And if she did, you wouldn't be here to wear the clothes!"

Misaki cocked her head in confusion.

"The girl whose clothes you're wearing," he started dramatically, the effect ruined by his flushed cheeks, "is you! You spent a lot of your time here, because your job wasn't very good for keeping a house of your own, and we were good friends, so you practically lived here!"

Now Misaki's cheeks flushed, more so in embarrassment than in hilarity. "Well, my most sincere apologies for not remembering anything more than how to breathe!" She strutted away with her nose in the air--for a record six steps before she fell on her face. "Owww..."

Tsubasa helped her up again and even walked her to the kitchen table--the foldout table that she now sat at, named with a proper air--with the very same look in his eyes that started the entire conversation, except even deeper now.

Misaki knew that the food tasted delicious. She partook in the same microwave food, as Tsubasa called it, yesterday, and she knew how good it tasted, and yet she just picked at her food, twirling it around in the bowl with her head propped up on her elbow. Maybe she wasn't hungry, and maybe she was just thinking too much to be bothered by food, she didn't know, all she knew was that the food didn't seem appealing at that moment.

Tsubasa noticed her depressed state. "Hey Misaki," he encouraged quietly, "I need to take you somewhere after supper. It shouldn't take too long, we should be back before eight-thirty, and then we can play a board game or something."

Misaki nodded unenthusiastically and sighed.

Tsubasa frowned. "Misaki, is there something wrong?" he asked worriedly. "It's not too cold for you, is it?"

She shook her head slowly and horizontally, her eyes never parting from the food on her plate. "Just a little tired," mumbled Misaki.

"Then eat," Tsubasa suggested. "You're not going to get any more energy from staring at your plate."

Misaki nodded faintly, lifted her practically un-laden fork to her lips, put it in, pulled it out, and continued stirring the remainder of the dish with the unclean fork.

Tsubasa sighed. "How about we do something different?"

Misaki looked up at him, slightly puzzled, and cocked her head slightly in confusion.

He chuckled. "Come on, there's something I want you to see."

Tsubasa pulled Misaki out of the kitchen by the arm and brought her to a room she hadn't been in before, the one that she thought was Tsubasa's personal room for sleeping. It wasn't really what she expected to see.

The room was disheveled; the books on shelves over the low-set and unmade bed were nearly falling off, the carpet was dirty, and discarded clothes littered everything. On closer observation, she saw that the carpet was a circular rug over a wooden floor; the rug was a teal color, and there were markings of black on the rug, various polygonal shapes inside a double-circle, decorated with various ancient-looking runes.

While Misaki explored the room, Tsubasa seemed more worried about clearing the swiveling chair under the desk that supported a strange object. This thing looked like a giant box made of some plastic-like substance on all sides except one that seemed to be made out of glass or something to that extent. After a few moments, Misaki came over to this desk and began to inspect the thing.

Tsubasa noticed her interest and told her, "That's a computer. It's what I wanted to show you."

Misaki nodded after a moment. "What do you do on it?"

"Everything," Tsubasa exaggerated. "Well, not quite, but if you name it, this thing will probably be able to do it, if you let an official programmer at it or give technology a few years."

She nodded again, and then searched her mind for something she wanted to have done that would be very difficult for a plastic box to do. Finally, she settled on asking, "Can it make a new person?"

Tsubasa laughed a little. "I don't think this model can, but it's probably possible to generate a person's DNA, and then you have a brand-new person."

"But can it put this person into reality?"

He thought about this for a moment. "Well," he said slowly, "I guess you could use code to make the DNA to make an artificial intelligence based on the person, and that could hack into files to make a record of a person to make it look like a real person, and then it could have all the email addresses and things that a normal person would have..."

"Yes, but can it make that person real?" Misaki questioned.

"What did I just say?"

"You said that the computer can make it seem like there's a new person, but you didn't say it could make this person real."

"Oh!" Realization dawned on Tsubasa's face. "No, I don't think so, but like I said, technology's always changing, it's one of those things that in a few years, maybe a decade or two, that will be possible, if unlikely to be done."

"Then it can't do anything you tell it to."

Tsubasa sighed. "I guess not, but that's not really what it's for. I use it to talk to people far away, and to write, and store memory, listen to music, and a bunch of other things I can't think of off the top of my head."

"How does it work?"

"Well, you use this mouse..."

"Mouse? I don't see a mouse..."

"No, that's what we call this," he corrected, holding up a piece of plastic molded to how he held it now. On one end, near his fingers, a cord came out, and on closer observation, the top third or so was isolated and divided.

"What do you do these mice do?"

"Well, you roll it around on the desk, and that makes the cursor on the screen move..."

An hour or so passed, and finally, Misaki had a general idea as to what to do with a computer and its mouse and its keyboard. Everything went fairly well until Tsubasa started talking about the keyboard.

"...You use the keyboard to type," he told her.

"What do you mean, type?"

"The keys have letters on them, and when you push them down, they make the letter appear on the screen. Type the letters for a word in the right order and you're typing words, and soon enough you've got pages worth of data, and usually more legible than your usual handwriting."

"Really..."

"Hey, why don't you give it a shot?" he suggested. "Type something for me."

"What should I type?"

"I don't know, just type something, like 'Hello' or your name or 'Look at me, I just learned how to type!'"

Misaki paused, thinking. "I don't know how to type," she declared at last.

"Excuse me?"

"I don't know how to type," Misaki clarified ineffectively.

"Wait, do you mean to tell me that you don't know how to write your name?"

"Yes, I can't," agreed Misaki.

Tsubasa looked at her with that look in his eyes that she knew she saw before, the one that she didn't know if it was sorrow or pity or worry or confusion. "I think we should go now," he decided.

"Huh? Where?" Misaki asked.

"Remember? I told you we would be going somewhere after supper, and we more or less did this instead of supper."

"Oh, I guess so..."

"First," Tsubasa sighed, "I need to do something real quick. You stay here and wait for me."

"Do I need to do anything?" asked Misaki.

"No, I don't need to do anything for the trip either, but I need to make sure that some papers get shredded, and that needs to be done as soon as possible, so it would be better if I did it now, in case we take a little longer than planned."

He left the room before Misaki could answer. A minute or so later, he came back with his finger cut and very slowly bleeding.

Misaki started to get up to help him, but he shook his head solemnly.

He moved the bed aside, as well as the nightstand, so that the circle-symbol thing on the rug was more or less uncovered. Tsubasa then rubbed his hands together, spreading the slowly leaking blood to the other hand, inhaled, exhaled, and placed his hands on the circle.

Brilliant blue-white sparks blinded Misaki. They left dark lines on her vision, and when they finally cleared, she was in a place that seemed impossibly familiar even though she never remembered being there before.

It was a pure white abyss embellished only by a single gate with foreboding skeletal decorations.

3. Part 1 Chapter 3

Names from behindthename.com

___'s seperate comments from the story.

Tsubasa, Misaki, Haruka, and everyone else mentioned thus far (c) ME

Enjoy or go away.

_____Chapter 3_

Misaki tried to take in the situation; she was now on the floor, which was funny because there didn't really seem to be a difference between the floor and the...whatever was at the end of her view. That was all that there was to see, just plain white and no distinguished floor or ceiling or walls. Except for the gate.

The gate was enormous. The doors alone were about twice Tsubasa's height, and the lining of these doors spread at least a foot away from them. And yet, nothing finished the touch quite so well as the carvings on the gate.

Skeletal figures were etched into the gate, depicting an ominous image that wasn't too easy to directly interpret, but Haruka was fairly certain that she saw hands at the top holding up a baby as if as a sacrifice. Tsubasa, however, didn't seem phased in the least by the gate itself. In fact, he seemed to be screaming at it in a fiery rage that Misaki didn't remember him having.

"Get out here, you coward!" shouted Tsubasa. Even with the lack of known walls, his voice somehow echoed. "Come out from behind your precious little gate and face me like the real man you wish you were! And if you even think of sending one of your cute little messengers, I swear, I'll kill you if it's the last thing I do!"

The gate opened. Tsubasa grinned slightly and muttered, "Well, I didn't expect you to come out so soon."

Misaki looked inside the gate and saw another void--but not the white one she was in. Now the space behind the gate was pure black--until she saw opened eyes. There weren't any detectable bodies, but there were definitely several dozen pairs of purple eyes of various sizes, opened and staring at her and Tsubasa and everything else outside the gate.

Nothing else happened for a short time. Tsubasa's grin fell into a frown, and he called into the gate again, "Hey, you coming out or not?"

No response was heard, although Misaki thought she saw some of the eyes squint at him, as if to say, "Oh, will you shut up already?" before they closed and disappeared entirely.

As if replying in the hopes that Tsubasa would shut up, a bubble in the black void boiled to the edge. As the bubble grew, the black crept away in a pattern much like water falling over an egg to wash away paint, revealing--a person. Whoever it was fell to the strange ground, curled in a tight ball.

Tsubasa grinned again, more nervously this time. "It's about time. What took you so long, Loki?"

The person looked up, revealing a feminine face. At first she seemed speechless.

According to the look on his face, this wasn't what Tsubasa was hoping for. He frowned again, while his body seemed more relaxed. "Does the name Loki mean anything to you, girl?" he asked, more rudely than Misaki would have.

The girl seemed extremely confused. "U-um," she stammered, "I-I don't think I've heard that name recently..."

Tsubasa sighed. "And here I thought I might finally be able to have a real excuse to punch him in the face." He looked at the girl, as if one problem had been postponed for another to come in. "Girl, you look very familiar, but I can't quite put my finger on it. Do you know who I am?"

Misaki looked at the girl as she shook her head no. It seemed impossible, but the black hair swept across her forehead seemed as familiar to Misaki as the back of her hand, even if her incredibly and unevenly short hair seemed to cancel that. And yet something told her that she hadn't seen this girl even in this lifetime...

The girl seemed to know Misaki, too. "Misaki?" she asked. "Is that really you, or do I just want to see you that bad?"

"Probably," answered Misaki vaguely. "I might not be the person you're looking for. Who are you?"

"Oh, um," the girl was taken aback, but she still told Misaki, "My name is Haruka...Haruka...I can't remember my last name."

Tsubasa sighed. "Well, I guess that means you're one of us now," he decided. "Now, he probably expects Misaki to be your partner, but..." he looked up at the gate. The girls followed suit, and saw that the gate had closed. Tsubasa frowned and began yelling at it again. "Loki, get out here! I need to talk to you, and I'll most likely do my best to restrain myself from punching you if you come out now."

Nothing happened for a few heartbeats, and then the gate opened. No eyes appeared, and no bubbles surfaced, but instead someone was seen walking towards the gate from the inside as though he was walking down a dark hallway.

Tsubasa grinned slightly and noticeably tensed up. "Took you long enough. Care to explain Misaki's memory loss?"

The man hadn't even finished coming out of the gate when Tsubasa said this, but he emerged seconds after he finished. He turned to Tsubasa and stared at him coldly with his red eyes. This new man's skin was extremely pale, and his hair was darker than Tsubasa's. Then he opened his mouth to speak.

Maybe it was just the general mood of the situation, but Misaki honestly expected his voice to be a demonic deep rumble that shook the nearly nonexistent ground. Instead, his voice almost cracked as he said, "Tsubasa, I thought I told you. She's going through her transformation, so if we don't want her to feel so much pain then--"

"You went too far," Tsubasa growled menacingly. "She forgot too much--she can't walk, she can't even stand up by herself, she can't write--she doesn't remember her job. And now you throw us a new Gatekeeper--"

"'Us'?" the new person--most likely named Loki--asked Tsubasa, grinning teasingly. "I know you two were close, and I know that you always di--"

"Shut up!" Tsubasa ordered. "You're changing the topic for no reason. Loki, do you seriously expect her to teach someone else when she doesn't remember even what she is? I know that she kept a journal, but she can't read. Why do I get the feeling that you're trying to make things harder for her, not helping her emotionally?"

Loki's grin disappeared. "I'm trying to make it as easy for her as possible," he declared. "Think of it however you like, but this will be best for her. It's the physical attribute of having memories that's going to hurt so much."

"Then don't take the memories until she'd reached that point!"

"I can't," Loki began. He closed his eyes, inhaled, exhaled, and opened his eyes again with a distant expression before continuing. "I know what she's going to become, but I don't know all the stages in between. I would have taken all of her memories and her ability to make more until she was done, but I was a little late. The method I had to use took too long, and I couldn't finish my work. She remembered how to talk. She's only lost half her memories, at the very most. Her subconscious still knows too much, and she can still have more, and those will hurt so much more. If I'd acted sooner, I could have kept her from hurting at all. But someone else opened the gate on the other side, and then I had to do all that I always have to do when someone does that and don't have a pass..." he ruffled his own hair with his eyes clenched shut, as if the very memory of the work gave him a headache. "Taking them in, keeping the seams closed so everyone else doesn't spill out while I'm doing everything else, searching through files to see who's next to go out, browsing through more files to find that person's identity, finding the one who the identity belongs to in the first place...even if I could do all this without batting an eye, I'd still go back in time at the first chance so I could repent while I had a chance and I wouldn't be chained to this damned gate..." Loki was actively frowning by now.

"You didn't answer my question," Tsubasa challenged rebelliously.

"Yes I did," Loki pointed out crossly. "I told you I couldn't have if I wanted to. Sure, I got a little sidetracked and forgot to say why, but I did tell you whether or not I could. If it'll make you shut up, I can tell you exactly why I couldn't just wipe off her memories just before she reached that point." He waited for Tsubasa to retaliate, but when he didn't, Loki continued. "It's simple. Well, not as complicated as most things, but..."

"My process is something like alchemy. I have to know every little detail that I'm trying to change and what might be effected and what might effect it--it doesn't matter what the chances of that complication are, just as long as it's more than zero. Then I change it, and all that stuff. You don't really need to know all the details of that. Anyway, Misaki's transformation is a complicated one. I'm not even entirely sure what it will come out like. I can see eight possibilities, and only one of them wouldn't cause pain merely by having memories. Well, technically, there are millions, but...well, after a while...I need to explain something else first.

"When Misaki transforms, she's going to have a lot of different stages in it. The number is nearly infinite--and it's possible, if unlikely, that she'll physically have infinite stages. The phases change so rapidly that she's probably gone through anywhere from two to a dozen just in this sentence. I can't calculate all the details that fast--it's just not possible. And near the point where memory hurts--that's the most unpredictable period. I wouldn't even be able to change it as she felt it; it's just too unpredictable. I had to take the memories as late as possible while she was still entirely human. Even a few seconds after that, I wouldn't be able to do a thing for her to save my life. And she'd have nothing in the world to worry about now if only some idiot hadn't thought that the gate is suicide. Sheesh, humans these days. Don't even remember when their lives were actually worth something. It wasn't that long ago, was it? Since they had an actual purpose?"

"I don't suppose you could stop talking about my species like a cat with a dirty litter box," Tsubasa requested almost dryly. "I am standing right here you know. And two other humans are listening, too."

"Oh," Loki seemed to have completely forgotten that someone else was there. "Well, you guys go and do whatever it is that you people do now. I'm going back to my gate. I can't exactly go anywhere else now, can I?" he added tiredly. He turned around, snapped his fingers, and the gate opened.

He was about to take his first step into the gate when Tsubasa called, "Wait!"

Loki turned back around and asked, "What, do you want to keep me from going back to sleep? You're really evil, Tsubasa. I'm really tired after all this. Someone coming in, someone going out, all the paperwork, erasing memories, explaining why I erased memories," his last complaint had a bitter emphasis. "What's your problem and do you seriously think I can help you?"

"What about the girl?" Tsubasa asked.

"What girl?"

"Haruka. The girl who came out of the gate when the new Tollkeeper came in."

"Oh, her...whatever. I just needed to get her out for a while. I was going to keep her in this realm until I had a chance to brief her and find her a mentor...hey; it looks like her life as a normal human was linked to yours and Misaki's. How about you two mentor her?" Loki didn't wait for a response, and the gate closed the moment Tsubasa knew what to say.
