

Reconstruction Rumors

I recently rediscovered Robotech on Netflix. It brought back wonderful memories to see the characters I fell in love with as a kid come back to life once more. The Macross Saga has always been one of my favorites. However, as an adult I couldn't quite believe that Lisa would clean Rick's house merely because she had a crush on him. Nor could I believe that Rick would give Lisa a key to his place if he was solely infatuated with Minmei. I think their relationship was much closer than what was presented... especially for Lisa to consider leaving the service because of him.

So this is my version of their love story that takes place in between Force of Arms and Reconstruction Blues.

Disclaimer: ** This is a story about relationships**

For those of you interested, I hope you enjoy my humble submission.

Now on with the story...

Chapter 1 The Return

Rick and Lisa were ecstatic. The SDF-1 survived the Zentraedi holocaust and was landing nearby in a dried up lakebed. As they prepared to join their friends on the battle fortress, Lisa put her hand on top of Rick's as he pushed the throttle forward and guided his VT home. She put her head on his shoulder feeling so thankful that HE had saved her, glad just to be near him.

Rick switched on the comm., "Skull Leader to SDF-1. Come in SDF-1. Requesting permission to land and bring aboard one damsel in distress," he laughed.

They both heard a shout of happiness as Sammie's face showed up on the screen. "Roger that, Skull Leader. Glad to hear your voice. We thought we lost..." there was a pause and Sammie looked as if she couldn't believe her eyes. Then she shouted, "Oh my god! LISA!!"

They could hear more shouts in the background then Claudia's honey brown face replaced Sammie's.

"Good to have you back, Commander," she chided. "Did Lieutenant Hunter save you again?"

Lisa nodded her head and blushed, burying her head in Rick's shoulder.

"Well, you're gonna have to fill us in on all the details when you get back now, you hear?" Claudia winked.

“Just make sure it’s the truth,” teased Rick.

Sammie’s face reappeared, more composed now, giving Rick his landing instructions. Rick proceeded to guide Skull One toward the flight deck of the Prometheus, but as they got closer to home, he started to feel more and more uneasy. Something inside of him didn’t want to alarm Lisa, especially now that she was so happy. He felt like he wanted to protect her, keep her safe. Well, at least he wanted to make her feel safe with him. He shook it off knowing what he had to do.

“We were both exposed to radiation, Sammie,” Rick said evenly. “We were protected from most of the higher levels of radiation in the VT...until the cockpit shattered...then we had to go through the barrel of the Grand Cannon to get out of Alaska Base.”

“If there are radiation decon crews ready, we’ll probably need them,” Rick continued, trying to sound as if nothing was wrong, averting his eyes from Lisa’s gaze.

He heard Lisa gasp and felt her grip on him tighten. Her exposure was far greater than his own whether she knew it or not. Judging from her reaction, however, Rick had the feeling she already knew. She wasn’t wearing a flight suit equipped for fighting in space and although he wanted her to wear his flight helmet with the visor down, she said it wasn’t necessary. Typical. Looking back, he wished he had insisted, but at the time he was more concerned about getting out of the base before it turned into an inferno. Now it worried the heck out of him, but he promised himself he wouldn’t show it.

“Roger, Skull Leader, we will notify medical,” answered Sammie. As she switched off the

comm, she sighed, clasped her hands over her heart and said, “Isn’t that sooo romantic? Lieutenant Hunter risked his life again to save Lisa! I think they’re in love.”

“Do you really think so?” asked Kim as she turned and rested her hands on the back of her chair. “He must care a lot about Lisa to go back for her, but do you really think she loves him too?”

“Of course!” replied Sammie. “Didn’t you see how happy she looked all cuddled up next to the Lieutenant?”

“They really had no choice now, did they? I do believe there is only one seat in his veritech.” said Claudia logically, trying to stop the floodgates of gossip she saw coming from the Terrible Trio. “But I am glad Rick was able to save her. I just hope they’ll be alright.”

“I hope so too. But I think Sammie’s right. Something’s going on between those two,” added Vanessa, “and this just proves it even more. I mean, how many times has he saved her? AND the shuttle pilots did say that Lieutenant Hunter gave Commander Hayes a ‘private’ message that they couldn’t see or hear before she went to Earth.”

“I don’t know about you, but this makes me want to reconsider my vow,” said Sammie dreamily.

“Mmm hmm,” agreed Vanessa and Kim.

“What vow is that?” asked Claudia curiously.

“To never date a pilot, of course!” answered Sammie. Vanessa and Kim nodded their heads in agreement.

“And why would you make a crazy vow like that?” questioned Claudia incredulously.

“Too much heartache,” replied Sammie without thinking. Suddenly she remembered Commander Fokker and quickly apologized, “Oops. Sorry, Claudia.”



Lisa Hayes - Repro Casual by Don Yee

Claudia responded dreamily, “You may avoid the heartache, girls, but you also miss a wonderful ride.”

Captain Gloval cleared his throat, “ Ahem. Ladies, let’s get back to work.”

“Aye aye, Captain!” they responded in unison.

As the bridge crew carried on with their work, Gloval allowed himself a moment to think. Rick and Lisa, huh? They did make a nice couple... could even become a powerful couple one day with the right training... he decided to put them on some projects together to see what would happen. Then he turned to Claudia, “Please inform medical that we are sending

Commander Hayes and Lieutenant Hunter for radiation decontamination. I want them to set up an area immediately.”

As Claudia prepared to make the necessary calls, Gloval added, “ And, Claudia, inform Dr. Hassan that they are not allowed to leave until they have been cleared by him personally, even if he has to lock them up! Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir!” said Claudia smartly.

I don’t want to lose them too, thought Gloval. Then he said a silent prayer that they would both be all right.

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As Skull One was lowered into the hanger bays, the first thing Rick noticed was the lack of mecha. Where the heck were all the planes? Usually no veritechs meant... well, he didn’t want to think about that yet. His fears were confirmed when he saw Chief coming to help him and Lisa deplane. He looked utterly hopeless, like the life was sucked out of him. His cheeks were wet from tears that had probably been wiped away just moments before.

“Glad to have you back, Lieutenant, ma’am,” croaked Chief.

“Hey, Chief, where is everybody?” asked Rick. For some reason he just didn’t want to believe what his eyes were telling him.

The Chief just shrugged his shoulders and looked the other way. He grabbed Lisa and helped her down.

Suddenly the elated feeling Rick was experiencing just moments before was gone, instantly replaced with the sinking feeling that the floor just fell from beneath his feet. All

those men... gone. Then desperately he questioned, "Max? Miriya?"

"They made it," Chief replied as his hand moved along Skull One's side. "You banged her up pretty good. She'll need a lot of work this time, boss. Oh, and Captain Gloval has ordered you and Commander Hayes to report to medical immediately."

Rick rattled off a bunch of names and squadrons, wondering who made it... and who didn't... while Lisa watched in horror and disbelief. Chief shook his head 'no' so many times... too many times. "But," Chief added, "We thought we lost you too and you made it. Maybe there'll be others..."

Rick felt faint. He walked over to the bulkhead and placed one hand on the wall. His head rested on his arm in an effort just to stay upright. He had been through countless battles. Death was no stranger to him, yet not of this magnitude. NEVER. Never had they lost this many pilots in one battle. Well, he never thought the Earth would be destroyed either. He wondered how many condolence letters he would have to write this time. Then the next thought made him feel sick. Would there even be anyone to send them to?

Rick had totally forgotten that Lisa was there until he felt her hand on his back. Suddenly, he felt warmth spread from the point of her touch to the rest of his body. "I'm so sorry, Rick," Lisa whispered as she moved up from behind him, tears welling in her eyes.

Rick turned to look at her and was somehow surprised to see what he had never expected to see in those deep green eyes... sorrow, compassion, and a little something else that he couldn't put his finger on. For some reason,

without a word spoken between them, he knew she understood, she knew how hard this was for him to take. That unspeakable feeling of being guilty to have even survived... the indescribable pain of losing so many lives... so many friends. He reached out and grabbed her hand, intertwining his fingers with hers and squeezed her hand – HARD. Then silently he let her lead him away from the hangar bays to medical.

While they were walking away, Chief looked back at them and thought, at least he has someone to lean on... someone to love.

As Chief was assessing the damage done to Skull One, one of the new maintenance techs walked up to him. He tried to remember her name. Jackie. That was it. She was a bright young girl of maybe 20 with long dark brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. Her brown eyes were alight with mischief.

"Wow. Was that Lieutenant Hunter and Commander Hayes I just saw?" she asked.

"Yeah," said Chief.

"I didn't know they were an item," chatted Jackie, "I mean, they sure looked cozy to me, didn't they? Sooo..."

"So what?" grumbled Chief. "Let's get to work, ok?" Why would she want to gossip at a time like this? The kids these days! It was sad. Were they so used to death that it didn't even faze them anymore?

"OK, Mr.Grumpy," teased Jackie. "Sooo... didn't you ask them what happened? I mean, I heard Commander Hayes went to Earth on some special mission, right? How did she survive? How did Hunter find her? Did he rescue her again?"

"I don't know," replied Chief, "but I'm sure you'll find out."

"Yeah, I can't wait to talk to Sammie. I'm sure this one'll be a juicy story. Mmmm," said Jackie excitedly.

Chief didn't say anything. He just went to work, but secretly he hoped he would hear what

happened too. He needed to hear a story with a happy ending. They all did.

Chapter 4: PTSA Rick

As the months passed by, the enormous task of reconstruction continued to move ahead at full speed. The people of Earth, with help from allied Zentraedi soldiers, started to rebuild their cities once more. Rescue missions turned into relief missions and the threat of attacks by renegade Zentreadi started to wane. Although this did not lessen the amount of work that needed to be done, it gave many soldiers a little breathing room to finally contemplate and process all that they've been through.

Rick was no exception. One night after a difficult mission, when he was dog-tired and second guessing his reasons for even being in the service, he tried to focus on something positive and calm his mind. He decided to call Minmei. She was the one person who usually cheered him up, the one person who made him feel like there was purpose in his life again.

"Hi, Rick," Minmei chimed in her usual cheery voice. "I'm so glad you called! I can't believe it's been so long. How are you?"

"Okay," Rick managed to squeeze in before she continued.

"So many things have happened since I last talked to you," said Minmei excitedly. "I'm working on a new album right now. The songs are more mature this time... more sophisticated with a hint of sadness. I don't know if you've heard, but they're introducing me as the voice that won the war! It's so exciting! Kyle even said we may go on tour as early as next year!"

"Oh, and I met someone from the army at one of my benefit concerts recently. He won a prize to see me backstage. I asked him if he knew you

and he told me you got promoted to Lieutenant Commander! Wow, Rick, it sounds so important... so OLD!" she giggled. "He also told me you saved another officer's life or something. I can't believe you're a hero. I'm so proud of you! Did they give you a medal?" "Uh, no," was all Rick could manage. Somehow Minmei's optimistic attitude, what usually cheered him up, just fell flat after all he had been through lately. Really, who cared about a medal?



Minmay 4 - I Want You by Don Yee

“Well, they should,” she continued. “Are you still busy? I mean... have things settled down now that the war is over?”

“Not at all, in fact, busy doesn’t even describe it...” started Rick.

“Oh, I know what you mean!” Minmei exclaimed without realizing she cut him off. As she chattered on, Rick listened for a while then made an excuse to get off the phone. There was so much he wanted to share with Minmei; about the horrible things he had been seeing, about how tired and frustrated he was, about everything... but somehow he couldn’t.

Listening to Minmei made him realize that she lived in a completely different world. It was a world he didn’t even recognize anymore... where her voice won the war: not the soldiers who fought and died to protect humanity. It

was a world that was actually exciting, not devastated. Oh well, he thought, maybe when things got better, he’d try again.

For some reason, his thoughts drifted to Lisa. She’d understand what he was going through... she coordinated many of the missions with him... saw some of the devastation herself... she knew how difficult dealing with survivors could be, especially desperate ones... but she was probably too busy... she was probably asleep...

As Rick closed his eyes and started to drift off to sleep, he heard a knock at the door. A part of him wanted to ignore it, to just stay in bed, but something made him get up and answer the door. The person he saw was the last person he expected.

It was Lisa... but she didn’t look right. She was dressed in a trench coat looking tired and a little scared. Her hair was tousled; like she had just gotten out of bed and her eyes were as round as saucers. She wasn’t her usual ‘pressed and polished’ self at all. Rick began to feel worried.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Rick, but I didn’t know where else to go,” Lisa said in a voice of barely controlled panic. “I usually go to Claudia’s when this happens, but she’s on duty tonight.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Rick worriedly. He placed his hand on Lisa’s shoulder wondering what was going on. “Did something happen? Something I should know about?”

“No. It’s just...” Lisa’s voice trailed off. “Oh, never mind. I shouldn’t have come. I’m sorry.”

She was about to walk away which made Rick even more concerned. He stopped her by reaching for her hand. “What’s wrong, Lisa?” he asked again. “You already woke me up and got

me worried. Now you're just gonna walk away?!"

"I guess not," she sighed, sounding resigned. "I've been having trouble sleeping lately. I keep having these awful dreams."

Rick looked up and down the hallway. No one was there so he asked, "Do you want to come in?"

Lisa hesitated a moment then stepped in. "Thanks, Rick. I couldn't stand being alone in my quarters anymore."

"Here have a seat," Rick motioned towards the sofa "Now tell me about these bad dreams. You look really tired. How long has this been happening?"

Lisa sat down and started explaining, "It started a couple of months ago, when they moved most of Macross City out of the ship, after we started looking for the protoculture matrix. I think the empty halls and spaces reminded me of Alaska Base. Now, every time I close my eyes I keep dreaming I'm back in Alaska during the Rain of Death."

Then she uttered, "Oh, Rick, it's horrible!" as she brought trembling hands up to cover her face.

Rick sat down next to her. He was wondering if she was having some kind of mental break down. With all the stress they've been under, it did seem possible... at least to him. "Maybe you should see a doctor," he suggested. "I heard that after really stressful or traumatic situations some people get Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Do you think you might have that?"

"I don't need a doctor," insisted Lisa with an edge in her voice now. "And I don't have PTSD. I

already looked it up. I don't have enough symptoms to be classified with the disorder. Besides, I've experienced nightmares like this before... after Karl died. I just need time to get through it. At that time, it helped to read his letters to me and look at old photos. To focus on the good times we had and to remember that he died doing what he loved. But now I have nothing. I lost the last of what was dear to me when Alaska Base was destroyed."

"Besides, " she continued, "I don't think it would benefit anyone for me to go on medical leave. We need as many capable people as possible right now and I can certainly do my job... I just need some sleep."

Lisa was right. Rick couldn't think of one slip up on her part that he'd witnessed or even heard of. And if she went on leave now, it would definitely hurt them more than anything else. She played an integral part in so many areas of reconstruction and defense that he actually shuddered at the thought of her being gone.

Rick also knew what Lisa was trying to ask him, in her own way of not asking, but he still had feelings of guilt he was dealing with. Somehow he couldn't shake the feeling that he was being unfaithful to Minmei. He wondered why? He had no commitments to Minmei and anyway, Lisa was a friend, right? He couldn't just tell her to leave, not when she was asking for his help.

So he casually said, "My friends are always welcome. You can stay here if you'd feel more comfortable... if you'd sleep better. That way you won't be alone. I think I have some extra blankets somewhere. I can take the couch if you'd be more comfortable on a bed."

Rick guessed that was a safe comment. At least he let her know she was a friend, right?

“Thanks, Rick,” Lisa replied sounding truly grateful. “I really need to sleep and lately my bedroom has been feeling more like a torture chamber than a sanctuary. I’ll sleep on the sofa. After all, it is your place.”

Rick walked into his bedroom to look for some blankets. When he came out, Lisa was still sitting on the sofa with her trench coat on. He wondered what she had on under there? Did she have anything on under her coat?

“Are you gonna be comfortable sleeping in a coat?” Rick asked a little uncomfortably. “I mean, uh, you can borrow one of my shirts, if you’d like.”

“No, thank you. I’m actually wearing my nightgown,” replied Lisa. Then she quickly added, “It’s a little embarrassing, but when I left my quarters. I didn’t think about what I was wearing. And I’d just... I’d just feel more comfortable taking off my coat after you leave. No offense, of course.”

“None taken,” Rick replied. Lisa was wearing her nightgown? He wondered what she looked like in it.

“I’ll set up the sofa. You can go back to sleep,” Lisa continued as she took the blankets from Rick and started to yawn. “Thanks again, Rick. I actually feel much better already, knowing I’m not alone.”

Rick awoke later that night to an ear-piercing scream. It made him jump out of bed with his heart pounding and run to check on Lisa. It sounded like she was terrified.



Lisa Hayes Casual by Don Yee

As he rushed out of his bedroom, it was suddenly quiet again. When he looked at Lisa, she was still sleeping. He was about to go back to his room when he started to hear mumbling and crying. Lisa was repeating something in her sleep.

He took a few steps closer to Lisa until he could hear what she was saying. She kept repeating, “It didn’t work. It didn’t work. He can’t find me. He can’t find me.” Then just once, she changed her tone and said, “Rick, why can’t you find me? Why did you give up?”

Rick froze, unbelieving. He suddenly realized what Lisa was dreaming... knew what her nightmare was. Her nightmare wasn’t what he imagined. It wasn’t about her father dying. It was that HE couldn’t find her... couldn’t save her... that he left her there to die.

For some reason, even the thought of Lisa dreaming that was too much for him to bear. He HAD to wake her up... to tell her that he would never leave her there... that he would have died trying to save her. Didn't she know that?

"Lisa! Lisa! Wake up!" Rick had his hands on her shoulders and was shaking her awake. Now he was the one who sounded slightly panicked. "I'm here! You're safe! It was just a dream."

Lisa woke up sobbing. As soon as she saw Rick, she instinctively grabbed onto him and held him tight. He could feel her body shaking and felt the warmth of her tears soaking through his shirt.

Rick just kept repeating, "It was just a dream. I'm here. You're safe. We made it, remember?"

When Lisa was finally able to speak she managed to say between deep intakes of breath, "In my dreams... you can't find me... my locator wouldn't work... Alaska Base was too big... too dangerous... or sometimes... I can hear you... see your face... but you can't hear me... you go back to the SDF-1... without me... you leave me there, Rick... to die in that awful place."

Rick just held her close. He rubbed her back, stroked her hair and said, "Well, it's not true. That was just a dream. You're safe now. We made it, right?" When he felt her body relaxing a little, he continued, "Anyway when did a little danger ever stop me? You should know me better than that... even in your dreams. And not hear you? Sometimes I wish I couldn't hear you." He chuckled.

Lisa hit him in the arm and gave him a small frown. "Watch it, mister," she scolded... then she laughed too.

Somehow, that tiny bit of laughter from Lisa settled Rick's nerves. It allowed him to relax and feel that everything was all right again. The only problem was, now that the situation had calmed down, Rick started noticing... well... things. Lisa had kicked off the blankets in her sleep and the bottom of her nightgown was pulled up almost to the top of her thigh, showing her long slender legs. Her top was skewed to the side, revealing one creamy white shoulder. He never imagined holding Lisa like this. She looked so feminine, so desirable.

Her hair smelled wonderful and her nearness was making his body respond in a way he didn't want it to... at least not with her this close. So he held her at arms length and asked, "Are you okay? Feel better?"

"Yes," she said, truly sounding better. "I'll be fine now. Goodnight, Rick, and thanks again." Lisa started to straighten her nightgown and pull up the covers.

"Goodnight, Lisa."

Rick walked back to his room, but it was a long time before he could fall asleep again. His mind couldn't rest after he found out exactly what Lisa was dreaming. How could she even think he would leave her there? The feeling of wanting her to feel safe came back so forcefully... along with the feeling of wanting to be near her... to hold her again. A part of him didn't want to let her go tonight.

But what about Minmei? Was he being untrue? The more he thought about it, the more he didn't think so. If the news was even remotely correct, she was probably cuddled up to Kyle right about now. He was sure she didn't feel guilty. Sure they loved each other, but with Minmei, when was that ever enough? Their

worlds were growing farther and farther apart and there was nothing he could do about it. Sometimes he wondered why she had such a strong hold on him. Shouldn't he just give up and move on already? He exhaled loudly. That was easier said than done... obviously.

And move on to whom? Lisa? Lisa probably wouldn't want a guy like him. Didn't she say once that her old fiancé or boyfriend was the not-able-to-hurt-a-fly, brainy, science type? That Kyle reminded her of him? Kyle... why did they all seem to want a jerk like him? It was disgusting. Rick tried to remove the thoughts from his mind and sleep. To sort it out later... or at least ride it out and see where things led...

In the morning as Lisa was about to leave, Rick walked her to his door and opened it for her.

"Thank you, Rick, for letting me sleep over," Lisa told him in a tone that made him feel warm all over. "You don't know how much it helped. I slept better last night than I have in weeks."

"No problem," Rick responded. Then he added, "If you ever need a friend, or don't want to be alone, you're always welcome."

"Thank you," Lisa said again as she stepped into the hallway. "I may take you up on that offer." She leaned forward to hug him. Rick leaned forward at the same time to return the hug, but turned his head to check if the hallway was clear. He didn't expect Lisa to try and kiss him on the cheek. They ended up face to face in front of Rick's open door.

The feeling that Rick was fighting last night... of wanting to be near Lisa... to hold her and not let her go overpowered his self-control. Before he even realized what he was doing, he closed the

gap and kissed her. This time there were no aliens to stop them, no escape plans, no battles. This time he didn't care or think about anything, except what he was feeling. And he felt good... damn good. In fact, he hadn't felt this way in a really long time. He put one arm around her waist and drew her closer to him. He was about to lead her into his quarters again when he felt her pulling back and pushing him away with her hand. When he took a step back and looked at Lisa, she seemed surprised and unsure. She kept staring at him as if he was supposed to say something.

He wasn't sure what she expected him to say. He only knew that she pushed him away... he messed up... again. Why did these things always have to happen to him? So he said, "Sorry, Lisa," a little sheepishly.

Lisa straightened her back and replied in a tone that seemed distant now, "No, I'm sorry, Rick. I don't want to cause any problems between you and Minmei."

"Don't worry. There are no commitments between me and Minmei," he replied honestly. Then in an effort to save whatever pride he had left he added, "The truth is I don't have time for any relationship right now. Can we still be friends?" This time he held out his hand and smiled. That was safe wasn't it?

For a brief second Rick thought he saw disappointment in Lisa's eyes, but she took his hand, smiled and shook it while saying, "Friends." Then she added, "And, Rick, I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't mention this to anyone."

"Don't worry. I won't," he assured her. As he stepped back into his quarters and closed the door, he wondered what she meant. Did Lisa

mean don't mention her dreams, sleeping over, or the kiss? He decided on all three, just to be safe.

Then he thought, wait a second. Lisa had kissed him back. He was almost sure of it. Why else would she apologize to him? A smile slowly started creeping across his face. Ha! She may

not want him, but she didn't not want him either. One thing's for sure, this time he wasn't going to make the same mistake that he did with Minmei. He wasn't going to chase after anyone else, especially if they just might be waiting for someone better to come along.

Chapter 6: PTSA Lisa

Later that evening, Lisa slept at Claudia's place instead of her own. She still had a lot to work through before her room felt comfortable again. And it was nice to be with Claudia. Sometimes she missed her old roommate.

"So how'd things go last night?" asked Claudia with a concerned look on her face. "I was worried about you... all alone."

Lisa blushed a little and looked at the floor. "Well, I wasn't exactly alone. I went to Rick's."

"Rick's, huh? Now things are getting interesting." Claudia looked at Lisa and raised her eyebrow. She could tell by the way Lisa was behaving that there was more to this story and she was determined to hear all the details. "Anything happen?"

"Not really," said Lisa still looking at the floor. "I started to have my nightmares again and when I couldn't stand my room anymore, I went to Rick's. I didn't know where else to go. He thought I had PTSD! But when I convinced him that I didn't, he let me sleep over. I slept on his sofa while he slept in his bed."

"There's something you're not telling me. Girl, I know you better than that!" Claudia pointed her finger at Lisa and stated firmly, "I want you to tell me EVERYTHING. I mean it."

"Okay," Lisa sighed. She should have known that Claudia wouldn't let her get away with a response like that. And once Claudia made up

her mind about something, she could be relentless. "I did sleep on the sofa, but I had another nightmare. I must have been talking in my sleep because Rick woke me up. He was literally shaking me and calling out my name! I was so happy to see him... I just reacted... I didn't think, Claudia. I hugged him... well, actually... it was more like I grabbed him and clung to him for dear life. It felt so nice... so secure to be in his arms. I felt like I could have stayed there forever. But when I think about it now, I just feel embarrassed."

"What did he do?"

"He held me, rubbed my back and kept saying that I'm safe now, that we made it," Lisa continued. "He told me that danger never stopped him and that I should know that even in my dreams. Then we went to sleep."

"Together?" asked Claudia in a silky voice.

"Of course not!" Lisa exclaimed, shocked at her friend's comment. "He went back to his room and I stayed on the sofa. It was one of the most restful nights I've had in a while though."

"I can imagine. Anything else?" Claudia questioned slyly.

"This morning, as I was leaving... I told Rick 'Thank you' for letting me stay. I was about to give him a hug and a kiss on the cheek because I was so grateful for his help," Lisa paused and seemed reluctant to go on, but finally managed to finish, "but somehow we got tangled up... and well... we ended up kissing right outside his doorway!"

"How was it?" asked Claudia curiously.

"It was wonderful... and awful," Lisa said looking distraught.

"What do you mean?" Claudia wondered. She didn't expect Lisa to look so upset. She never understood how Lisa could be so tough at work, even in the most stressful of situations, yet be so timid when it came to emotions and relationships.

"It was wonderful to be close to him. I wished that it would never end, Claudia, that we could be together... really together. But it was awful because when he pulled me closer, even though I wanted to stay in his arms, I pushed him away," Lisa admitted looking paler than ever now.

"Why'd you do that for?" Claudia couldn't believe it! Wasn't this what Lisa wanted? Why would she push Rick away?

"Because I know he loves Minmei," explained Lisa sounding resigned. "He told me, remember? Because I refuse to be 'the other woman.' I even apologized for getting in the way of their relationship."

"What'd he say to that?"

"He told me they had no commitments to each other. That he didn't have time for any

relationship right now," added Lisa sadly. "Then we agreed to be friends."

Lisa looked terrible. Claudia's heart went out to her friend. "Why didn't you tell him?" she asked for what seemed like the tenth time.

"Tell him what?"

Lisa didn't know? "That you love him, silly!" scolded Claudia. "At least that you want to be more than friends."

"How could I?" asked Lisa. "Especially when he told me he didn't want a relationship. I would just scare him away."

"You don't know that, Lisa!" insisted Claudia. "What else could he say when you pushed him away? He was probably just saving his ego. You weren't here after you left for Earth. Rick really missed you. He was moping about the ship for days. I even caught him staring at the Earth from the observation deck one night."

Lisa shook her head refusing to believe what Claudia told her. Rick loved Minmei and she needed to accept it. There was nothing more.

"If you don't believe me, ask Max," Claudia continued. "I think Max took Rick to that video arcade where he met Miriya to get his mind off of YOU. And Rick went looking for you in Alaska, didn't he? He's the one who pulled you closer when you kissed, right? Doesn't that tell you anything? He is obviously NOT with Minmei."

"That's not true. He told me himself that he confessed his feelings to Minmei before that last battle with Dolza. And he also said that she felt the same way too. Everything seems pretty clear to me," said Lisa firmly. Who was Claudia trying to fool? Facts were facts.

"I bet he wouldn't have said anything to Minmei if you were with him in the room that day," said Claudia, trying to help Lisa see her viewpoint. "I'm almost sure he thought he might not survive the battle. We all did. He probably just didn't want to feel alone."

"I know he would have said the same thing, Claudia." Lisa persisted. "Look at Minmei. She's gorgeous, charming, famous and talented. What man wouldn't want her? How many men would give their right foot to be in Rick's position? Why in the world would he choose me?"

"He would choose you because you're pretty too. Didn't he tell you that once? You're smart, strong, loyal and kind and a better match for him, in my opinion," pressed Claudia. "You understand him. You appreciate him. And don't

think for a second that you are 'the other woman.' I believe no commitments means that she is NOT his girlfriend? She is obviously with Kyle. Don't you watch the news? I know he does. Maybe this morning was Rick's way of trying to move on."

Lisa just shook her head in disbelief.

Claudia was frustrated. Nothing she said would convince Lisa to think otherwise. Sometimes Lisa could be so infuriatingly stubborn. And since she couldn't be persuaded, Claudia tried to think of another way to help her. When it came to love, maybe Lisa needed to be SHOVED in the right direction. Claudia made up her mind then and there. She better get her rest when she could, because for the next few months it seemed like she would be volunteering to work nights... at least when Rick was off.

Chapter 7: Moving Day

A suburb of New Macross City that linked itself to the battle fortress via an overhead rapid transit system had just been completed. Crewmembers with families were the first allowed to move off base. Most jumped at the chance to live with an actual sky above them again. Max and Miriya were no exception and today was moving day.

Max turned to Rick as they were unloading boxes from the moving van, "Hey, thanks for helping us move, Rick. I really appreciate it."

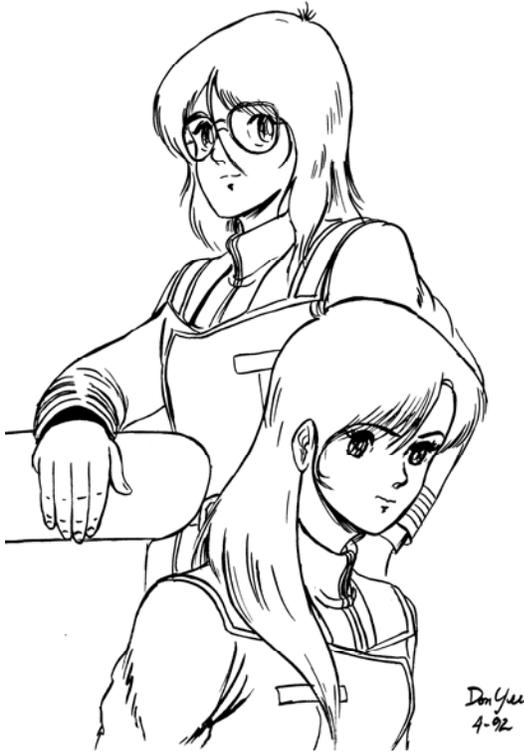
"No problem," Rick replied. "Just do the same for me when it's my turn, okay? How were you and Miriya able to get housing off base so soon anyway? I know you're married, but I thought the first phase was for families only, then officers according to rank. Lisa isn't scheduled to move for another month and I'm after her."

"Well... to tell you the truth..." Max hesitated a second, then finished, "we qualified because we are going to be a family."

"Wait a sec," Rick stopped in the middle of picking up a box. "Are you telling me what I think you're telling me? Are you and Miriya gonna have a baby? Is that even possible?"

"Yep," Max nodded his head while he kept unloading boxes. "You didn't notice that they took Miriya off active flight status? That she hasn't been around lately?"

"I did notice," said Rick trying to keep his mouth from dropping to the floor. "I didn't say anything because I thought it was politics, not pregnancy! I figured you'd tell me about it later."



Max and Miriya by Don Yee

“We didn’t want to say anything too soon,” said Max looking a little green. “But the doctors and scientists seem to think that Miriya and the baby are okay... maybe three months or so according to human standards. Believe me. It was a shock for us too.”

“Wow!” Rick was speechless for a while. “So should I say congratulations?”

“I guess,” answered Max, still looking pale. “To tell you the truth, I’m worried, Rick. No Zentraedi has ever been pregnant before. I just hope that Miriya and the baby will be okay, y’know? And I keep thinking, what if the media finds out? It could be a nightmare for us. I mean our wedding was one thing... we still get the occasional snide remark from some bitter person who recognizes us. You know, those ‘alien-lover’ or ‘traitor’ or ‘stick to your own kind’ sort of comments. One guy even called

Miriya a murderer! But that’s us. We can handle it. A baby is different. I don’t want them to hound a kid! I don’t want my kid to be known as some kind of half-alien freak either. How am I gonna protect my family against that?”

“I see what you mean,” Rick agreed. “You don’t get those kind of comments on base, do you?”

“No. Everyone there pretty much knows whose side we’re on... at least the old guys. Sometimes I get a comment about marrying an alien from a new recruit, but they usually don’t say anything more than that. Maybe it’s because I outrank them. I dunno. Anyway, I refuse to live the rest of our lives hiding on base.” They started unloading some small furniture and Max went on, “I just keep hoping they’ll be too busy with Minmei or some other movie star to bother with us. Oh... um... sorry, Rick... I didn’t mean to... I mean... uh, have you spoken to Minmei lately?”

“Not for a month or so,” Rick replied, ignoring Max’s last comment. “She’s finishing up a new album and planning to go on tour, so she’s been really busy. She told me she’d try to call me sometime this month though. Maybe get me a ticket to one of her concerts here in New Macross.”

“Oh, that’s great. It’s just... well... I thought you’ve been seeing more of Lisa?” questioned Max.

“Yeah,” Rick answered. “How’d you know?”

“I’m your neighbor... well... at least I was your neighbor,” said Max. “A couple of months ago, Mir and I heard Lisa at your place a lot. At first we’d hear screaming and stuff, but it got less and less. Now it’s like you’re never home. What gives?”

“Uh... I’m just helping her out with some stuff,” said Rick cautiously.

“What are you saying? Are you staying at her place?” asked Max suspiciously.

Rick just shrugged then added quickly, “Like I told you, I’m helping her out with something... and she’s a friend, you know? We’re just good friends.”

“Yeah, right,” Max sounded like he didn’t believe a word Rick was saying. “Whatever you say. Should I return your key so you can give it to Lisa?”

Rick was too busy trying to move a particularly bulky piece of furniture to notice Max’s tone of voice, so he answered, “No, keep it. She already has a key. Just be sure to knock before you barge in like you usually do. Since I’m never around long enough to use all my water rations, Lisa said it’s the only place where she can take a nice long shower. And I benefit because she cleans up after me once in a while or gets me food. Y’know to thank me.”

Max stopped what he was doing, leaned on one of the stacks of boxes they set up in the yard and looked at Rick. “Mmm hmm. And you’re just friends? Suuure, Rick, I believe you.”

“We are!” Rick exclaimed. “I’m just helping her through a rough time. That’s all.”

“Uh huh,” Max mumbled, still not believing a word Rick said. “Like I told you before... whenever you feel like telling me the truth... mums the word. I won’t tell a soul.” He smiled and decided to see what would happen if he increased the heat on Rick a little. “Not like Morales. He told a bunch of us that Hayes is off limits. Something about seeing you two making out outside your quarters one morning? You

know, the same thing he always says – ‘bros before hoes’ or something like that.”

“He what?!” shouted Rick almost dropping the lamp he was carrying. “I’m gonna get that guy.”

“Why? Was he lying?” asked Max innocently.

“Err...” was all Rick could say.

“I didn’t think so,” said Max smugly.

“Hey, do you want me to help you move or what?” asked Rick defensively.

“We’re almost done unloading everything out of the truck,” said Max with a hint of laughter in his voice. “The real question now is whether you want me to help YOU move.”

“You’re an annoying SOB. D’you know that?” said Rick looking frustrated.

“Yeah, but at least I am an SOB who knew what I wanted and went for it,” countered Max.

“Smart Alec!” Rick replied as he walked past Max towards the moving van. “You gonna help me with this sofa or not?”

Max just laughed and stepped into the van to help Rick.

As they walked into the house with the sofa Rick called out over his shoulder to Miriya, “Congratulations, Miriya.”

Lisa and Claudia were helping Miriya unload some boxes in the kitchen. They were both wondering why Rick was saying congratulations when Miriya echoed their thoughts.

“For what?” she asked.

Rick looked confused. “You’re gonna have a baby, right? I hope you don’t mind. Max just told me.”

Lisa's and Claudia's faces lit up as they both exclaimed at the same time, "Congratulations!!"

Almost immediately both women were fussing over Miriya, telling her not to lift anything heavy and to take it easy. Miriya gave Max a 'what the heck is going on' look as Lisa and Claudia hovered around her and began to ask what seemed like a million questions. "Do you have morning sickness? When is your due date? Can you feel the baby yet? Do you want a boy or a girl?" On and on.

Max just gave Miriya a quick wink, hopefully assuring her that this was perfectly normal

female behavior and followed Rick out the door as fast as he could.

Max checked on Miriya a few minutes later when he and Rick moved their bed into the house... just to make sure she was okay. She seemed to be enjoying herself now, so he didn't bother to break up the conversation. As Max's gaze moved from Miriya back to Rick and the bed they were carrying, he noticed Rick and Lisa giving each other a small smile as they passed by.

Max thought to himself. Yeah, right, Rick. Just friends, huh? And you wonder why I don't believe you?

Chapter 8: Flight Deck

Corporal Matthews was standing on the flight deck of the Prometheus when he saw a young female officer walk by. She was pretty and slim with long brown hair and legs to die for. He couldn't help it. He followed her with his eyes until she stopped to talk to Sterling and Hunter. He didn't notice how Rick leaned in toward her or how she touched his sleeve and let her hand linger there for a while...he was too busy looking at her rear end.

As she walked away, Matthews walked over to Hunter and exclaimed, "Man, who is the C.O. with the sweet assets? I bet she could keep me warm on these cold nights, if you know what I mean."

Lieutenant Commander Hunter was always pretty kicked back, never one to be a stickler for protocol. Matthews expected to have a good laugh or at least a name... but instead he got an earful of crap.

"Is that any way to talk about a superior officer, Corporal?!" shouted Hunter. "If you even hope to have a chance at becoming a pilot, you better

learn to have some respect. And another thing, CORPORAL..."

While Hunter was lecturing him, Matthews thought, "What the heck is Rick's problem? When did he ever care about something like that? He must have woken up on the wrong side of the bed or something."

"... and the next time you see Commander Hayes, you will address her as such, not like some piece of meat. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?" yelled Hunter.

"Yes, sir!" Matthews snapped to attention and saluted.

As Hunter walked away, Lieutenant Brown walked by laughing.

"Who're you laughing at?" sneered Matthews.

"You. You're an idiot," replied Brown. "Don't you know that Hayes is Hunter's girl? You can look, but don't touch and definitely don't say a stupid thing like that in front of him... unless you want to be on his list... and I am not talking about the one with unicorns and stars on it, if you know what I mean."

Matthews was dumbfounded. "I didn't know," he sputtered out.

"Have you been on a deserted island or something? EVERYBODY knows it," said Brown incredulously. "It's common knowledge. Just like Sterling is married to a Zentraedi."

"Sterling is married to an ALIEN?!" shouted Matthews.

"You didn't know that either? Where have you been?" yelled Brown, "under a freakin' rock?"

"Yeah, I was on a rock called EARTH. Hellooo... I was rescued remember? I wasn't on the SDF-1. I thought you were all dead. This is all new to me.

So what does Sterling's wife look like?" laughed Matthews. "Half man? Blue skin?"

"You gotta be kidding me," said Brown exasperated. "Miriya Sterling is smokin' hot and an even hotter pilot. Are you sure you haven't seen her? You should've at least had her for XT Battle Tactics... oh, unless she was out on maternity..."

"So how'd those lucky dirtbags get women like that?" asked Matthews enviously. "They don't look like much to me."

"I don't know," replied Brown, "but I DO know they are #1 and #3 on the roster, dude. Sterling's been top dog pretty much since day one and Hunter's not far behind. But to me Hunter's a stronger leader. I think that's why he leads the Skull. Honestly, you won't find better fighter pilots than those guys."

"Wait... if Sterling is #1 and Hunter is #3, then who is #2?" asked Matthews.

"Sterling's wife," spat out Brown reluctantly.

"Damn," was all Matthews could say as he shook his head and walked away.

Chapter 9: Happy Birthday Lisa Part 1

Lisa looked at her watch. Almost time to go. She was working a double shift today and thankfully it was nearly over. She couldn't wait. Rick was back from a long three-day patrol and she was anxious to see him again. Her birthday was two days ago and she had celebrated with Claudia, Sammie, Kim and Vanessa, but she missed Rick and wished that she could have spent some time with him. She doubted he remembered her birthday. He hadn't mentioned anything at all, but it was okay. She wasn't one for big celebrations anyway.

At the end of their shift, Vanessa looked for Lisa. She was going out for drinks with Sammie

and Kim and wanted to know if Lisa wanted to join them.

“Have you seen Lisa?” she asked Sammie in the hallway. “I’ve been looking for her all over the place. I can’t seem to find her. She NEVER leaves exactly at the end of her shift.”

“Well, ‘you know who’ just returned from patrol, right?” said Sammie tilting her head and fluttering her lashes. “I bet she ran over to see him.”

“You could be right,” muttered Vanessa. “I did notice Lisa looking at her watch a lot tonight. She seemed anxious.”

“I bet she was excited,” exclaimed Sammie. “You would be too, if you were separated from your honey.”

“I’m still not convinced that they’re together, Sammie,” added Kim catching up with her two friends. “Lisa never talks about them doing anything outside of work.”

“Let’s make a bet,” said Sammie looking at Kim with a sly grin on her face. “Let’s stop by Lisa’s place and see if she’s home. If she’s home, you win and I’ll buy you drinks tonight. But if she’s not, you buy me drinks.”

“Okay, you’re on!” said Kim confidently.

Sammie giggled as she thought to herself, “I’m guaranteed to win.”

Rick was in his quarters looking at the gift he was supposed to wrap. He never was good at this sort of thing. He was sure he didn’t even have wrapping paper. When would he have time to buy that anyway? With endless patrols, training pilots, seeding clouds and flying escort, not to mention all the meetings and projects Gloval assigned to him, there just wasn’t enough time. There just weren’t enough pilots.

He put the box under a blanket and hoped that Lisa wouldn’t notice.

Did he have any food? Drinks? He didn’t know. She would probably yell at him and call him an insensitive moron for forgetting her birthday. He could literally hear her voice saying those exact words. He groaned aloud to himself. Maybe I can at least wrap her gift in paper, he thought. Maybe newspaper? He was pretty sure he at least had that somewhere in his house.

As he was about to look for some newspaper, he heard a key in the door and saw Lisa step in. She was still wearing her uniform, carrying her overnight bag. “Hi, Rick,” she said happily even though she sounded tired. “How did the rest of your patrol go? I was in another long meeting when you got back.”

“It was okay,” replied Rick as he sat back down on the sofa next to the blanket covering her gift. “This time it was uneventful, but I’m still worried. The Zentraedi are getting more and more restless and the dissidents are still out there. All they have to do is come across a well-stocked battle cruiser crashed in the wastelands somewhere for it to be disastrous. We just have to find them or at least find the weapons before they do. I’m exhausted.”

Lisa sat down next to him and leaned her head back on the cushions. “I’m exhausted too. I can’t wait till the new recruits get up to speed and can start relieving us. I need a break.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean.” Rick leaned his head back also.

They sat in silence for a while then Rick finally blurted out, “Happy Birthday, Lisa. I know it’s late, but here’s your gift.”

Lisa looked surprised. "You didn't have to get me anything," she said. "I actually thought you'd forgotten."

"Well," Rick pushed the box to her..."Open it."

The box was old and worn; parts of it even looked a little burned. At first Lisa was confused. Why was Rick giving her an old box? Then she recognized the monograph on the front... LH... could it be? No... he didn't! Her mind was racing. Her hands started to tremble as she opened the cover. He did! He somehow went to her Father's estate and found her pictures!

As she flipped through them, tears started to well up in her eyes. Then she saw a picture of her mother and started crying... then a picture of her father. She thought she would never see their faces again, at least not outside of her memories. All of the photos dear to her blew up along with Alaska base over a year ago. Slowly as she went through the old photographs, Karl's picture came up too.

"Oh, Rick, thank you! Thank you so much!" she exclaimed as she lovingly placed the photos back in the box and hugged him. While she hugged him she whispered in his ear, "you don't know how much this means to me."

"I'm glad you liked it," laughed Rick, hugging her back, enjoying her closeness. At first he thought Lisa was going to yell at him, then when she started crying, he didn't know what to think at all. Phew! This reaction was a relief!

Suddenly Lisa pulled away.

"Wait a second... when did you get this, Rick?" she questioned. Her hands were on his shoulders now holding him at arm's length. Her eyes looked like they were blazing.

"Oh, I dunno, about a month ago." He tried to sound as casual as possible.

"Was that the time you went to RAD DECON again?" demanded Lisa as she started to stand and put on her 'command' face again. "Tell me the truth, mister."

"Well, maybe... yeah. So what?" replied Rick defensively. Damn. Couldn't anything get past her? Was this going to turn into another argument, he wondered? He was already starting to get annoyed with the bossy tone in her voice.

"Why did you do this?" questioned Lisa. She couldn't believe that Rick would risk radiation exposure just to get some old pictures for her... no matter how much they meant. "Why risk yourself?"

Rick wasn't sure what Lisa was asking. But Lisa's features had softened somehow and now she looked a little insecure, vulnerable... and that look was dissolving his anger as quickly as it had come.

"It wasn't much of a risk. The radiation levels were low. Much lower than Alaska Base and I knew how much it meant to you. Anyway, it was something I wanted to do if I got the chance and I did," he stated matter-of-factly.

"Why didn't you tell me?" continued Lisa, still unable to let the matter go.

"Lisa, it was supposed to be a surprise. I couldn't just tell you!" exclaimed Rick. This conversation was going nowhere so he tried changing the subject. "Hey, you never told me you were a spoiled rich girl."

"What do you mean?" asked Lisa.

"I went to your father's estate," Rick said simply, "at least what's left of it. He must've had a lot of money because he built it like a fortress!"

"Oh," Lisa dismissed him with a wave of her hand as she sat down next to him again. "Just promise me you won't go back there again, okay?"

"Mmm," Rick mumbled non-committedly. He remembered seeing a vanity and a mirror with stars on the back that wasn't damaged too badly. He made a mental note to himself to go back for it if he got the chance again. Maybe for Christmas? He smiled.

Lisa put her head on his shoulder. Why did Rick keep doing these things? It was driving her crazy. Here she was trying to fall OUT of love with him, when he kept doing things to drag her back hopelessly head-over-heels IN love with him again. The infuriating part was that he didn't even know what he was doing. At least she didn't think he did.

They had agreed to be friends. Neither one of them had time for a relationship. Anyway, even though it was a long time ago, Rick admitted he still had feelings for Minmei and who did Lisa think she was compared to her? She knew better. Still, they spent a lot of their free time together, slept over at each other's place when Rick got home late or she worked a double shift. When else could they see each other? Occasionally they would kiss... okay; maybe she wasn't trying that hard.

What was this, Lisa wondered? She was both confused of what their relationship was and afraid to ask for anything more. Afraid of rejection. Wasn't that the story of her life? Afraid of her father's rejection, afraid of being

anything less than perfect; as a student, as a daughter, as an officer. She sighed audibly.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"Just tired," she replied then laughed. "Do you even know if you have food in your house?"

"No, but I thought maybe you did."

They both laughed now. It was nice to be with Lisa when they weren't working... or fighting. Just to sit comfortably and not have to LEAD anything, to not have all that RESPONSIBILITY weighing on him. Rick kissed the top of her head without thinking.

She looked up at him with that same vulnerable, questioning look, but this time her eyes were glowing with a warmth in them he hadn't seen in a while. He wanted to kiss her again, but he knew he shouldn't. He was still screwed up, his feelings muddled and conflicted between her and Minmei. Lisa knew it; at least he thought she did. She herself said that all she wanted was his friendship. And he was content with that friendship... most of the time. A slow smile worked its way across his face. Lisa was still looking at him... with that look... her eyes were sparking like jewels.

Rick slowly moved closer to her. He could feel her shallow breaths against his skin. Then his lips touched hers lightly. Rick felt her body rise up to meet him and it happened again, just like that 'first kiss' aboard Breetai's flagship... the world, all the heartache, brokenness, anger and despair faded for that instant. It was just the two of them again.

Suddenly Lisa wasn't tired anymore. She felt like she could hardly breathe. Every inch of her skin felt like it was electrified. She opened her lips slightly and Rick deepened the kiss, sending her

head spinning off into the heavens. Everywhere he touched set her skin on fire. His lips left hers only to trail hot kissed down her neck. Oh God... why can't he be mine? All mine? Why can't he see? Lisa wished with all her heart.

Then suddenly it hit her like a bucket of cold water dumped over her head. He wasn't hers. Her mind became clear again as Rick's hands were slowly undoing her officer's coat. She stopped him with her hand on his shirt. Her eyes were closed and she was out of breath, her heart racing in her chest.

"We need to stop, Rick," she whispered.

At first it seemed like he didn't hear her. His hands kept on working at her uniform while his lips moved back to hers. Lisa let herself enjoy one more kiss before she pulled away and said a little louder, "We need to stop. Aren't we supposed to be friends?"

Lisa always hoped that one day Rick would tell her 'no' that they were more than friends. That

he loved her. But he never did. He just stopped and gave her that guilty look that he always did and apologized.

"Sorry, Lisa. I guess I got a little carried away," he said as he combed his hands through his unruly dark hair then dragged them over his face as if he were wiping away what just happened.

Lisa looked away, trying to hide the disappointed look on her face.

"I'm going to take a shower. Get the smell of SDF off of me," she said as casually as she could. "Thank you for my birthday present, Rick. It's honestly one of the best presents I've ever received."

She bent down to pick up the box. The old cover slid off and there smiling back at her was Karl. She put the cover back on and thought, are you trying to tell me something, sweetheart?

Chapter 10 Happy Birthday Lisa Part 2

Sammie, Kim and Vanessa walked past Lisa's house. Vanessa rang the doorbell. "Lisa, are you home?" she called out.

"The house looks dark. I don't think she's here," Sammie said excitedly. "You see, I told you she was with Commander Hunter. I win!"

"Let's see if she really is there," said Kim. "His house isn't too far from here. Besides, we have to walk in that direction anyway."

As they walked past Rick's house, they slowed down and tried to look for two figures in his house. They could only see one.

"You see," said Kim triumphantly. "She's not there. I don't think they're anything more than friends. You're buying me drinks tonight. Yipee!"

"I don't believe it," said Sammie stubbornly. "People say they're at each other's place all the time. Where could she be?"

As Lisa stood in the shower, memories of Karl came flooding back to her. Sweet Karl... peace

loving Karl... the man who first introduced her to love and all the intimacies she longed for now, but denied herself. Why did he have to be taken away from her? He never wanted to fight. That was why he left for Mars in the first place.

Lisa recalled the last time they were together. He told her that if anything happened to him, he just wanted her to be happy, to live without regrets. That was why he had to leave. He couldn't stay on Earth and regret being forced to kill another human being.

And while Karl tried to escape the fighting, Rick always seemed to be in the midst of it. How many times had she guided him in battle through what seemed like hell itself? How many good, even great pilots had she known that have already died... in war and even in this 'so called' time of peace? How many times had Rick been shot down or nearly killed? One time by the missiles she herself ordered to be launched. How long could his luck hold out?

To live without regrets... what did that mean to her? If something happened to Rick, would she regret not being with him? Never knowing what it would be like to be with him? Even without his love or commitment? Or would she regret wasting her time, her love, on someone who didn't love her in return?

Was she wasting her time on an egotistical, moody, male-chauvinistic, hot-head that talked too much and drove her crazy half the time? Or would she regret not being with the strong, honest, hard-working man she also knew him to be? Someone who was proving himself to be a natural leader, a man of strong conviction, an excellent pilot, one of her best friends, someone she had somehow come to depend on... to trust... to love... even to respect.

Wasn't there a saying, it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? That was true for Karl. Wouldn't that most likely be true for Rick too? Lisa turned off the shower. Maybe next time she wouldn't stop Rick when he got carried away by loneliness or hormones or whatever it was that was causing him to want to be with her.

She laughed to herself as she was drying her hair. Who was she kidding anyway? Her prospects were slim to none these days. No one even took a second look at her anymore. And if she got assigned to the SDF-2, which she would make sure she did, there was no guarantee that Rick would come along. He didn't seem too interested at this point. That settled it. Rationalizing or not, she planned to live without regrets.

While Lisa took a shower, Rick put a pot of water to boil and turned on the TV. The tabloid news was on and Minmei was the headliner. Well, Minmei and Kyle that is, and rumors of secret wedding plans!

Rick's thoughts drifted. Was it just over a year ago that he told Minmei he loved her and she told him she loved him too? It seemed like a lifetime ago. He knew he should let her go, that it was really goodbye, but for some reason he kept hoping that someday they would be together again...

By the time he focused back on the TV, Kyle was ranting about the military and the lies they were telling everyone. When Rick couldn't stand watching anymore of Kyle's nonsense, he changed the channel to the 'real' news that was still monitored by the RDF. The rosy picture they painted of the military and the Earth's situation started to disgust him so he just turned the dumb thing off.

It was funny, in an ironic sense. The military was lying on the 'so called' news. At least they weren't being completely forthright about everything. The RDF was in bad shape. New recruits were desperately needed. If there were to be another alien attack, it would be disastrous. And an alien threat was real. Why else would they start building the SDF-2 so soon? Especially when the people of Earth needed those resources too? But what Kyle was calling lies, was actually the truth. The RDF was trying to help and protect the Earth, not become "overlords" or whatever crap he was spouting off.

Sometimes Rick wished things could just be simple again. Maybe that was why he had a hard time letting go of Minmei even though he hardly saw her anymore. Things seemed so much simpler with her. She always accepted him as he was, had a way of making him feel special. She never pushed him for more. They rarely fought AND he felt she knew HIM -- the original Rick; the Rick before all the fighting and killing, his original, untainted self. It didn't hurt that she was drop dead gorgeous too.

Then there was Lisa. He cared about Lisa, was even attracted to her, but was it love? He wasn't sure. She was probably the polar opposite of Minmei. With Lisa things were always complicated. She was his superior officer who seemed to demand more from him, for one. They also fought – a lot. More than half the time he thought she loved her job more than anything else in the world. But she also knew him better than anyone else, spent more time with him than anyone else. She knew his broken, damaged self and still hung around for some odd reason. And the more he got to know her, the more he respected her, even admired her; for her dedication and determination, her

quiet strength, her intellect, even her compassion.

Could he love two women at the same time? He laughed. Sammie would probably call him a lecher.

The SDF-2 was slated for completion in a little over a year and Lisa wanted in on it. She was studying anything and everything she could get her hands on to help her become the first officer of that ship. She also wanted Rick to do the same. Needless to say, they had many arguments over this. He just couldn't commit to shipping off with the SDF-2, wherever it was destined for, because that probably meant giving up his dream of being with Minmei for good.

One thing's for sure... he now knew why Lisa was always at the top of her class. Unfortunately for him, he had to convince her that he didn't have to be too. She sure tried though. He remembered the time she was studying Zentraedi protocol at his place and was pressing him to learn some phrases. He told her that Max taught him all the Zentraedi he needed to know. "Friend or foe." He didn't need to know anything else, except maybe "lay down your weapons" and he was sure Max could teach him that too. She had looked at him like he was an idiot.

It was funny though, that same night she told him he was a natural leader. That he was capable of so much more. It was kinda nice to have someone around with that much faith in you, although he would never tell Lisa that. Who knows what she'd do next? She'd probably want him to become fluent in Zentraedi or memorize the schematics of the SDF-2. She was always striving for more. He guessed she wanted something more... maybe someone

with more... someone else. Still, Lisa was here now. Why shouldn't they enjoy each other while they had the chance?

Rick turned off the stove and took out two mugs. He walked over to where the extra blankets were and started to set up his bed on the sofa. Then he stopped. Maybe he didn't want to sleep on the sofa tonight. Maybe he wanted to be with Lisa... if she would let him... if she didn't push him away like she usually did...even though she seemed to enjoy his advances... waited for them sometimes. He put the blankets away.

Lisa finally came out of the shower. She looked beautiful. She was wearing a simple light blue nightgown with little buttons down the front. Her long brown hair fell loosely down her back to her waist. She always used a shampoo whose scent drove Rick crazy. Sometimes he wished he could bury his face in her hair and just breathe it in for a while. The lotion or soap she used on her skin reminded Rick of fresh fruit and sunshine. The trick was getting close enough to her to smell it. Nothing with Lisa was overdone. It was always subtle. You had to get closer to notice.

They drank their tea together then got ready for bed. They were both scheduled to attend an early morning meeting the next day addressing the threat of another alien attack. The top brass were not only worried about other Zentraedi forces still loyal to the Robotech Masters, they were also convinced that an attack by the Robotech Masters themselves, looking for Zor's protoculture matrix, was also a possibility.

Lisa passed by the sofa and noticed that it was not set up yet. "Do you want me to sleep on the sofa tonight?" she asked Rick. He probably

needed a good rest after being gone for three days.

Rick hesitated, then replied, "No."

Lisa was tired and starting to get annoyed. What was he doing this whole time? Why was he just sitting there? He couldn't even get blankets for himself in his own house? She walked over to where the blankets were in the bedroom and started to grab a pillow from the bed when Rick sat on the bed and grabbed her wrist.

Lisa's pulse quickened and she started to feel warm. Why did he have such a strong effect on her? Without looking at him she tried to sound annoyed, "Rick, I'm tired. Let's just go to sleep, ok?"

Rick held onto her, debating what to do. He was about to let go when she turned to look at him. Her face was flushed and when he squeezed her wrist tighter he could feel her pulse racing – much like his own.

"Stay with me," he blurted out.

"What do you think I'm doing?" Lisa replied in that same annoyed tone of voice.

"Lisa, you've stayed at my place a hundred times, but this time I'm asking you to stay with me." Rick let her go now... and held his breath.

"What?" Lisa was shocked, scared and excited all at the same time. Her breath caught in her throat. "I don't know, Rick." She suddenly felt insecure. What if he compared her to Minmei? "It's been a long time... not since Karl..." she whispered a little embarrassed.

Rick saw the uncertainty in her eyes, but at this point he felt there was no backing out. The words had already been said. "It's been a long

time for me too,” he replied honestly. “Not since high school,” he added quietly, mostly to himself.

Lisa was only half-listening. Her mind was spinning. She couldn’t control her words now, they simply came out. “But why? Aren’t we supposed to be friends? What about...”

Rick knew she was going to bring up Minmei. He didn’t understand why she always wanted to push him towards Minmei and away from her, so he cut her off before she could finish.

“I’m tired of feeling angry, sad, and bitter about what’s happened, Lisa. I’m constantly seeing devastation and suffering to the point where I just feel numb sometimes. And to tell you the truth, it scares me. I know that we’re friends, but when we’re close, I don’t know, I feel something good again. I can forget all of the horrible things I’ve been seeing... at least for a while,” he confessed.

Lisa didn’t say anything. She just reached out her hand and touched Rick’s face. When Rick was talking she could see the sincerity in his eyes. She knew he was telling her the truth. How many rescue and relief missions did they coordinate together... countless... and Rick was the one who saw it all... who ultimately made those difficult decisions... who experienced it.

He didn’t say he loved her, didn’t offer her any kind of commitment, but she understood – this time he needed her. Even if it was just to forget,

to escape. Anyway, she reminded herself, hadn’t she already decided? No regrets...

As Lisa’s hand slid from his cheek to his chest, Rick grabbed it and kissed it. He pulled her down on the bed next to him and kissed her lips. All at once his senses felt like they were being assaulted on all fronts; the smell of her hair, the taste of her mouth, the feel of her skin. He was in another place, another time again.

Suddenly he felt an increasing need to be closer, ever closer to her. His mission now was to touch, feel, taste every inch of her. And for once, this was a mission he planned to enjoy. As he slowly unbuttoned her nightgown, he half expected her to tell him to stop, but this time she didn’t say no, she didn’t run away.

Lisa couldn’t believe this was happening. Not tonight. She felt like she wasn’t even in her body anymore. As Rick started to undo her nightgown, something clicked in her head. Did she honestly hear Rick say he hadn’t done this since high school?! Then he never was with Minmei... at least not like THIS. Her heart started to soar. Maybe she had a chance after all? She could only hope.

Rick looked up at her, his blue eyes twinkling. He gave her a mischievous smile that reminded her of a boy getting away with something he knew he shouldn’t be doing. Lisa felt giddy. She just laughed, put her hands around Rick’s face and led him back up to kiss her again.

Chapter 11: The Briefing

The next morning Lisa woke up before her alarm. She could feel Rick's slow even breaths as he slept next to her. It felt so nice, so right. She wondered what was wrong with him? Why couldn't he see how perfect they were together? Why couldn't he love her? She shook her head to stop the flood of negative thoughts that were threatening to ruin her morning. Hadn't she promised herself last night that she would savor this moment, no matter what happened? She sighed and tried to redirect her mind to focus on the positive.

Yesterday was probably the best birthday she had ever had in her life. When Rick gave Lisa her pictures, he may as well have given her diamonds on a plate. They were that precious to her. And what happened after? Well, it took her breath away.

Lisa asked herself how such a wonderful night could leave her feeling so empty the next morning? She already knew the answer, but was ashamed to admit it. Last night was an escape for Rick, nothing more. And she wanted, no, needed his love and commitment to truly feel content. What was she going to do now? Why couldn't she just relax and stop thinking so much? She sighed again, a little louder. Lisa started to get out of bed when she felt Rick's hand around her waist pulling her back.

"Good morning," he said in her ear. His face was buried in her hair and he kissed the back of her neck. "Last night was amazing. It brought me back to another time... a better place. Kinda like homemade chicken soup, y'know? And if it's okay with you, I wouldn't mind a little more." He smiled a slow smile and started to move his hand from her waist ever so slowly higher... but she blocked him.

"Hold it right there, mister," Lisa said. "We have to be at the briefing by 0800 hours and I am NOT going to be late."

Rick groaned and fell back on the bed. Business as usual, he thought. Why did he expect anything to be different? Especially with Lisa. Work was and always will be first for her. Her job was what she loved the most. Why couldn't he get that through his thick skull? Rick put the pillow over his head and stayed in bed until his alarm went off. By the time he got up, Lisa was dressed and practically running out the door.

"I'll see you at the meeting," Lisa called out. "Thank you for a wonderful birthday, Rick. I want to drop off these pictures at my place before we have to report for duty. You have cereal in your cupboard and milk in the fridge if you're hungry."

Rick wondered if Lisa would give him a hug, maybe a kiss before she left? She did neither. The door closed before he even managed to say 'okay' and she was gone without even a wave goodbye.

Lisa was out of breath by the time she reached her place. She practically ran the entire distance. She had to get away from him... to think. When Rick pulled her back on the bed next to him, she knew what he wanted, was almost going to give in, until he made that lame comment about the soup. Then she realized that Rick had to learn his boundaries. He wasn't hers and she knew it, but he had to know that she wasn't his either, at least unless he said

something to change that. She had to show him that she still had control. Otherwise he could become too full of himself.

Besides she wasn't about to walk in late to the briefing, especially with Rick. Rumors were already starting to circulate and that would be too obvious. No. It was better they continued their routine, coming separately as co-workers and friends. They weren't anything else to each other anyway, no matter how much she wished things could be different.

Exedore opened the briefing in his usual formal tone expounding on the likelihood of another attack by other Zentraedi forces spread throughout the galaxy, or even by the Robotech Masters themselves.

Lisa found her mind drifting from the topic at hand. Lisa Hunter? No, that doesn't sound good. Lisa Hayes Hunter? Better. Captain Lisa Hayes Hunter... now that had a nice ring to it. A second later she thought, what am I doing? Daydreaming like a teenager! She forced herself to look at Exedore and focus.

Rick had an even harder time concentrating. He already found Exedore slightly annoying and at times incomprehensible. Now he had Lisa looking at him from across the table. Every now and then their eyes would meet and he would start thinking of soft skin, long brown hair, fresh fruit and sunshine... homemade chicken soup. He breathed out slowly, trying to release his wayward thoughts.

Thankfully at that moment Gloval started talking, which made it a little easier for Rick to concentrate. The Admiral wanted to discuss options on how they might avoid or at least survive another attack by aliens looking for

Zor's protoculture matrix. They didn't have it. Spent months looking for it. How could they convince any potential enemies that they didn't possess the protoculture? Or if it was to their advantage... that they did?

Exedore spoke up again, "According to my analysis, an attack by Zentraedi forces still loyal to the Robotech Masters is the most imminent threat. I believe the best course of action would be to pretend to possess the protoculture. That would cause them to fear us and therefore make them more willing to negotiate. At least they would be reluctant to completely destroy us."

"Furthermore, I have found that this 'love business' is a very powerful weapon," Exedore continued. "I believe it can be used effectively against the Zentraedi in what you humans call 'a bluff.' We can mislead our enemies into believing that love is the protoculture itself since they have no concept of what love is."

"Fascinating," Gloval said, "please continue, Exedore."



Captain Henry J. Gloval by Don Yee

As Exedore went on to explain his idea, Rick's blood began to boil. How could they even think of equating love with protoculture? How could they sit there and listen to a Zentraedi who never experienced love, who didn't even know what the heck love was tell them to use love as a weapon? That went against the very meaning of love! Were they becoming less human and more emotionless like the Zentraedi by the mere exposure to them?

When Exedore finished, Rick spat out, "With all due respect, I can't believe you're even suggesting this. Why would anyone believe that love and protoculture are the same thing?"

"They are both powerful forces at work in our universe," replied Exedore in that same

annoying voice. "It was your idea to use Minmei's song in the battle against Dolza, was it not, Lieutenant Commander? And when we added the kiss, that was using love as a weapon, a very powerful countermeasure."

Rick was about to reply, but Gloval interrupted him, "I believe Exedore is right, Lieutenant. We need to use every advantage we can to increase our chance of survival, don't you agree?"

Before Rick could answer, Gloval continued, "For now, why don't we take a short break. We can collect our thoughts and reconvene in 30 minutes."

Lisa could tell Rick was fuming. His face looked like he could barely control his anger. As he stood up to leave, Lisa waited a moment, stood up and followed him out the door. Who knows what he might do or say when they returned? She wanted to speak with him before he said something he might regret later.

Rick finally stopped at one of the observation bays overlooking Lake Gloval, well away from the ears of any passersby. He was seething.

"I can't believe they're talking about using love as a weapon... as protoculture... as a thing," he shouted. "It makes me feel less than human! If we change the meaning of love, I don't even want to think about where the human race is headed. Pretty soon we won't even know what love is anymore! Will love still be something good, probably one of the best damn things humanity has left, or just more ammunition in our arsenal? Will a kiss become nothing more than a diversionary tactic? To tell you the truth, Lisa, sometimes I wish I never mentioned Minmei's song in the first place."

"What are you talking about?" asked Lisa. She didn't understand why Rick was so angry.

“Using Minmei’s song probably saved many lives that could have been lost, including yours. It gave the SDF-1 and Breetai’s forces the element of surprise and confused the enemy. You know that as well as I, Rick. If we can enter negotiations without fighting, why not use all we can?”

“I can’t believe you’re saying that!” Rick yelled back. “I can’t believe that you agree with Exedore. I’m telling you, we’re going to lose our humanity if we continue on this path!” He slammed his fist on the railing.

“No we’re NOT, Rick!” Lisa started to raise her voice now. “We didn’t lose our humanity on Breetai’s flagship, did we? Nor did we lose our humanity in the Last Battle.”

“That’s completely different! We would have been crushed if we didn’t kiss during our interrogation! AND if you remember correctly, COMMANDER, we didn’t use it as a weapon. We just did what our captors asked us to do. We couldn’t have anticipated their reaction,” countered Rick. “And in the Last Battle, we were being faced with annihilation, for crying out loud! We used Minmei’s song for DEFENSE and to bolster morale, not as a weapon.”

“How is that any different if we are faced with another alien attack?!” yelled Lisa. “We are trying to save humanity! We can’t take another invasion. Even with Breetai’s forces on our side, we would still be vastly outnumbered. I don’t want to see you or any of our friends get hurt or worse because we’re not willing to explore all our options... because we’re not willing to use everything we can to our advantage. That’s ludicrous! Right now our options are few.”

“We haven’t even explored other options!” fumed Rick.

“Then give another one!” shouted Lisa. “Tell me! Tell them! If you really believe that we are losing our humanity, then think of another solution!”

Lord, Lisa thought, how could a beautiful night turn into this the next day? So much for savoring the moment...

“Well,” Rick continued still angry, “don’t ever use ME or volunteer ME as a ‘weapon’ or diversionary tactic.” He turned his back on her. As far as he was concerned, their conversation was officially over.

“Now why would I ever want to do that?” asked Lisa sarcastically as she rolled her eyes and walked back into the ship. She took in a deep breath and tried to calm herself down. She needed to cool off before the briefing resumed.

She really wanted to scream at Rick and tell him that SHE knew what love was... she loved him! She didn’t need anyone to define it for her. Even if the military or the whole world used love as a weapon or changed its definition, she would still know what it really meant. Anyway, humans themselves have used love and sexuality as weapons for centuries. Why couldn’t he be more secure in knowing what love was? The stupid idiot. Did he want another war? Didn’t he know that meant risking his life again? And she didn’t want to lose him... couldn’t bear to lose him... not now... not ever.

Rick looked out at the lake. The sky was steel gray. A cold breeze blew over him. Another damn cold day, he thought. Just as well, it matched his mood. Sometimes he wondered if the sun would ever shine again.

He exhaled loudly. Why couldn’t Lisa understand? It wasn’t that he wanted more fighting... there were just some things worth

fighting for... like humanity... their way of life. He didn't want humans to become like the Zentraedi. And the principle of constantly using love as a weapon disturbed him. How many times can people use a word differently before its meaning changes completely? Didn't she care? Especially after last night? Maybe that was it. Maybe Lisa didn't care. Maybe she didn't care because the only thing she loved was her job.

Deep down Rick knew he wasn't being fair to Lisa to think that. It wasn't even true... but he didn't care. He was mad and sometimes she could be so cold, just like the damned weather. At least Minmei knew what love was. At least he knew that she loved him... well... she used to. And when she sang during the battle against the Zentraedi Main Fleet, she didn't sing to be a weapon, even though they used her as one. She sang for him. She sang because he asked her to sing.

Chapter 12 Lucky

Rick was flying back from another long patrol. But this time he was in a good mood. In fact, he felt better than good. He felt lucky. This time he didn't have any scared rookie pilots to babysit... or worse, a cocky new hot shot to humble. Everyone who went on patrol with him were veterans. Every one of them could handle their VT effortlessly. Any one of them could have easily led the patrol themselves. They just did their job and had a good time doing it... at least as good a time as could be expected, considering it was patrol duty.

As Rick contacted the base, Lisa's face appeared on the screen, "Welcome back, Skull Leader."

"Thanks. Nice to hear your voice, Commander. It's good to be back," Rick replied. He felt daring this morning so he added, "It was a long, cold patrol. I'm looking forward to a hot shower, a warm bed and hopefully... some homemade chicken soup."

He thought to himself, he was lucky enough to get this patrol. Maybe he'd get lucky tonight too? Who knows?

"Rick!" Lisa exclaimed, shocked at his audacity. She looked around the bridge to see if anyone thought Rick's comment was unusual. No one did.

"Yes, Commander?" Rick asked innocently, even though Lisa was sure she could see a glint in his

eye and a smirk on his face through the monitor. "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, no," said Lisa feeling flustered. She heard a small chuckle from Rick... could just imagine what she looked like on the monitor... so she steadied her resolve to calm down. She wasn't about to let him think he won this little game he was playing. Even though she could feel the color starting to rise in her cheeks, she managed to keep a straight face as she responded, "Homemade chicken soup sounds good to me too. It has been really cold these past few days."

Rick's smile got even bigger, "Really?" He sounded shocked and in his surprise, Lisa could see that he bumped his helmet on the back of his seat. She heard him clear his throat, "I mean, um... yes, it's been really cold. Well... all right! ETA 15 minutes. Faster, if I'm lucky."

“Roger, Skull Leader, you and your men are cleared for landing,” Lisa had to use every ounce of control she could muster to keep herself from laughing as she proceeded to give them landing instructions.

After Lisa switched off the comm net, Vanessa said, “I think Commander Hunter’s right. Chicken soup sounds really good to me too. What d’you say to finding some good chicken soup in New Macross after our shift is over.”

Kim turned around and agreed, “That sounds great! It would sure hit the spot right about now. You can’t beat hot chicken soup on a cold day.”

Sammie joined in the conversation, “And homemade chicken soup sounds delicious. I don’t think I’ve had some in years!”

At this point, Lisa could barely restrain her laughter. In an attempt to control herself, she frowned purposefully and said more severely than usual, “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

Lisa walked out the door as quickly as she could and stepped into a deserted corridor. She stopped where she thought no one could see or hear her. Then she laughed. She laughed like she hadn’t laughed in years! She laughed until

tears started to roll down her face. And she had Rick to thank for this unexpected gift too. She couldn’t wait to see him tonight to tell him what just happened!

After Lisa left, Kim wondered aloud, “What’s the matter with Lisa? She looked so upset when she left.”

“I noticed that too,” said Vanessa. “Do you think Commander Hunter said something to make her mad again? Although I can’t imagine what it would be. He seemed pretty happy today.”

“I bet I know what the problem is!” declared Sammie. “I bet Lisa’s upset because she wants Commander Hunter to be happy to see her when he returns from patrol. Maybe she was hurt because all he was looking forward to was going to bed and having some dumb soup.”

“Now that you mention it, Lisa did seem a little bothered when he mentioned the soup and she left when we started talking about it too,” commented Vanessa.

“Yeah, that has to be it. What else could it be?” questioned Sammie. Then she said sympathetically, “Poor Lisa.”

Chapter 13: Next of Kin

New User: This is Dr. Jean Grant filling in for Dr. Hassan. Testing the new voice recognition charting system.

Dr. Grant: It looks like it works. I will now begin recording the Officers’ physicals. Computer, please date and time stamp all new entries in the chart.

Dr. Grant: Please state your name and rank.

Patient: Commander Lisa Hayes

Dr. Grant: It’s good to see you, Lisa. All your tests came out fine. Your heart and lungs sound great and your vision is perfect. Any changes in your health this past year? Questions?

Hayes: No, but you look great, Jean. I can hardly tell you're pregnant at all!

Dr. Grant: Thanks. I feel good. I can't believe it, but I'm five months already! Unfortunately, now that they know I'm pregnant, they took me out of the hospital. I'm only allowed to see healthy people until the baby is born. Sometimes I miss the challenges, but I also know that everyone just wants the baby and I to be safe. Anyway, any change in status? For example, have you become sexually active in the past year?

Hayes: What do you mean by that?

Dr. Grant: I think you know what I mean, Lisa.

Hayes: Why are you asking that?

Dr. Grant: We ask the same questions to everyone, every year. You know that. It's just a part of your annual health evaluation. Then we can determine if you need to be screened for STDs, pregnancy, or ask if you're interested in contraception. There's nothing to be ashamed of.

silence

Dr. Grant: So... what is your answer?

Hayes: Is this confidential? I mean, as my doctor, you have to keep this private, correct? You won't tell Claudia, will you?

Dr. Grant: Your health information is protected and private. I'm not allowed to discuss this information with anyone, unless it becomes medically necessary for your care.

Hayes: Then... yes.

Dr. Grant: How many partners have you had?

Hayes: What kind of person do you think I am, Jean?

Dr. Grant: Lisa, these are standard questions. I'm not implying anything. I know you're not some kind of floozy. Any physician doing this physical would ask the same question.

Hayes: I'm sorry, Jean. This is actually the first time I've said yes and I just feel a little uncomfortable. You might think I'm old-fashioned, but I feel embarrassed. Especially since I know you as Claudia's sister-in-law and as a friend, not as my doctor. My answer is one, by the way.

Dr. Grant: Don't be embarrassed. I'm not here to judge you. I'm here to make sure you're healthy. When was your last period?

Hayes: I think it was about a month ago. That's one thing I never really keep track of.

Dr. Grant: I'm going to do a pregnancy test on you today.

Hayes: There's no need. I'm very careful. Well, except for one time, but that was months ago... it took me by surprise. Honestly, I think it took us both by surprise. Nervous laughter...

Dr. Grant: Lisa! Are you serious?! Computer pause recording.

Dr. Grant: Computer resume. Pregnancy test negative.

Hayes: You see. I told you. I'm a very careful person.

Dr. Grant: Do you know if your partner has been with anyone else?

Hayes: As far as I know, no.

Dr. Grant: Would you like a prescription for a contraceptive?

Hayes: No. I'm going to stop soon. The relationship isn't healthy for me. It's just a strange situation. I hate to admit it, but I don't think he cares for me the same way.

Dr. Grant: Are you sure? Have you talked to him? What if I give you a prescription anyway? Then if you change your mind, you can still get it filled.

Hayes: No, Jean. It's okay. I've already made up my mind even before this physical. And don't worry. I have tremendous self-control.

Dr. Grant: Does your partner know you've decided this?

Hayes: No, but it doesn't matter. Like I said before, it's a strange situation. He has no say in my decision.

Dr. Grant: Then I have one final question. Who is your next of kin? You must state at least two people.

Hayes: Lieutenant Commander Claudia Grant and Lieutenant Commander Rick Hunter.

Dr. Grant: Thank you, Lisa. That's it. If you ever talk to your partner and change your mind about the prescription, just call me. I'll see you around, okay?

Hayes: Okay. Thanks, Jean.

Dr. Grant: Please state your name and rank.

Patient: First Lieutenant Maximilian Sterling.

Dr. Grant: Good to see you again, Max. How's Miriya doing?

Sterling: She's great. Thankfully everything's going pretty smoothly.

Dr. Grant: She's due any day now, right?

Sterling: Yeah.

Dr. Grant: Are you ready?

Sterling: Is anyone ready? Are you and Vince ready?

Dr. Grant: Not yet, but we're getting there. I'm happy our kids will be about the same age. Hopefully, they can be friends.

Sterling: Yeah, that would be great.

Dr. Grant: Anyway, all your tests came back A OK, Max. Your vision is stable and everything looks good. Any changes in your health status? Questions?

Sterling: Nope.

Dr. Grant: Have you considered correcting your eyesight surgically?

Sterling: No. Not unless they make me. I can't afford to have any mistakes done on my eyes.

Dr. Grant: I understand, especially since you're a pilot. I assume your wife is your only partner?

Sterling: Yep.

Dr. Grant: Would you like any information on contraception?

Sterling: Uh... It's a little too late for that now, don't you think?

Dr. Grant: laughing... I'm sorry. I've had to do this all day. It's just automatic. We'll discuss that after the baby is born.

Sterling: Okay.

Dr. Grant: Last question. Who is your next of kin? I need at least two names.

Sterling: Second Lieutenant Miriya Sterling and Lieutenant Commander Rick Hunter.

Dr. Grant: Sorry, Max. You're not allowed to have only active combatants on your list. I need at least one more name.

Sterling: Okay. Then can I ask you a question?

Dr. Grant: Of course.

Sterling: Would you mind if Miriya and I put you and Vince on our list as next of kin? We were thinking it might be a good idea to have a couple with a family on our list. You know, to take care of our baby if anything should happen to us.

Dr. Grant: We would be honored, Max.

Sterling: Okay then, I'll also add Vince and Jean Grant.

Dr. Grant: Have you picked out a name yet? It's going to be a girl, right?

Sterling: Yeah. We're gonna name the baby Dana. I liked Aurora too, but Mir thought Aurora sounded too weak. How about you? Any names yet?

Dr. Grant: We just found out it's going to be a boy. For a boy, I like the name Bowie, but Vince wants a junior. I'm gonna fight him on that one though. I refuse to have two Vince's in the house. Anyway, you've completed your physical, Max. Thanks and I'll see you later.

Sterling: Yeah, catch ya later, Jean.

Dr. Grant: Please state your name and rank.

Patient: Lieutenant Commander Rick Hunter.

Dr. Grant: Well, Rick, I'm afraid your tests came back and the results aren't good. I may have to ground you.

Hunter: What?!

Dr. Grant: laughing... Just kidding. All your tests are fine. Everything looks perfect. Sorry, it's just that you're my last patient of the day and I wanted to say something different for a change.

Hunter: Great. Why does it always have to be me?

Dr. Grant: Any changes? Complaints? Has your status changed in any way?

Hunter: Everything's pretty much the same.

Dr. Grant: Have you become sexually active in the past year?

Hunter: Wow! I can actually say yes this time.

Dr. Grant: You sound pretty happy.

Hunter: Wouldn't you be? Especially since I've had to say no for years. Wait. This is confidential, right?

Dr. Grant: laughing... Yes it is. How many partners have you had?

Hunter: Just one.

Dr. Grant: Has your partner been with anyone else?

Hunter: I doubt it.

Dr. Grant: Are you interested in learning about contraception or checking for STDs?

Hunter: No. Don't you know that cautious is my middle name?

Dr. Grant: I don't think I would use that word to describe you, Rick.

Hunter: laughing... I guess not. Put it this way, my partner's middle name is cautious.

Dr. Grant: Now THAT I believe. Did Lisa like the Christmas gift you gave her?

Hunter: First of all, what are you suggesting, Dr. Grant? I don't think I mentioned anyone by the name of Lisa. We are obviously just friends. And second, yeah, she loved it. Tell Vince thanks for arranging the transport of the mirror and vanity from New York to New Macross for me. I think she would've killed me if I ended up in Rad Decon again.

Dr. Grant: Did you get anything special?

Hunter: Yeah, Lisa had Dr. Lang make a working model of Skull One for me.

Dr. Grant: That sounds very special. Well, that just about sums it up here. I just need your next of kin. At least two names please.

Hunter: Commander Lisa Hayes and First Lieutenant Maximilian Sterling.

Dr. Grant: Okay. See ya, Rick.

Hunter: Thanks, Jean. Tell Vince I said hi.

Chapter 14: Falling Apart

Rick slammed the phone down on the receiver. He had just finished arguing with Lisa about some stupid report that she was nagging him about. Her attention to detail and strict adherence to protocol sometimes got on his nerves.

He was in a bad mood. The only good thought he could think of was the fact that he was glad the Zentraedi forced them to revert back to old phones. He hoped Lisa heard him hang up on her and he hoped it hurt her ears. Pushing a button on the video monitor in his VT just wasn't the same... especially when you're fighting.

Rick was waiting in his office for Captain O'Connell, one of Dr. Lang's Robotech engineers, to come and speak with him. He wasn't exactly sure why the guy called. Nor did the engineer explain why he wanted to meet. Everything sounded so vague and that annoyed Rick too.

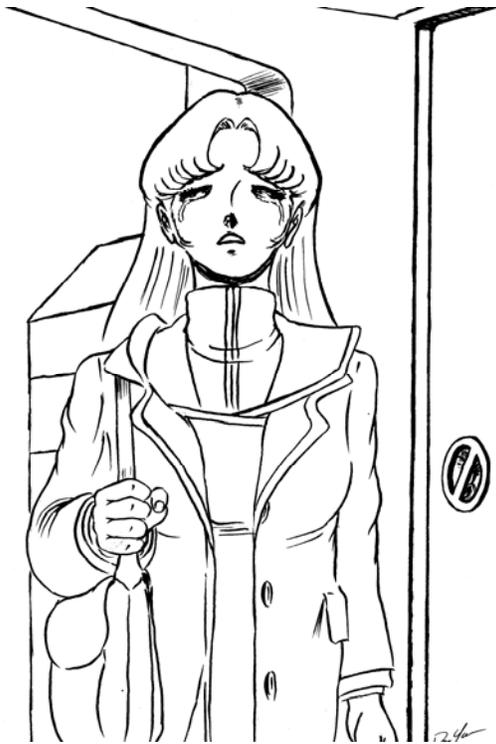
Sitting there gave Rick time to think and at this moment in time, it was NOT a good thing. To make the best use of his time, he tried to finish

the report Lisa was bugging him about, but he couldn't concentrate. His mind kept focusing on other things... things that he didn't want to think about.

Lisa had been keeping her distance from him lately... at least physically. For the past few months anything more than friendship was completely out of the question. And Rick couldn't figure out why. He didn't know what happened. She didn't yell at him for some stupid mistake he did – nothing. She was totally tight-lipped about whatever changed her attitude towards him.

Well, not completely tight-lipped. Lately she was incessantly badgering him about Minmei. THAT irritated the hell out of him. He didn't know if she was suddenly being insecure or if she WANTED him to be with Minmei again. One

day he was THIS close to telling Lisa if SHE was so interested in Minmei then SHE could ask her out HERSELF! What was her problem?



Lisa Hayes 2 - Jealousy by Don Yee

A knock on the door released Rick from his angry thoughts. “Come in,” he called from his desk as he stood to salute Captain O’Connell.

Captain O’Connell was taller than Rick by about 5 or 6 inches and older too. Rick guessed about 8 to 10 years older? He had sandy blond hair that he wore perfectly groomed, unlike Rick’s own unruly mop of wavy brown. Pencil pusher, Rick thought with disgust. Still, O’Connell was pleasant enough in past dealings with him. And he kinda reminded Rick of Captain America, one of the comic book characters he used to love as a kid.

“Don’t worry about formalities, Hunter,” said O’Connell as he walked toward Rick’s desk and shook his hand. “I’m here for more personal reasons than business.”

“Okay then, what can I do for you, Captain?” asked Rick sitting back down, motioning for O’Connell to do the same.

“Call me Mike,” answered O’Connell as he sat down. “First, I wanted you to look over some schematics for the improvements to the latest VT models we’ve been working on. Input from the pilots themselves helps us tremendously.”

O’Connell handed Rick the schematics then stood up again and started to pace around the office. “You can get back to me later on those. There’s no rush. I know you’re extremely busy.”

Then he continued, “Our world is a crazy place, isn’t it? We have the technology to build mecha that can link mind with machine, yet we don’t have enough reserves to have cell phones anymore. I always marvel at how spoiled we were before the holocaust and how much we’ve learned to conserve. The Zentreadi have crippled our resources tremendously. It’s as if we took 100 paces forward in some areas and 100 paces backwards in other areas, don’t you agree?”

“Uh... yeah,” mumbled Rick. He sat at his desk wondering what O’Connell wanted. Why was he wasting their time talking about stuff they both knew already? Why didn’t he just spit it out? “I can look at the schematics now, if you want.”

“No, it’s okay. I just used it as an excuse to come and speak with you,” O’Connell was looking at the model of Skull One that Lisa had given Rick for Christmas. “The truth is, I came to ask you if the rumors about you and Commander Hayes are true? Are you... shall we say... together?”

“Why are you asking that?” asked Rick, taken aback by O’Connell’s question.

“Let’s just say that I’m a man who doesn’t take stock in rumors,” said O’Connell, looking Rick in the eye now. “I’d rather find out the truth from the horse’s mouth, so to speak.”

“A-are you telling me you’re interested in Lisa... I mean, Commander Hayes?” asked Rick, momentarily stunned by what he was hearing. He looked down at his desk, wondering why this had to happen today.

“Well, we have worked on several projects together and have had some lunches together,” O’Connell replied. “I have found her to be a very pleasant and enjoyable person to be with, but I haven’t pursued anything further because of you.”

Rick stood and looked up at the Captain. His eyes flashed and the force of his gaze almost made O’Connell take a step back. For a moment he thought Rick was going to punch him. However, in a few seconds Rick regained his composure and managed to respond rather stiffly, “I can honestly tell you that Commander Hayes and I are just friends. Is that all, Captain?”

O’Connell cleared his throat before saying, “Yes, well, that is all. Thank you, Hunter, for your, uh, honesty...” He paused before he opened Rick’s office door and turned to ask, “Are you sure? I mean, if this upsets you or if you’re interested in her, I respect that. And if you want me to keep your intentions private, I won’t mention anything.”

Hunter’s eyes looked as cold as ice. He answered just as coldly, “No. I ASSURE you, CAPTAIN. We are just friends. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do. I’ll get back to you on the schematics later.”

“That would be fine, Hunter.” O’Connell stepped into the hallway and closed the door.

When O’Connell walked back to engineering, Dr. Lang greeted him.

“So how did your meeting with Rick go?” asked Dr. Lang curiously.

“For a second, I thought he was going to kill me,” laughed O’Connell. “He assured me that he and Lisa were friends, but his body language definitely suggested otherwise.”

“I told you to stay out of it, Michael,” Dr. Lang scolded in a fatherly way. “Rumors are often rooted in fact.”

“That may be true for some rumors,” said O’Connell, “but other rumors are rooted in lies. I just needed to find out for myself.”

“Why would Lisa ask me to make a model of Skull One for her, if Rick was not special to her?” asked Dr. Lang.

“I saw it in his office!” exclaimed O’Connell. “I thought you gave it to Hunter.”

“Why would I give Rick a present?” questioned Dr. Lang.

“Why would you make a model of Skull One for Lisa?” countered O’Connell.

“Because she asked me,” responded Lang. “Because I want to see her happy.”

“Are you sure Hunter can make her happy?”

Dr. Lang patted O’Connell on the shoulder. “I’m not sure, but I believe he is her choice, Michael. Leave it at that.”

Rick sat in his office. He was in a foul mood now. He wanted to punch something... anything... he wanted to punch O'Connell. He knew he couldn't do that so he punched his desk. That didn't make him feel any better, so he kicked his trashcan too. The trashcan flew across the room scattering rubbish all over the floor. Rick cursed aloud as he knelt to clean up the mess.

He wanted to pick up the phone and yell at Lisa. Did she know about O'Connell? And if she did, why didn't she tell him? He was totally blind-sided! Did she WANT him to look like an idiot in front of the guy? Was that why she was keeping her distance from him lately? Waiting for 'Captain America' to come and sweep her off her feet? The damn pencil pusher! Maybe that was why she kept pushing him towards Minmei recently. He felt like a fool.

He promised himself that it wouldn't happen again. And here he was, in the same predicament; first with Minmei and Kyle, now with Lisa and Captain O'Connell. It was disgusting. Why couldn't he learn?

At least with Lisa he never expected it to last. Rick knew things with Lisa would have ended one way or another. He never deceived himself into believing he was a priority in her life. The military was ALWAYS her first priority. She would have left him: if not with O'Connell, then with the launch of the SDF-2. There were no promises. Nothing was said. He and Lisa were friends. She made THAT clear to him often enough, didn't she? So friends they'll be. FINE.

Lisa left her workstation on the SDF-2. It was nearing completion and most of the day-to-day

work functions had shifted from the SDF-1 to the new battle fortress. She had just finished arguing with Rick about the report he was supposed to have finished by this morning. She sighed. It seemed like they were always fighting lately.

Lisa was on break and she decided to leave the ship to have lunch elsewhere. She didn't want to see Rick in the Officer's Mess today so she went to a place that had become one of her favorite restaurants in New Macross. A little café close to work with outdoor seating and good food.

Lisa needed time alone to sort out her thoughts and make sense of everything again. She couldn't believe how fast her and Rick's relationship deteriorated in just a few months. It's like they just fell apart. She wondered what happened?

As Lisa ate her lunch alone, she remembered the last time they made love. Then she corrected herself. She couldn't call it making love, now could she? Not even in her head because Rick didn't love her. So she recalled the last time they were intimate with one another.

It was a week or two after the New Year. They celebrated a late Christmas together because of work and because Rick said her gift wasn't ready on Christmas Day. He had sounded excited when she spoke with him on the phone and he insisted on meeting Lisa at her place after work. He met her at her door and put his hands over her eyes as he guided her inside. Then he sat her down before he let go. The sight she saw when she opened her eyes took her completely by surprise! It was something she never expected.

Rick had somehow managed to transport her mom's antique vanity and her childhood star mirror to New Macross! He didn't know it, but all the money in the world couldn't have replaced those items. And she would have waited years for them if she had known they still existed.

She had felt so good, so happy. Rick was happy too, judging from the look on his face when she gave him the model of Skull One. She practically threw herself at him that night. Then she almost said it, but she stopped herself. Her heart wanted to tell Rick that she loved him, but her head reminded her... he never offered her that. He never even asked her out on a date!

That slip of the tongue could have cost her everything. And it scared her. It scared her to realize how much he meant to her... even more than before. It frightened her to love someone that much again especially since he probably didn't love her in return. He would have said something to her by now if he really cared, wouldn't he?

So she decided to pull away from him. She decided to step back and reassess the situation. And the only way she knew how to do that was to stop all physical contact. Being too close to Rick always clouded her judgment. Plus, she was secretly hoping that by withholding her affection, Rick would want her more... maybe confess his love for her. But he didn't. He just became moodier and more closed off than ever before.

Lisa had tried to ask Rick a few well placed questions regarding Minmei. She wanted to know if he still loved her. But whenever Lisa asked Rick about Minmei, things got worse. He became more irritated and angry and never gave her a straight answer. It was infuriating! It

was also making her feel more and more insecure about their relationship by the day.

Why did Rick always have to make things so difficult? She felt like she was always guessing... never knowing what would set him off.

Then came the night of Minmei's concert in New Macross about a month ago. Rick took the day off and 'just happened to be gone' for the entire evening. He didn't mention a thing to Lisa, but she knew without a doubt where he was. When she asked him about it, he brushed her off and got angry again.

His refusal to answer her questions solidified the fact that her decision to keep her distance was the right one. Why couldn't Rick just answer her questions? If he had nothing to hide, it should be easy, right? What was he hiding? Every time Lisa thought of an answer to that last question, she felt like she wanted to scream or cry or throw up... maybe all three.

The sad truth was that it hurt. It hurt almost more than she could bear. The only thing Lisa was grateful for was the fact that she didn't reveal her true feelings to Rick. At least he didn't know how much he hurt her. She didn't want to give him THAT satisfaction. After all, she still had her pride.

And in spite of everything, she still hoped against all odds that they would be together... only as a REAL couple this time. No more hiding, no more guessing. Actually going out to dinner or a movie together. Maybe even holding hands in public. Oh... wouldn't that be wonderful? Well, she never was a quitter, so why should she be one now? Rick meant too much to her to give up so soon.

And she missed him. Of course Lisa still saw Rick all the time, but she missed the person she

was beginning to think of as HER Rick; the one who smiled at her... who laughed with her... the one she could talk to about her day or just sit in comfortable silence with. She felt like the OTHER Rick, despised her. He looked at her like she was someone who disgusted him, someone who constantly annoyed him, someone he loathed. Sure, it wasn't all the time. There were still occasional glimpses of HER Rick every now and then, but she rarely saw him anymore. She sighed. What was she going to do?

That was the million-dollar question, wasn't it? What was she going to do? With Rick, she never had a clue. She could hear Claudia's voice in her head saying, "Tell him how you feel about him, silly," but she couldn't... she wouldn't. The man was supposed to make the first move, wasn't he? Anyway, if Rick could ask her to sleep with him, he could certainly tell her he loved her.

Rick lay in his bed, but he couldn't sleep. The pillow still smelled faintly of Lisa's hair and it was starting to annoy him. He tried to remember when she was here last. Was it three weeks ago already? They were fighting again and she slammed the door in his face. His OWN bedroom door! But now, even that had stopped. She hadn't slept over since that night. He threw the pillow to the bottom of his bed and put his feet on it. Then he made a mental note to wash the sheets as soon as he returned from this next patrol.

He couldn't help but think that this was an awful end to his perfectly crappy day. How could he make it better? He sat up in bed and turned on his lamp. He walked over to the bookshelf and pulled out an old, worn photo album. It was his Minmei album.

He couldn't believe that he hadn't looked at it in almost two years! He used to look at it at least once or twice a week. As he flipped through the pages he stopped at the photo of him and Minmei at the fountain... their fountain. He remembered it was before his first mission and he was scared. Huh, he laughed, they even looked younger! He wondered what happened?

At least he got to see Minmei at her concert last month. She left a note for him to wait for her on the north side of the hotel so Kyle wouldn't see him. He waited for hours, but once Rick saw Minmei run out of the hotel looking for him, it was worth it. She embraced him and gave him a quick kiss. Then they walked around the sleeping city, hand in hand, talking as if they had never been apart. All too soon she said she had to go, it was over an hour and she didn't want Kyle to get suspicious. To Rick it had seemed like minutes. Then with another hug and kiss, she was gone. Leaving him wanting more... always wanting more.

Rick started to feel sleepy. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knew he should put the photo album away. Lisa still came over to take her shower and clean up his place every now and then. But he was too tired. He'd put it away tomorrow before he left on patrol. Besides, Lisa had the SDF-2 and her Captain now, whether she knew it or not. And when Rick was truly honest with himself, he knew O'Connell was better for her. He was higher in rank, older, more refined, more educated; the kind of man Lisa should be with. So who cared? He placed the album next to his old flight helmet and drifted off to sleep.

This is the final chapter of Reconstruction Rumors. If you are on this web site, I am sure you all know what happens next in Reconstruction Blues. I want to thank you for reading my little piece of fan fiction and hope you enjoyed it!!