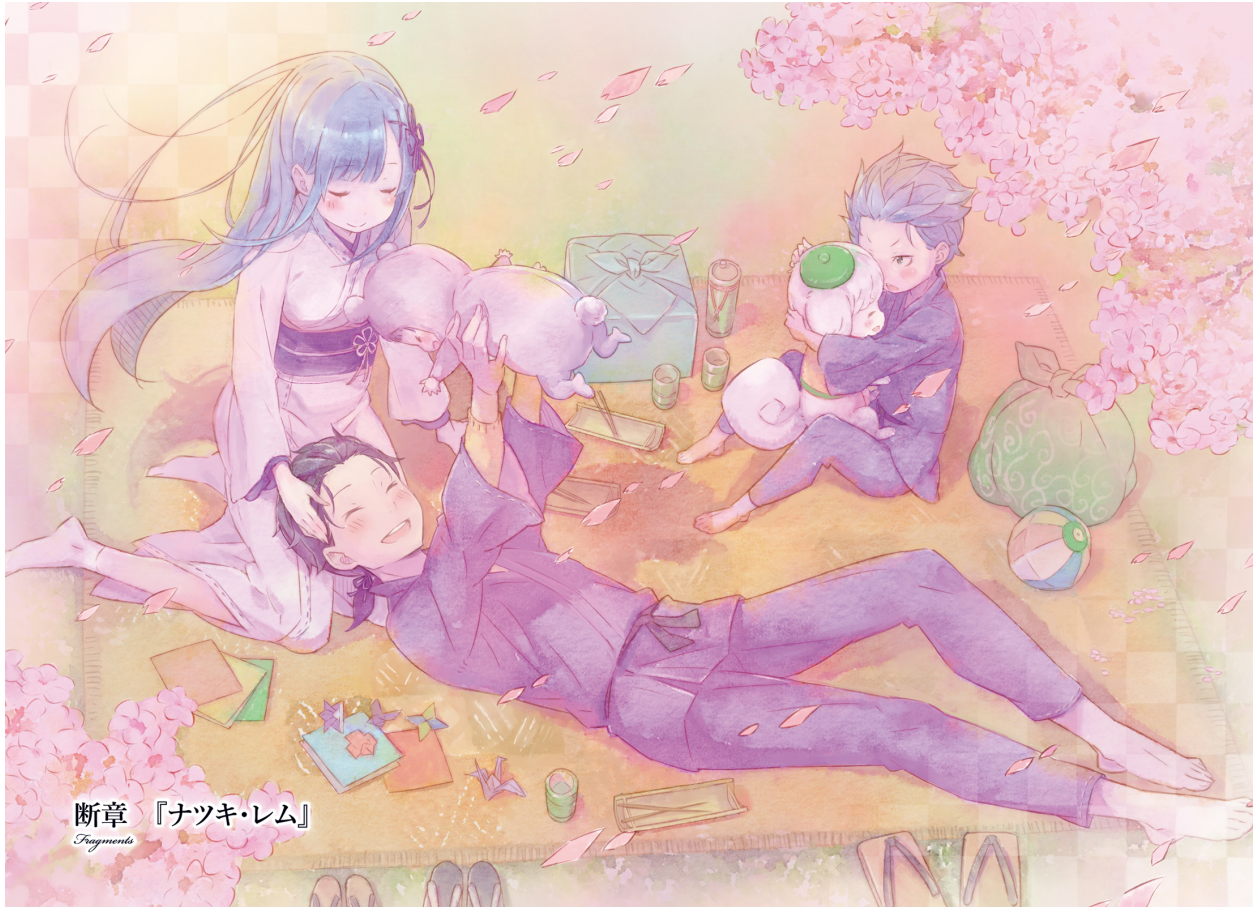


## 3 Months



1

After that scene with his employer, Subaru spent a few days working at the palace.

You could say that it was going smoother than one would expect. It seemed that the many men hired at the palace quickly gave up under the environment, but Subaru didn't falter.

A big part of why he didn't is because, first of all, Subaru got hired because they were taking anyone as long as the person was a 'young man'.

Knowing why he was hired, he was able to do his job while taking it rather easy. He was also fortunate to not have his pride hurt by his coworkers' somewhat excessive physical contact.

The most fortunate thing of all was that women were attracted to Subaru, just like Clane had claimed.

[???: Subaru-chan is a hard worker. He's so great.]

[???: He's super skillful, and he's considerate. Unlike my kid.]

[???: I don't get tired of talking to him, and he's like a child since he smiles a lot.]

These were the opinions of the women who were gossiping during break. He smiled a lot, talked a lot, cracked a lot of jokes, asked a lot of questions, and moved around a lot. Subaru had a mostly favorable reputation.

They also liked how he didn't awkwardly show off or try to cover up his mistakes. Even the sexual harassment that became a problem died down dramatically after he got through the first few days.

[Subaru: I guess this means I've been recognized as a coworker.]

That's what Subaru understood since the butt rubbing damage became 1/10th of what it had been.

This was the type of treatment outsiders would get while they were one. However, once you were recognized as a colleague, you wouldn't get such treatment. All the men didn't have enough perseverance.

[Subaru: Well, I was confused about what the perseverance was for too.....ah, it's done.]

Subaru threads the last needle, and he bit off the remaining thread with his teeth. And so, what Subaru made with his own hands were clothes that had flower decorations sewed on—it was a palace uniform.

Subaru sewed flowers on the clothes for the employees working at the palace and for the spares. It was to distinguish the guests and employees at the banquet that was being held tonight at the palace.

Since Kararagi dresses were typically Wasou, it was possible to mistake guests, who wore kimonos, for servants. A plan was needed so that the atmosphere wasn't spoiled.

[Subaru: Can't have servants wearing maid clothes here.]

Subaru took responsibility and added flower decorations with the hostess' permission, and it wasn't a part of his professional duties. Subaru's female coworkers did tell him, "You didn't have to do all that", though.

[Subaru: It's a banquet, right? The guests and I would be more happy with everyone wearing cute uniforms.]

Then, Subaru got everyone to leave as he made that response.

Instead, the women who wore uniforms with flower decorations at the banquet concentrated on their hair and makeup so much that you might think they were guests, and that caused a different commotion.

On top of that, someone other than Subaru's coworkers surprised him at the banquet—

[Rem: —Did I surprise you? Subaru-kun]

[Subaru: .....I'm stunned.]

[Rem: Then this was a huge success. Hehehe, Subaru-kun's uniform is lovely too.]

It was Rem who said that and surprised Subaru at the banquet hall wearing a hair-pin and a kimono that had flowers drawn like morning glories with dark blue cloth.

Rem, with her gorgeous dress, was so beautiful that all eyes in the hall were on her. However, she didn't react to her surroundings, and she just waited for Subaru to speak.

[Subaru: Ahh...my wife is soo cute.]

[Rem: My.....for you to say that you're a lucky guy for having the best wife ever...I'm embarrassed.]

[Subaru: You sure said it.....but why are you here?]

Subaru questions Rem, who wriggled her body and forth as she touched her blushed cheeks with her hand. Rem said, "Well you see", in response as she lifted the sleeves of her kimono and continued,

[Rem: I was actually invited by the parent of a child I teach at Temple Elementary School. I was going to decline at first, but it was at Riffen-sama's residence. So I borrowed a kimono.]

[Subaru: So you came to see me work .....Um, is this parent that invited you a man?]

[Rem: Please relax, it was a woman. Subaru-kun's such a worrywart.]

She was invited to a banquet, which is a party, and she was even given a kimono. Of course Subaru would be cautious. Seeing Subaru like that, Rem smiled slightly as she said,

[Rem: I too would be an Oni if something ever happened. That's when I'd smash that person's abdomen into bits and pieces.]

[Subaru: Doesn't that kinda sound like you're saying that you're not usually an Oni!?!]

He'd never heard a phrase that was as convincing as "I'm an Oni".

When Subaru got cold feet from imagining an abdomen being smashed, Rem fixed the position of her hairpin as she said,

[Rem: She was a dry-goods dealer and she said that she had plenty of kimonos, so I borrowed one gratefully. But the one thing I didn't get is what she meant when she said that it could be advertising if I wear it.....]

[Subaru: It's just what it implies. It'll get publicity if a beautiful woman wears it.]

The excitement of the surrounding looks not calming down despite knowing that they were married was proof of that. Seeing Rem in her kimono sure

was a treat for Subaru, but his anxiety from male instincts was much stronger.

That being said, at least he was managing to not worry at all about Rem's feelings wavering. After all, he did now know that even if someone tried to carelessly do something to Rem, that person's abdomen would turn into bits and pieces.

[Subaru: Anyway, I really enjoyed the surprise. Rem, you go enjoy yourself, though I won't be able to look after you because I have work. The cooking will be as good as Rem's.]

[Rem: Mm, you can't beat me. Subaru-kun's stomach is mine.]

[Subaru: You make it sound like you're literally going to take it away.....]

[Rem: Still, it feels kind of strange. I get to see Subaru-kun working his hardest. It's like.....]



[Subaru: ——]

That's when Rem paused. What was she going to say next? He could no longer tell since Rem just said, "No", as she shook her head and changed her mind.

[Rem: I'll be with the one who invited me. When I get the chance, I'll put food in Subaru-kun's mouth, so please look forward to it.]

[Subaru: That's a pretty original way to enjoy a party!]

He wasn't planning on relaxing, but he gained one more reason to avoid doing so as Rem left. Subaru watches his wife mix in with the guests at the banquet, and he shrugged his shoulders as he went, "Good grief".

Suddenly, Subaru felt someone standing next to him——

[Halibel: ——Rem-chan is such a great wife.]

[Subaru: Wait wait wait wait, something's wrong here.]

Subaru turns around to the familiar voice, and he glared at the wolf man that appeared——he glared at Halibel. With casual clothes and casual behavior, he ate the food on the plate he was holding.

[Halibel: Mmm, this is excellent. Is there anything in this world that's more delicious than free liquor and free alcohol?]

[Subaru: There is. It's called food made by one's beloved wife.]

[Halibel: Agh! You're boasting about her! I have to drink some alcohol to get through this.]



[Subaru: Forget about that, why are you even here!?!]

Subaru hit Halibel's hand as he reached for the alcohol, and he pressed him for an answer. Subaru's force makes Halibel open his slit eyes slightly, and when he made an evil smile he said,

[Halibel: Of course the gatekeeper would know me. It's the power of networking which Su-san doesn't have.]

[Subaru: You're a trespasser!]

Although he wanted to fault the gatekeeper for letting a suspicious person through, Halibel being well known was what you'd call a mystery. Thinking back, he did remember Clane respecting Halibel.

[Subaru: You aren't a feudal lord that came to check out the town or anything like that, right?]

[Halibel: 'Feudal lord'. You sure know some outdated words. That's what the king was called before Kararagi settled down.]

[Subaru: Really? Not that I know anything about it, though.]

Subaru wanted to just talk, but it seemed like this was going to be another point connecting his former world and the different world again, so he gave a nasty look as he didn't want to delve into it.

[Riften: —My oh my, it's Mr. "Eternal Playboy". I'm happy to see you.]

[Halibel: Oh, Rif-san, long time no see. Sorry for coming today even without being invited.]

Halibel replied to Riffen, who greeted him, as he raised his bottle of wine which he got his hands on god knows when. Riffen calmly nodded at that behavior, however Subaru quickly bowed his head to his employer as he said,

[Subaru: I'm sorry, Master. I will kick out this suspicious man right away.]

[Halibel: Hey now, that's cruel, Su-san.]

[Riffen: I like your hard work, but that would be unnecessary. It's rare for Mr. "Eternal Playboy" to show up at banquets like this. So rare that I'd like to apologize for not sending a written invitation.]

Riffen acted gentlemanly while Halibel acted relaxed. Their relationship also was a mystery to Subaru.

But, if there was one thing he could point out confidently it would be—

[Subaru: Did that 'Playboy' nonsense actually spread?]

[Halibel: Taking what you like is the Kararagian way, after all. I'm happy that I was able to get a simple title thanks to Su-san.]

[Subaru: I—I see.....hopefully you can become a sage someday.]

It might be difficult because of the 'Eternal' part at the front, but he couldn't give up his hope.

[Riffen: By the way, these past few days I've been carefully observing how you work.....]

[Subaru: Oh, sorry. I've been talking to guests so much that.....wait, a few days!? Observing!?!]

[Riften: I told you, didn't I? I have high hopes for you. I've been receiving information from the hostess, and you sound different from the men I've hired. You're more.....feminine than all of them.]

[Subaru: Feminine!?!]

[Riften: A truly intriguing word. I hear you're the one that made it spread.]

The unexpected evaluation and the expression that said he'd brought it upon himself make Subaru's eyes widen. He did remember saying 'Feminine' with his female coworkers several times, but he had underestimated Kararagi people's adaptability.

But, it still wasn't clear how that led to 'feminine' being the evaluation

[Subaru: So why did Master end up pointing out me being feminine?]

[Riften: The hostess has mostly the same opinion as the other women, although your femininity isn't the only thing that's been recognized.]

[Subaru: The same opinion.....]

[Riften: Incidentally, I've heard from Mr. Clane that you've been looking for a place where you can have a long career.]

Subaru blinks with surprise as the conversation made an unexpected turn. Seeing Subaru's reaction, Riften raised his thick eyebrows, and he reached out for Subaru's chest—and he touched the flower decorations.

[Riften: This is well done. And you did it quick. The girls like it. Keep this up for the rest of your work period. —I'm hoping that I can tell you something good on your final day.]

[Halibel: ——]

When he nodded deeply, Riffen and Halibel exchange a few words, and he went back to the middle of the banquet. He had an obligation to entertain the guests as the host of the party.

Despite being busy, he spared time to tell Subaru something. As for what that meant—

[Subaru: .....Hal-san, I should look forward to what he was talking about, right?]

[Halibel: If that was an indirect layoff notice, then I don't think I can believe anything in this world anymore.]

Halibel answered Subaru's question while opening a sake bottle. The previous exchange had so much impact on him that he forgot to warn the uninvited guest about his bad manners.

So, when Subaru took away the sake bottle from Halibel's hand, he said,

[Halibel: Oh]

[Subaru: Looks like you're out of drinks. I'll go get more.]

Subaru collects the empty bottle as he hurried out of there.

While stopping himself from breaking into a smile, he made up his mind to take the initiative and work harder than anyone else tonight at the banquet hall. He also had to deal with the uninvited guest now to do that.

—As he felt excited inside since it seemed he'd be able to give some good news to Rem.

2

[Rem: —Oh, Subaru-kun.]

It was after the banquet cleaning when he exited the main gate to go home.

Subaru gets his named called, and the slight surprise makes him raise his face. Then, it was Rem who was leaning against the palace gate, wearing her kimono which he'd seen at the banquet.

[Subaru: Rem? You didn't go home with the person you came here with?]

[Rem: I was going to, but I was selfish and said that I was going to stay here. I promised to return the kimono and hairpin I borrowed tomorrow.]

[Subaru: That doesn't worry me, but.....actually, it does. If something happened while you were out this late...]

[Rem: Thank you. But the gatekeeper was there with me, so I was fine.]

Rem holds Subaru's hand as he rushed up to her, and she smiled at him to calm him down,

When Subaru turned around as he heard her words, he saw the gatekeeper he knew giving him a thumbs up. Subaru bows his head to show his gratitude towards him, and he considers not snitching on him to the hostess for letting Halibel through.

[Subaru: On another note, why were you waiting here? Did you have some urgent business to take care of or something?]

[Rem: It's nothing like that. I'm wearing clothes that I wouldn't usually wear, so I just wanted to walk home together.]

[Subaru: ——]

[Rem: I rarely wear kimonos like this.....should I have not tried it?]

[Subaru: Erm.....]

Subaru scratches his head with his hand that wasn't being held, and he looked away from Rem. He saw the gatekeeper looking through the gap between his fingers. *You know what, I'm going to snitch on him to the hostess tomorrow.*

Subaru puts off that thought for later, and while feeling his ears turn red, he said,

[Subaru: I'm happy that you said that. Actually, I'm lame for making you say all of that. I want to show off my beautiful wife while walking home too. Thank you.]

[Rem: Yes. Please show the whole town that I'm yours.]

[Subaru: Now that's a lot of people you're talking about here!]

While being surprised by Rem's idea, Subaru waves at the gatekeeper, and the two of them walked back home.

It was deep at night in the town Banan. The moon and starlight were not the only things showing in the twilight; Banan was being illuminated by

hanging paper lanterns. Magical stones weren't blazing in them; they were candle flames.

A beautiful girl in a kimono walking next to him, and a street illuminated by the night sky and paper lanterns—Subaru was not in a different world. He felt like he was seeing an optical illusion, as if he got lost in the past of his former world.

[Rem: —? Subaru-kun, what's wrong?]

[Subaru: I just got lost in my thoughts for a little bit. I know I said that I wanted to show off as we walk, but I just remembered that I'm the type that wants to have everything to himself. I want to enjoy it at home.]

[Rem: I—It's a borrowed kimono, so we can't do naughty things, you know.....?]

[Subaru: But what if it's just for a little?]

[Rem: Oh.....i—if it's just a little.....]

Subaru's naughty statement makes Rem look down with her face turned red. While loving her profile, Subaru said, "Still", as he began to speak.

[Subaru: I didn't expect Rem to be at the party.....or I guess banquet. You must be close with that person to have been invited to go with her.]

[Rem: I don't think think we should be friends since I'm a teacher and she's a guardian. But yes, we are.]

[Subaru: I see. I'm so glad. We've finally just barely managed to settle down in this town now.]

While responding to Rem, he remembered this year's journey where they moved from place to place.

Although he'd talked about it with Halibel when he went job hunting the other day, Subaru and Rem continued to move all around Kararagi until they settled down in Banan town. It was because they couldn't really find work and houses, however they finally were freed from their difficult problems at this town.

While wandering around, they visited Banan because of an introduction letter they got from a person they met, then they were introduced to Halibel, the tenement house manager, and they finally found a house. Rem got a job quickly, and even Subaru, who felt down because he was unqualified, was one step away from living the full-time employee life he'd dreamed of.

It was smooth sailing—it seemed they were finally in a situation where they could say that.

[Rem: I had the time of my life tonight. Subaru-kun praised my kimono, and I got to see my husband work up close. My heart is full.]

[Subaru: I praised Rem in a kimono, not just the kimono alone, you know? Also, I'm full because of the treats you gave me during my break at work.]

[Rem: Everything was so delicious, so I thought you'd love it too.....]

[Subaru: Yeah, that was very sweet, and I love you, but...]

Even before the banquet, for some reason women made Subaru taste a lot of food, so he was full and couldn't carry anymore weight. He was currently holding it all because of the naughty arrangement they made and his willpower.



[Rem: Plus, I was able to tell all your coworkers to take good care of you.]

[Subaru: I'm definitely going to be teased by everyone tomorrow.....]

[Rem: —?]

He's already treated as a toy as is, so of course the women would be so delighted to be asked a favor from his cute new wife. He was now terrified of how everyone would act tomorrow after work.

[Subaru: ——]

The trivial but happy conversation stops. However, the silence was not something uncomfortable. It was just something that went between them naturally.

Even though they weren't talking, it wasn't awkward. There certainly was a natural feeling of distance between them. If it was just the two of them, there wouldn't be anything to go with the silence.

—Thus, the world that unnaturally fell silent was a matter unrelated to their silence.

[Rem: Subaru-kun.]

Rem called Subaru's name about at the same time when he noticed that something was up.

Rem, who stood still and held onto Subaru's hand tighter, stops him. That makes Subaru hold his breath for a bit, and he—tried to look at her, but he hesitated.

Since he knew why Rem stopped him and why she called his name.

[Subaru: ——]

A small person was standing at the front of the street at night.

The shadow was in front of the moon, and its whole body was vague as it was under cover of night. It was shorter than Subaru and a little taller than Rem, and he just knew that it was a woman since she was thin and looked delicate.

She had on this sort of black dress that you'd mistake for darkness, and her hakama was boldly shortened to only cover half of her thighs, and he could very clearly see her white, long legs stepping on the ground.

It was an unarmed, young woman with a lot of revealing spots—if she was just that, then she'd seem like a beggar or a prostitute. And although he was hesitant to say it, neither of those were rare in large towns. Poor people who lost their family and lived in the streets and prostitutes taking customers in back alleys were natural to encounter.

—Hence, it was the glitter of the eyes of the woman standing still that made him think she was different.

Starlight was in the background and a shadow was casted on her face, but the woman's eyes were shining in a penetrative way. That sharp light frightfully and violently directed hostility towards Subaru and Rem and—

[Subaru: Ah——]

The moment Subaru understood that hostility, he felt his hands and legs getting colder rapidly.

[Subaru: ——]

He couldn't move. Subaru completely lost control of his consciousness with hostility before him. His eyes widen, he forgets to breath, and his knees tremble pathetically. And then—

[???: —What...are you doing]

The presence deeply rumbling the atmosphere swept towards them as wind.

He was despairingly too late to realize if it was a voice or just someone calling out to them. That's how much he forgot about the world, and the being was standing firmly as a foreign body.

It was a woman, but it wasn't. She had the shape of a person, but she wasn't a person. It was a repulsive enemy.

[???: —What...are you doing]

The repulsive enemy repeats the wind, her words.

It was a question, a threat, an attack, and mercy. It was even mercy.

Because she could've made someone like Subaru disappear long ago if she wanted to. It didn't happen solely because the enemy had mercy. Could there be anything else to it?

If there was something besides mercy and pity, it would be to let Subaru live.

[Rem: Y—You.....]

Subaru's voice was gone. Hence, that wasn't Subaru's voice. It was Rem's, who was standing next to him. She held onto Subaru's hand so tight that it hurt, and it woke him up. The pain made Subaru face reality. Rem also stayed aware

[Rem/Subaru: —]

They were both overwhelmed by the being before their very own eyes.

Rem was the only one who was desperately looking for a way to escape while feeling pressured. Subaru's senses were also telling him that he had to do so. But, his spirit wouldn't respond.

He didn't have the strong spirit to respond. He couldn't do it with the enemy in front of him.

—Since Subaru couldn't choose to do something like fight an enemy as someone who ran from his enemies.

[???: —Die.]

He was afraid.

The moment he came to that conclusion, the enemy expressed a very straightforward judgement.

Right after that, the increasing pressure becomes so severe that it practically burns his skin, and the hostility sublimates into murderous intent.

Wind blows. As if the seasonal night wind lukewarmly and gently brushed against his skin—

[???: —Come here!!]

When that fatally connected to him, Rem jumped away to the side while holding Subaru. The space they had been in splits roundly within an instant. The space splitted, as if it was bitten off by the jaw of a beast.

Anything left at that place wasn't a living thing. And so, no doubt about it, it was the murderous intent of the women before their eyes that was left there.

[Rem: Hya—]

[???: Die]

Since the hostility was unavoidable, Rem summoned up mana to attack and defend. However, her opponent's murderous intent was fast and strong like a sudden gust. The wind's jaw attacks Rem continuously, and she had no choice but to concentrate on dodging it.

[Rem: Ku...u—]

The kimono backfired. It reached down to her ankles and it was elegant, but in exchange, it restricted her actions. Even if she concentrated on dodging, she would eventually lose the ability to do so. It was getting worse and worse.

[???: Die die die die die.]

Her murderous intent gushes out again and again as the shortest chant using the smallest amount of words, leaving no way out. It was too tall to jump over for Rem, who was holding onto Subaru. And first of all, even if she were to jump high, they'd become easy targets. As for the option to escape to a place with lots of crowds, she wasn't so sure if the women had

the mentality to hesitate in sacrificing people, so that would be the very last option—.

[Rem: —]

Rem frantically racked her brain and struggled as much as she could to find one of the few chances of winning.

Subaru couldn't move since he was being held in her arms as he was swung around by the force of her jumping away. When the hostility turned into murderous intent and was acted upon, he even lost the willpower to act brave.

Despite knowing that he had to move and think.

[???: Die.]

Without budging an inch, the woman repeats a chant of death.

[???: Die.]

The wind's jaw eats the sky, the ground, and the town.

[???: Die.]

The enemy was so much stronger than him that it wouldn't even be an exaggeration to say that it was like a cat playing with a mouse.

A way to turn things around, a suggestion that'd turn the hopeless situation around, an attack to paint over the distress—

[Subaru: ——]

He had no time to find all that, and he couldn't buy any more of it.

*—I don't want to die.*

Subaru's mind and body become chains, and that thought alone was what coiled around him, like a strong curse.

[Rem: If I could at least.....]

Rem forces her voice out of her throat in response to the raging wind that was trying to kill them. Subaru knew what was going to come after her interrupted words. She was going to say this.

“If I could at least—just save Subaru.”

[Subaru: ——]

There's no way he'd let that happen. To show that he was against it, Subaru put a little strength into his hands that were holding onto Rem's kimono. He put in all the strength he could muster up into his fingertips.

To say that even if he were ripped off easily by force, his heart is the one thing he'd never let someone rip out,

[Rem: But.....]

Rem sensed that from Subaru's slight movements. However, Rem really knew just how bad the situation was, much more than Subaru did, who was restrained as someone was trying to kill them.

They were being cornered. Soon enough the jaw of the wind would take away her legs, slurp on her guts, and devour her life.

Before that happened, she just wished for the one she loved to live longer, even if it was just one second—

[???: Die—]

[???: —That's not happening. That's enough.]

Right before the decision lead to action, there was the sound of the jaw of the wind biting on steel.

The bite attack changes the space that had been breaking up to this point. It didn't stop with one blow; a loud, sharp sound cut up the night in line with the consecutive bite attacks.

[Rem: ——]

The change even makes the girl who continued to chant and chant death stop moving. Rem, who was holding Subaru, also stopped, and she blinked, wondering what just happened.

The one who came into their sights was a tall person with a black kimono that shook at its edges—it was Halibel, who smoked the kiseru in his mouth and stood between them.

[Rem: Hali...bel.....?]

[Halibel: Yes yes, this is the Ha-san you all know. That was a close one, huh, Su-san. That would've been bad if I hadn't come. Rem-chan even looked like she'd made up her mind for good.]

[Subaru: Why...are you here.....]



[Halibe: Ahh, I get why you're curious, but I'll have to postpone the explanation for now. Or else.....]

Subaru could not comprehend the sudden appearance, and his trembling voice didn't make Halibel act any different from how he usually would. It didn't help relieve them, but rather it just increased the feeling that they were in an emergency.

Without caring about those thoughts Subaru had, Halibel slowly turned around to face the woman and said,

[Halibel: It'd be hard to fight that girl.]

Halibel says that, sounding like he wasn't even in the mood to fight, and he slowly stepped towards the enemy. Subaru tried to say, "That'd be reckless" from behind.

However—

[Rem: Let's let Halibel-sama handle this.]

[Subaru: Rem? But she.....she's.....]

A terrifying opponent. A being with unordinary strength. Halibel was going to fight someone like that.

Subaru was trying to say, "We should at least try our best to run away".

[Rem: —Halibel "The Great".]

[Subaru: .....Huh?]

[Rem: The one deemed the strongest in Kararagi city-state—that's Halibel-sama.]

Rem's quiet statement makes Subaru stiffen up, unable to use his voice. After that, he looked at Halibel's back, as he closed the distance between him and the enemy, and it simply took his breath away.

The one who poured alcohol at the banquet. That guy was going towards the enemy, like it was just a walk.

[Subaru: This is.....]

[Halibel: —Unbelievable, is what Su-san might be thinking. How about you?]

Halibel, facing the woman, takes the words right out of Subaru's mouth, and he talked to her in an over-familiar voice.

He put aside Subaru and Rem, who were behind him, and stood in between them and the woman as if to say, "You have to get past me before you lay a hand on these two", but the enthusiasm didn't show on his face.

Halibel was being aloof, just like he would be whenever he took naps at the tenement house.

The woman also kept the same attitude. The woman standing still didn't show any interest in Halibel's appearance, and she kept directing the unlimited hostility towards Subaru and Rem.

Anything standing in her way would get smashed—thus,

[???: Die.]

The invisible murderous intent becomes wind, and the attack cuts the space into the shape of a globe—the bite attack went for Halibel. A threat at the end of death that went through defenses and relentlessly devoured its target.

There was only one way to protect himself against that—don't let the bite attack reach him.

[Halibel: ——]

Halibel puts his hand inside his kimono, and he threw something at lightning speed. An object that was thrown at such a speed that no ordinary person could've seen it — that collides with the wind—the bite attack didn't crunch on Halibel's guts; it stopped at a completely different place and crunched on the thrown object.

[Halibel: It doesn't matter if I can't see it. My nose is extremely effective.]

[???: ——]

[Halibel: Oh, but don't get me wrong, okay? I'm a wolf of dogs, and that's one of our important aspects.]

Halibel would always say something to relieve tension whenever he first met someone. After that, she turned her head slowly, although it wasn't as if she'd understood him, obviously.

The woman looked at Halibel with her piercing eyes, and it was the first time she looked at someone other than Subaru and Rem.

[Halibel: Oh, so you finally look this way.....]

[???: Die.]

[Halibel: —There.]

Halibel misfires the bite attack yet again by throwing. However the woman changed the priority of her murderous attack, and fire power focused on Halibel at once.

[???: Die die die die die.]

Halibel waved his arms and demolished all the murderous winds wildly fired all at once. After brushing away the first gust of wind, Halibel went, “Alright” as he gained some momentum and said,

[Halibel: It seems you took interest in me, so how about I meet your expectations!]

[???: Di—]

[Halibel: Hoho. —Which me would you like to get killed by?]

[???: ——]

Halibel steps on the street with his zoris, and he roughly shook his body left and right. An irregular feeling, and footwork that was captivating in a way. Right after that, a Halibel’s body shook strangely—

[Halibel: Now,] [Halibel: Which me would you like?] [Halibel: I’m the devoted type.] [Halibel: And I’m like a bossy husband.]

[Subaru: —Wha!?!]

It was not the woman who raised a surprise voice upon seeing an unbelievable phenomenon, but Subaru, who was being protected in the back.

And it was just natural to do so since he saw Halibel say a bunch of words unannouncedly as four people.

[Halibel: By the way, my strength isn't divided into 4ths. I'm four people, and my strength is quadrupled.]

[Halibel: I begged and begged my parents for siblings, and then more came.]

[Halibel: Sorry, that was a lie.]

[Halibel: I saw myself in the mirror and pulled them out.]

[Halibel: Sorry, that was a lie too.]

The four Halibels crossed their arms, smoked their kiserus, and randomly talked as much as they wanted.

It was like coming into a bad dream. But, the four Halibels were not just illusions.

They were all there and felt real. The four Halibels, fighting power quadrupled.

[Halibel: ——]

Halibel, who did not multiply, but cloned himself. Seeing that right before her made the woman stop acting for the first time.

It was doubtful whether the continuous bite attacks would work on Halibel, who could now act as 4. The possibility of having her invisible attacks defended against and getting hit with a severe counterattack increased immediately.

Whether or not the woman still had the sense to make such calculations was unknown, however—

[???: Die.]

[Halibel: .....Is that all you can say? Seems like you have some pretty complicated family circumstances.]

The woman bent her knees and jumped. She easily jumps onto the roof of a building next to her, and she looked down on Halibel and the others while cracking the roof with her bare feet. The moon was in the background, not one bit of the light in her eyes weakened, and it looked so beautiful that it was beyond human understanding

Halibel, who stood as four on the ground, and the woman dressed in black with the moon behind her glared at each other.

It felt like time it was going to continue forever, but—

[Subaru: —Rem!?!]

The two of them did not break the stalemate. It was Subaru, who could only be there as a spectator. Halibel looked back at Subaru, who held onto Rem as she became dead tired in his arms and his voice trembled.

Taking advantage of that chaos, the woman tries to blend in with the night sky—]

[Halibel: Sh—!]

Three of the Halibels wouldn't overlook that.

The throws attack the woman from three sides, and two of the shots were repelled by the wind. However, the third shot drawing an arc slips through the wind, and the thrown object—the kunai pierces the woman's thin back.

[???: —]

The woman gets injured, lets out a slight groan, and she tries to flee.

[Halibel: ——]

Halibel sharpens his hearing and looked out for the disappeared woman's movements for a bit. There was a possibility of her taking advantage of the darkness and continuing the fight. Still, it was apparent that the woman withdrew, knowing that she was at a disadvantage.

As a result, Halibel was satisfied and—

[Halibel: Guess one should be fine for now. Anyway.....]

[Subaru: Halibel! Hal-san! Rem is...!]

Halibel finally runs up to Subaru and Rem as he was called out to desperately. At the same time, his clones disappear, and he went back to his normal self like an illusion.

Still, there was no time to talk about that mysterious phenomenon. Subaru continues to desperately call out to Rem, who was dead tired in his arms.

[Halibel: Did that black girl's attack hit her?]

[Subaru: I checked! But there are no injuries on her body! But she still fainted and.....]

It was chaos. However, he was sure that Rem had no wounds. She also fainted suddenly. The woman most likely did something after she escaped to the roof.

However, it misfired, and as a result, Rem collapsed instead. And that was—

[Halibel: Maybe she casted some strange magic or something.....she does feel hot. It feels unreal, but it could be an illness.]

[Subaru: —]

[Halibel: That look sure makes me feel nervous. I'll carry her back to the tenement house.....]

[Subaru: N—No, I'll.....I'll carry her! I'll bring her back to the tenement house.....]

Subaru interrupts Halibel, who stretched his arms, and picked up Rem as he tried to control his shaking legs. Subaru stood up, and for a just a moment, his words made Halibel ponder something in his slit eyes.

However, he quickly said, “Okay” with a deep nod.

[Halibel: Then you carry her to the tenement house. I'll call a magic user, and we'll meet up with you guys in your room. Use a light street with a lot of crowd to go back.]

[Subaru: Yeah, I'll leave it to you!]



Subaru immediately began to run with Rem in his arms without any objection. He had a desperate look and his thoughts were covered with uneasiness, but he still had strength to walk. He wouldn't run out of strength before getting to the tenement house.

Halibel looks at them go off, and he takes one deep puff of his kiseru as he said,

[Halibel: Anyhow...anyhow.....]

The wolf man gives out smoke, and he ran off to the street at night, searching for a magic user.

3

—*It's all my fault.*

[Subaru: Haa...haa.....]

—*It's all my fault. It's all my fault. It's all my fault. It's all my fault. It's all my fault.*

[Subaru: —!]

—*It's all my fault!!*

[Subaru: Haa.....!]

Subaru rushed to the tenement house with rough breathing, wide open eyes, and a bright red face.

He couldn't feel Rem's weight in his arms. He was just one person holding another in his arms as he ran, and yet the burning heat of the blood flowing through his body wouldn't let Subaru stop, as if it had become magma.

[Subaru: ——]

He sprinted as fast as he could. Even though he tried to not shake, it still wasn't perfect. There's no way it was comfortable. And yet, Rem, who was unconscious, had no reaction. That was way too terrifying.

Magic, illness—Halibel's worries bound Subaru's mind with the chains called anxiety.

The black clothed woman that appeared — his fear of that enemy was completely disappearing from his head right now at this moment.

Being targeted with hostility, being exposed to murderous intent — they were all trivial matters.

Compared to the reality where he didn't know what was happening to this precious girl right now at this moment—

[Subaru: —Damnit!]

Subaru did not choose a direct route while dealing with his impatience; he chose the streets with the most crowds. Once he came out of the space that was unnaturally empty by crossing two streets, he saw everyday life, as if nothing had happened, and he felt everyone walking the streets at night looking at him.

A man changed his expression and ran through the street while holding onto a girl. It was a miracle that no meddlers with a weird sense of justice stopped him.

Still, he wasn't hoping for a miracle like that. Right now, there was only one wish he'd like to be blessed with.

[Subaru: Please...Rem.....]

He just prays sincerely for Rem to be safe.

For her to open her eyes, call his name, and smile at him. That's all.

If Subaru, as someone who couldn't do anything back in that situation, had the right to shamelessly beg for a miracle, that would be the only thing he'd wish for. Nothing else.

[Subaru: ——]

Subaru somehow made it back to the tenement house as he desperately prayed to the heavens. He forces the slide door open with his feet and puts down Rem in the dark room. He did not wipe his face dripping with sweat. When he turned on the light in the room, he spread a futon in a hurry, and he moved Rem onto it.

[Subaru: Rem...Rem.....answer me...Rem.....]

Even though he called her name, there was no response from Rem, who kept breathing painfully. With a sorrowful look, Subaru gently loosened the sash of her kimono, and he took off her sleeves. The borrowed kimono was tangled everywhere, and it seems she had dropped the hairpin that she had on her hair.

It was as if the Rem he saw this night dressed up, smiling gorgeously, was just a dream.

[Subaru: Rem...please.....]

He scoops up water into a bucket and wipes Rem's forehead and the back of her neck with a wet towel. He feels a fever from the forehead he touched. He couldn't tell if it was a slight fever or a high fever. Currently, Subaru himself was in a condition where his anxiety and agitation wouldn't die down, and he couldn't say that he was at a normal body temperature.

Right now, he had no choice but to wait for Halibel to bring a magic user as soon as possible.

Even here, there was not a single thing Subaru could do.

[Subaru: Rem.....]

Subaru holds onto Rem's hand as she laid down on the futon, and he prays at the girl's thin fingers.

*Nothing happen, please. Please, wake up, I beg of you. If you could just wake up safely, smile like nothing happened, and then call my name—*

[Subaru: ——]

Who knows how long his praying went for. When Subaru heard a sound behind him, he was in a trance. It was the sound of a door opening. No doubt about it, Halibel had arrived with a magic user.

Hoping for that, Subaru turns around, and he was tried to say, "Take a look at Rem"—

[???: —Huh? What's up with that pathetic look. I can't bear to look at it.]

The woman leaning against the side door with her arms crossed says that in a contemptuous tone. That makes Subaru's thoughts freeze completely for a moment.

It was a woman dressed in a kimono. She was wearing a pure white dress that was completely clean. She was wearing the white kimono with the right side over the left, and it looked like burial clothes. However, her dress' hakama was shortened to the middle of her thighs, and he couldn't find any sign of "death's" shadow in her freely exposed long, thin legs and white skin.

The tips of her short, milky white hair were made into an uneven shaggy cut. Her sharp almond eyes were deep indigo blue. Although she had provocative facial features, they made an oddly beautiful face.

It was beauty created because it was unpolished and uneven. It was like an accidental beautiful face that was created as a result of a wild animals putting together whatever they thought was beautiful—it was an uncanny work of art made up of truly beautiful things without even being particular about beauty.

An unordinarily beautiful face that would take anyone's breath away and make them lose their sense of reality. Subaru looked at that with his very own eyes, but the woman's beauty wasn't why he stiffened up.

He had a memory of the woman's face, although vague. And it was also a very recent memory—

[???: Hello? I'm talking to you. Do you even hear me?]

[Subaru: Y—You.....]

[???: Oh. You can talk after all. Can you cut that out? It freaks me out when I get ignored. Cause, you know...]

After Subaru's trembling voice made the woman open her eyes wide, she put her hands together in front of her chest. And then, she had a slight smile on her face—a ferocious smile a carnivore would have upon finding its prey, and she said,

[???: —If you die before I kill you, that would dishonor the “Shinigami” name.]

[Subaru: —]

The woman—the second attack of the woman that had continued to chant death makes Subaru move on impulse

He grabs the water bucket near Rem's pillow and throws it as hard as he could at the woman. He wasn't expecting it to do damage. He just needed to keep her in check. In fact, the woman had dodged the thrown bucket and the water thrown out of it with a displeased look.

[Subaru: Ruaaa—!]

That's when Subaru tackled the woman from a low position in order to grab onto her waist. He'd have a chance if he pushed her down and got on top of her. He'd smash her head with all his might. He was going to do it. He was prepared to do that easily with all the anger and energy he had right now—

[???: —Can you not hug me just because I'm cute?]

[Subaru: Ga—!?!]

The low charge at her stomach gets blocked. The woman backs away easily, and when she grabbed the back of Subaru's head with her right arm as he was bent forward, she immediately held him to the ground by brute force. Subaru's nose hits the wooden floor, and he sees sparks. His face gets crushed by such brute strength that you wouldn't believe that they were thin arms.

He grinds his teeth, and he bends the lower half of his body like a Shachihoko<sup>1</sup> while having his face on the ground. He goes for the woman's head with his imperfect heel attack, and she brushed it away with her free hand in an annoyed manner. However, distracting her, even if it was just for a little bit, was good enough. He twists his body, forces the woman's hand off of his neck, and jumped up.

[???: Yuck, you're covered.....in sweat!]

[Subaru: Like I care!!]

He waves his right hand and jumps at the frowning woman yet again. He kept going for the lower half of her body. At least there wasn't a clear difference in ability for standing techniques<sup>2</sup>. He'd force her out of the tenement house and keep Rem away from danger, even if it was just for a little bit. Even if it really was just for a little bit.

[Subaru: —Dzu..raa!]

His spirit was superior, and he tackled the woman's waist before her arms could stop it. He holds onto her thin waist by force, throws her at the door vigorously, and she immediately rolls out of the tenement house. He instantly tried to get on her to get the upper hand, but...

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<sup>1</sup> Animal in Japanese folklore with the head of a tiger and the body of a carp  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shachihoko>

<sup>2</sup> Judo techniques performed from a standing posture

[???: Don't get so cocky!]

Before the woman fell to the ground on her back, she hit Subaru's chest with her knee as he clinged to her, and the impact of her long, beautiful legs sharply pierced Subaru's body, as if gouging his intestines. He chokes, and all of his bones crack. Even if he tried to hold onto her with his arms, the structure of his human body wouldn't let him.

Subaru was the one who came off and fell to the ground. He immediately tries to get up to scratch off dirt. But the woman put her bare feet on his head and pushed it to the ground.

[Subaru: Go....o.....]

[???: Don't get up, stay down. You'll dirty the air. Sweat will fly.]

He lifted his arms and grabbed onto the woman's thin ankles. He strengthens his grip. She didn't budge an inch. She snorts at his resistance, and once again, she swung down her foot that she lifted easily. She crushes his nose. Twice, thrice—

[Subaru: Ka...a.....]

[???: Don't touch me, pervert. I didn't come here to fool around with you. Listen. Go to sleep.]

She steps on Subaru one more time for good measure, and he was silent. Seeing Subaru dead tired with his blood spreading onto the ground, the woman turns around with satisfaction, and she started to go back to the tenement house.



She said that her goal wasn't to play around with Subaru. The woman's goal was not about Subaru—

[Subaru: —What are you trying to do?]

[???: ———]

Subaru was clinging onto the woman's legs while having his nose crushed and dirtying the ground with his nose blood. Dirt and blood dirty her white skin. The woman's eyes were getting colder.

[???: Get off of me.]

The woman's sharp demand was frank. Her breathing sounded suspicious, and Subaru couldn't respond with words.

He just put his other arm around the woman's ankle, which he was already clinging onto with one arm, to express his intent.

[???: Look.....]

The woman brushes up her hair and looks at Subaru, who stuck onto her, in dumbfoundment. And then she sighed and kneed the man who was glaring at her with his face dirty with nose blood.

[???: I said get the hell off of me.]

She knees his lower jaw, and the intense impact bounces the brain inside his cranium. The cerebral concussion even makes him feel like he was losing consciousness, and he saw blood from his nasal cavity get on her dress.

He falls down. Still, he didn't let go. He was grabbing onto her, and he wouldn't let her go.

[???: You're going to die.]

[Subaru: Hyaa.....]

He shook his head disapprovingly. The pain...the pain was unusual; it was irritating his whole body, and his head was being affected the most.

His crushed face, kicked body, kneed lower jaw, his whole body hit by unbelievable strength was having a big chorus of pain and powerlessness.

The danger alert was going off as loud as possible, and the fear that made him feel like "death" was near makes his hands and legs go cold. His vision was blurred by either blood or tears, and his shaking was getting worse and worse.

Death was right before his eyes. The woman Subaru was grabbing onto right now was the embodiment of death. She was a Shinigami.

"Death" is scary. Terrifying. Subaru feared "death" more than anyone in this world.

Doing as the woman said and begging for forgiveness was the right move if he wanted to avoid "death" and get away.

But, but, but, he wasn't allowed to do it. She wouldn't let him do it. And he couldn't do it because—

[???: —You can't stop me. After all, you are a loser]

Subaru's resistance was all for naught; the woman started walking. She enters the tenement house without even pulling him off as if to say that he was nothing to her. She goes up, steps on the tatami mat, and heads towards Rem.

[Subaru: Gi...ga—]

He bites on the tatami mat and tries to stop her. The tatami mat tears off of the floor. He stretches his legs to a pillar and hanged onto her knee. He takes him off by force. He gets dragged along, and he resists as he scratched the tatami mat. He resists.

[???: You just don't know when to give up, do you. You poor sport. Aren't you ashamed of struggling so much?]

[Subaru: Oooo! Oooo!!]

[???: So unsightly! So unsightly so unsightly so unsightly! So low! So lame! Are you stupid!?!]

She harms Subaru with abusive language, but he still shook his head stubbornly like a child. Subaru would try to stop the women, even if it meant bleeding, losing teeth, and having his limbs torn off.

His unreasonable stubbornness makes the woman click her tongue irritatedly—

[???: This is retribution, but it still leaves a bad taste in my mouth! I am just.....]

The woman grimaces with her beautiful face and she makes it to the futon with Subaru. Then, she looks down at Rem, who was sleeping there, and turned her palm towards her.

If that palm reached Rem, her sleep would end in an undesired way. Thus, Subaru called out to her woefully—right after, the woman stopped moving.

[???: —Ah?]

The woman's mouth was wide open with her hand reached out towards Rem. She then knits her brows and takes a long look at Rem, who breathed painfully. From top to bottom, slowly.

Subaru swallows saliva with blood without knowing what that look meant.

[Subaru: What...are you.....]

[???: Ahhh! Damn it! Are you serious!? This won't do! I can't do this!]

The next moment, the woman suddenly erupts, and she kicked at the tatami mat as she roughly clicked her tongue. And then, the woman shakes off Subaru, whose eyes opened wide because of her strange behavior, and he sends him flying towards the corner of the room.

[Subaru: Damni.....]

Subaru's carelessness leads to her being released, and he completely regretted his mistake. He falls onto the tatami mat, immediately gets back up, and he tries to grab onto the woman. Then the woman attacked his face with her bare feet.

[Subaru: Ga.....]

[???: Calm down. Good grief, what a noisy man.]

With a dumbfounded look, the woman looks down on Subaru, whose shout was stopped by her kick, and he collapsed onto the tatami mat. After that, the woman points at her own nicely shaped nose as she said,

[???: Your face looks pretty ugly now. Can it be fixed?]

[Subaru: ——]

[???: Sure sucks to be a human. Since if you get scarred, it stays there.]

The woman says just that, and she alternates between looking at Subaru and Rem in an annoyed manner. He could tell that the emotion in her eyes wasn't peaceful. So, he had to get up and restrain her. However, his body wouldn't listen to him—

[???: Time is up, huh. Guess I have to go.]

[Subaru: ——]

Stricken with a sense of helplessness, Subaru gets left behind, and he hears the woman let those words out. Her eyes were not looking at Subaru and Rem, but at the open entrance. She then went towards the entrance—towards the tenement house, just like she said, without doing anything to Subaru and Rem.

[Subaur: Wai.....]

[???: Just curse at your bad luck. Tremble and regret as much as possible.]

He was unable to put together the words to stop her, and he had no clue what the woman's sharp parting remark meant.

Subaru just stayed silent, stained the tatami mat with the blood coming from his nose, and he could only watch the woman leave.

Then for a while it was just Subaru and Rem, who was breathing painfully, left in the room

[Halibel: —Su-san? Are you okay? What happened!?!]

Halibel arrives late to the chaotic situation. When he was called out to by the dog face that rushed up to him, Subaru moved to breath heavily from his nose clogged with blood and his mouth as he said,

[Subaru: .....Take...care of...Rem.]

Subaru says that to the wolf man taking a look, and his consciousness disappeared.

4

[???: With this, the treatment is over for now. Now you just have to rest.]

The old healing magic user says that, and he wiped off the remaining traces of blood on Subaru's face. The old magic user actually quickly finished the treatment after he examined Subaru, who was half alive.

Because of that, he went from having wounds all over his body to having serious body bruises, and the dull pain in his nose settled down to a level where he could ignore it. Now he'd have no trouble doing the very least: standing and walking.

[Halibel: Su-san, how are you? Think you're good? Think you're gonna die?]

[Subaru: When I bite with my jaw, I feel pain that feels like my body is getting joint locked, but I'm not dying somehow. Thanks. ....Thanks, but...]

[Halibel: Hold it hold it. I know that you want to prioritize Rem-chan. However, you can't just forget about your condition.]

Halibel, who shrugged his shoulders, and he forced his opinion before Subaru could, who mumbled.

Halibel had returned to the tenement house, and the one he looked at was Subaru, who had stained the tatami middle in the middle of the room with blood and fainted as he said something like a will before doing so. Rem was sleeping on a futon, and if Subaru were to debate who was having more of an emergency, unfortunately he'd have no chance of winning.

But, in Subaru's heart, he still wanted to prioritize Rem—

[Halibel: Rem-chan can't do whatever she wants, of course. However, that goes for you too. That's the decision I came to fairly with Sensei. You owe me, right? Forgive me in consideration of that.]

[Subaru: Owe you.....]

For letting them live in the tenement house, and for saving his life just now—he kept getting more and more indebted to Halibel. Plus, he wasn't so shameless that he'd consider worrying him as paying off his debt.

[Subaru: Okay. But apart from that, Sensei, please take care of Rem.]

[???: Leave it up to me. You guys are getting in my way. Leave to the front.]

The old magic user responded bluntly and waved at Subaru, who bowed his head. Following his instructions, Subaru and Halibel leave to the front of

the tenement house. On the way, Halibel stretched his long arms and helped prevent Subaru from almost losing his balance because of body pain.

[Halibel: Woah. You have to be careful, Su-san. You just started recovering two minutes ago.]

[Subaru: You start to worry too quickly. ....But you really did save me.]

[Halibel: Su-san being honest...this is just wrong. But it pains me to be thanked. After all, I really failed at predicting an attack in the tenement house.]

The two of them were sitting next to each other on a bench placed in front of the tenement house. When Halibel lit his kiseru, the smoke he inhaled went out into the night sky, and he said that.

[Halibel: I didn't expect her to attack continuously. I thought that she wouldn't act for a few days.]

[Subaru: It wasn't even close to a few days. We met again within 10-20 minutes.]

[Halibel: I was really shocked when I saw you bloody in the room. I thought to myself, "I messed up by sending Su-san back home alooone. Let's not make the same mistake next timeeee."]

[Subaru: That won't situation won't happen to me again.]

[Halibel: So, I was going to go attack the enemy, and then Su-san talked. I thought your heart had stopped beating. I thought you were dead.]

[Subaru: .....Aah, right.]



[Halibel: ——]

Halibel goes from looking at the sky to looking at Subaru's profile. It was a brief exchange, but it was clear that Subaru's thoughts were elsewhere. Subaru was not focused on his conversation with Halibel; he was thinking all about Rem's well-being as she was being diagnosed in the room right behind them.

He trusted the old magic user's skill in relation to external wounds, enough with his own body. However, Rem didn't have external wounds. It was an illness, or perhaps——

[Halibel: I don't think it's magic, though I only took a glance. Incidentally, you can consider it to be different from a kind of black magic. Rest assured.]

[Subaru: How can you be so sure?]

[Halibel: Because I'm a black magic specialist. You can believe in my stamp of approval.]

[Subaru: A black magic specialist.....? I can't just let that comment slip by.]

[Halibel: There's a long story to my past. For now, just think of it as one less thing to worry about.]

Although it was a pretty impactful reveal, Subaru didn't object to Halibel's statement. It was concerning. However, he wasn't concerned about it right now.

Just like Halibel said, that was one less possibility of a threat to Rem's life. Even if it didn't make him feel relieved, it was enough to ease his mind.

And so, they waited for a while as the smoke Halibel gave out went into the night air—

[???: —Thanks for waiting.]

[Subaru: Sensei! Rem, how's Rem!?!]

[???: It's night right now and there's a girl sleeping, so quiet down. —I have something to tell you. Come inside.]

Showing only his face outside, the old magic user beckons Subaru to come in. Impatience and the somewhat alarming atmosphere makes Subaru catch his breath, and he slowly went back inside the room.

The room was still in its disorderly state caused by him raging at a woman. Only the futon Rem was sleeping in was fixed nicely, and it made him feel that the old magic user was somewhat thoughtful.

[???: Hey idiot over there, put out your kiseru's fire. It'll harm her.]

[Halibel: But usually you wouldn't say anything unnecessary. ....Okay okay, fine I get it.]

Glared at sharply, Halibel obeyed the old magic user and put out his kiseru's fire. He sat down heavily at the entrance, and Subaru's mind makes him come towards Rem's bedside. The old magic user sitting at the side opposite of Subaru begins speaking with a hoarse voice as he said, "Alright".

[???: Let's start with the good news. This girl is not unconscious because she's injured or has an illness. And I'm guessing you've heard from that idiot that it has nothing to do with a curse.]

[Subaru: .....Yeah.]

[???: Basically, this means there is nothing wrong with her.]

[Subaru: Huh? No wait.....]

The old magic user's statement makes Subaru's eyes widen, as he couldn't understand what he was saying.

He said nothing was wrong. Rem collapsed. Her breathing sounding painful. These were all true facts. Although, her breathing was calm now, perhaps because of the treatment.

[Subaru: Sensei, Rem collapsed. She was in pain. Examine her more thoroughly!]

[???: You're an idiot, just like the one over there. You jump to conclusions too quickly. I'm not done talking.]

[Halibel: You don't have to call people idiots.....]

[???: Quiet, idiot. And I'm going to tell this idiot something. That was the good news.....now I'm going to tell you the better news.]

[Subaru: The better news?]

There wasn't anything wrong with Rem, so what kind of unbelievable news did he have in store for him next? Subaru decided to keep silent in hopes that his next words would provide clarity.

And then, after a pause, the old magic user continued speaking to Subaru, who waited for his words.

[???: —Congratulations.]

[Subaru: Huh?]

Subaru was taken aback by the next word he said, and let out a sigh.

—He didn't fully understanding the word "Congratulations"<sup>3</sup>. Was it a name of a person? A name of a place? Whichever one it was, it was a different world proper noun that Subaru wasn't familiar with. What did it mean?

[Subaru: Um, so you're saying.....Rem can be saved because of 'Congratulations'?)

[???: Hey, playboy. There might be someone who's dumber than you are.]

The old magic user scratched his head with a dumbfounded look as Subaru questioned him with a stiff expression. Halibel scratched his head similarly as he went, "Well" and tried to make him see the matter his way.

[Halibel: Shouldn't you have told him in a different way? I'm not surprised that this confused him.]

[Subaru: What do you mean 'confused me'!? Please just tell me! What's happening to Rem.....]

[Halibel: You see, Su-san. By congratulations he means *congratulations*. And I congratulate you too.]

Congratulations, or rather, '*congratulations*': the word that was repeated to Subaru, who was confused.

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<sup>3</sup> The word used here is Omedetaya(おめでたや), which is the type of congratulations used for events like when someone is pregnant. However, it is written in katakana and Subaru thinks 'Omedetaya' is a name

That word meant—

[???: Your wife is pregnant. It's your child.]

[Subaru: Pregnant.....she's pregnant!?!]

The old magic user's explanation shocks Subaru as his eyes opened wide.

Pregnant, congrats, congratulations—all that goes around inside his head, beating up his brain. Subaru continued to be confused as the magic user looked at Rem with a serious expression.

[???: Don't worry about her being unconscious. She just exhausted herself so much that she became light-headed. She'll get up soon if you let her rest. Collapsing is not something that should be praised, though.]

[Halibel: She does push herself way more than your average wife, after all. We can't learn anything from what happened tonight. That being said, this doesn't mean that we could be completely relaxed, either.]

Halibel was murmuring about how Rem ended up exhausting so much that she fainted.

It's true that they couldn't learn anything from what happened tonight. They weren't going to get attacked frequently like that. Still, it wasn't like they had fought off the enemy; she just retreated on her own for some reason. He couldn't possibly believe that everything was over now.

[Halibel: But she really didn't kill you when she could have, huh.]

Just like Halibel said, the woman had plenty of chances to kill Subaru and Rem before he arrived.

She was hostile enough to make him tremble, and yet nothing happened with it. It was also true that she settled down. That's how they escaped death by the skin of their teeth. Her true motive was still not clear at all, though.

[Halibel: —Su-san, are you okay?]

[Subaru: .....Eh...ah]

Halibel taps Subaru's shoulder, as he wouldn't participate in the conversation, and he looks at his face. After doing all that, Subaru finally returns back to reality, and his eyes met the slit eyes in front of him.

His mind and heart were a mess with chaos and confusion.

It seemed Halibel could tell, and so when he made eye contact with the old magic user and they nodded at each other he said,

[Halibel: Su-san, we'll be leaving for the night. The girl from earlier shouldn't come now. I have something I want to tell you, but that can wait until tomorrow. ....Sensei.]

[???: Let your wife sleep. You should get some rest tonight, too.]

[Halibel: So that's that.]

Halibel and the old magic user take turns speaking to Subaru, and he nodded at them in silence like a doll. When he made that slow movement, Halibel grabbed onto Subaru's head, and then he forced him to turn around to Rem.

[Halibel: Su-san, you have to be the first one Rem-chan sees when she wakes up. Got it?]

[Subaru: —. G—Got it.]

He tells Subaru something else again, and his eyes finally vacantly settle on one place. Halibel makes sure Rem was in his black eyes, and he quietly gets up with the old magic user as they leave the room.

He was helped countless times in this night alone. Subaru really should've stood up and saw off the two of them, but he didn't have the energy to stand up, and they didn't want him to do that.

They put the fallen door back up, and the helpful guests leave the room behind. Left behind, Subaru silently reaches out for Rem's hot hand as she was lying down on the futon.

Chaos and confusion were still heavily disturbing Subaru's mind. They told him to rest, but even if Subaru was shameless enough to sleep in a situation like this, he wasn't going to be irresponsible.

First he was going to wait for Rem to wake up and make sure that she truly was safe. Subaru had to make sure of it before he could think about anything else.

[Subaru: —Rem.]

Subaru shortly calls her name, and he continues to gaze at the girl's face as she slept.

Only the breathing of Subaru and Rem, the married couple, was left in the room.

A few hours had probably passed since then.

It was about to be the break of dawn when Rem nervously opened her eyes slightly.

[Rem: .....Subaru...-kun?]

The color of the sky changes into signs of morning, and the dim light faintly shines on the room through the window. A weak light was in Rem's bright, light blue eyes in this scene that was shaded a color between black and blue.

[Subaru: —Mm. Good morning, Rem.]

Rem's voice, which made it sound like she was dreaming in a way, brings Subaru back to reality.

Subaru's thoughts were engulfed in a swirl of stagnation in these past few hours he spent staring at Rem's sleeping face.

The tumultuous day, the busy banquet at night, suddenly having his life threatened on the streets at night, getting severely hurt at his own home he arrived to, the opinion of the old magic user that came afterwards, his thoughts on all of that were put on hold.

It felt like he kept having recurring thoughts, and it also felt like he kept looking away from them. In any case, he used waiting for Rem's awakening as an excuse to avoid wanting an answer

The time he could've used to run away ended, and it was now the time to face the situation.



[Subaru: Rem...umm.....]

Rem blinks with her tired eyes, and she slowly moves her head while being half-awake. In the middle of doing this, she notices Subaru holding onto her hand, and she happily broke into a smile as she went, “Hehe”.

[Rem: What’s wrong, Subaru-kun? You were holding my hand while I was sleeping.....]

Rem’s flower-like smile slowly stiffens, and she starts to open her eyes. Her consciousness gets freed from the cage of slumber, she puts her thoughts in order as the memory of last night came back to her vividly.

Rem holds onto Subaru’s hand harder, and when she sat up in a panic she said,

[Rem: S—Subaru-kun, are you injured!? I fainted, and then...aah, why.....]

[Subaru: Calm down, Rem. I’m fine. And I don’t.....have any injuries now.]

Subaru hid the second disaster that happened in the tenement house, although he did hesitate a bit.

If he made it clearer, the traces of Subaru getting physically abused in the room would become noticeable. However, she wouldn’t be able to tell with the current dimness anyway. It was okay to cover it up, just for this moment.

Fortunately, Subaru’s reply didn’t make Rem suspect any chaos, and she was relieved.

[Rem: Thank goodness. If anything happened to Subaru-kun after that, I would be very.....]

[Subaru: I hate to admit it, but it's all thanks to Hal-san.....to Halibel. He fought off that suspicious person.]

[Rem: Oh, I see. Halibel-sama did. I'll have to thank him later.]

It seemed that her memory was clear to a certain extent, and that she remembered Halibel coming in to help. In fact, it seemed like Rem clearly remembered things that happened up to the point where she was about to faint.

Once she closed her lips tightly, she continued with a, “So” as she said,

[Rem: What happened to me.....]

[Subaru: You...]

[Rem: What I remember is that Halibel-sama showed up, and then I focused on my forehead to protect you as much as possible. However, that's when my consciousness faded away and.....]

With her free hand, Rem touches her forehead—the spot where her horn appears, and she knits her thin brows. Her poor condition and fainting—Rem had no idea what was the cause of those things.

[Rem: I've never fainted like that before.....umm, I'm sorry.]

[Subaru: Y—You don't need to apologize. I should be the one doing that. You're always saving me.....I wasn't able to move promptly in a time like that.....that was really pathetic of me.]

[Rem: No, that's not true.....]

Rem's apologetic attitude hurts him inside. Subaru shakes his head at her apology, and harshly condemned himself.

He could not be afraid anymore, and that also went for the powerlessness and cowardice he described to her. He was being spoiled by Rem's feeling of guilt and delaying important news for as long as possible.

After confirming Rem's safety, his thoughts would move one step forward—he had to move forward.

[Subaru: Rem, listen. The truth is that you were examined by a magic user. After you suddenly collapsed.]

[Rem: —Okay.]

Subaru had a determined look, and Rem nodded with seemingly stiff cheeks.

With a serious look, he told her that she was examined by a doctor. It was natural for her to be nervous. However, Subaru, with how he was right now, really did not have the composure to show concern for her nervousness.

He hesitated many times, and wet his dry lips. Seeing Subaru do that, Rem closed her eyes as she said,

[Rem: Subaru-kun, please let it out. Whatever the truth is, I'll accept it.]

[Subaru: .....Ah]

[Rem: Even if it's that I don't have much time left, I'd like to spend it with Subaru-kun and.....]

[Subaru: —Apparently, you're pregnant.]

He interrupts her with that.

[Rem: Huh?]

*He's going to let me know that I have a serious illness.* Rem was preparing herself for something like that, and so she was taken aback.

Rem opens her eyes, and she was looking at Subaru in dumbfoundment. Subaru nods at her, forgets about the dryness of his lips, pushes away his hesitation, and repeats himself.

[Subaru: Rem, you have a baby inside of you. —A child, and it's ours.]

[Rem: ——]

Hearing those repeated words, with her eyes wide open, Rem rubs her stomach with her hand that Subaru wasn't holding onto. She still couldn't tell with how it looked. It could be a misdiagnosis. That's how unreal it felt.

A new life was inside of Rem. And it was theirs.

[Subaru: Were there any signs? Something that seemed weird.]

[Rem: I had...a slight fever...for a bit.....I just thought that maybe I was tired. After finally settling in one town and being relieved, my body was tired.....that's what I thought.]

Rem answers Subaru's awkward question while choking.

He was bothered by the fact that Rem didn't tell him about the noticeable symptoms of her slight fever, but he understood how she felt. It was when their lives were finally starting to settle down. She didn't want to use her poor health as a reason to interrupt that. Subaru would've done the same thing if he was in her position.

[Rem: A child...inside of me...a child. Subaru-kun's...and mine.....]

[Subaru: You fainted because you've been acting different. You're in this condition where you get tired more easily than usual, and you've been getting exposed to tanger, getting tense, exhausted...]

[Rem: I—I'm sorry.]

[Subaru: Like I said, you don't have to apologize. I've always been the one who should be apologizing.]

He made Rem overwork herself, which he shouldn't have done.

Even though he didn't know that she was pregnant, that was no excuse. He selfishly brought Rem with him, and he was a burden to her because of his own incompetence.

They did not finally have an everyday life; even a dangerous situation like that was just like how they were before.

[Subaru: —]

He couldn't forgive himself for that. The one who couldn't even move in his last moment. The weak one who couldn't even accomplish his goal of not letting that person get close to Rem and was saved just because she was fickle.

The one who was always hurting Rem, Natsuki Subaru—.

[Rem: Subaru-kun.....umm]

[Subaru: What is it?]

The hesitation in Rem's words becomes clear. Subaru notices her agitation, and he spoke as kindly as possible with his voice to get her to relax.

As he did, he had only one thing in his mind, which was that he wanted keep her away from him after all the times he's hurt her.

Rem nervously begins to talk to Subaru as he felt that way.

[Rem: Subaru-kun...what do...you think?]

[Subaru: What do I...by that do you mean.....]

[Rem: We...have.....a c—child...about that, do...]

“You regret it?”. —Her next words were probably going to be something like that.

Rem's weakness for not saying it and his own stupidity for making her say it make Subaru tremble, as if he was struck by thunder.

He was an idiot. A complete idiot. There should've been other things he had to say to her other than the fact that there was a baby inside of her at this moment and that they were blessed with a child. There were things, but he was such an idiot.

[Subaru: I...]

Subaru speaks reflexively, and that's when he had trouble putting it into words. Rem's watery eyes were sincerely staring straight at Subaru, waiting for his answer.

Doing something like saying a thoughtless statement on the spur of the moment would be unacceptable. Now was the time to make his frozen thoughts move again in front of Rem and ask his mind a question.

—The new life inside Rem is Natsuki Subaru's.

The first emotions he felt when he imagined seriously facing their new life that was growing.

That was—

[Subaru: Let's...see. —I think I like it and I'm glad.]

[Rem:——]

[Subaru: We have a child.....a baby. And that...makes me.....]

He faces the first, the very first deep emotions he had.

He felt surprised. He also felt anxious. But, more importantly, he felt passion. Natsuki Subaru defined that passion welling up in him as the first time he learned what it meant to be glad.

Subaru was happy to have a child with a girl so precious to him.

[Subaru: —Rem!]

[Rem: Fua!?!]

Subaru gives in to the urge hurting his chest, and he hugs Rem without thinking.

That sudden action surprises Rem, and the warmth she felt from Subaru, who was very close to her, makes her goggle in astonishment. Subaru brings his lips near her ears, and with everything he felt, he said,

[Subaru: Thank you, Rem. —Thank you. Thank you, Rem.]

[Rem: Subaru...-ku.....]

[Subaru: I'm so happy. We have a kid.....a family.]

[Rem: —Ah]

Subaru cleared away his anxiety about the distant future, acted on the impulse he felt at this moment, and all of his words were his true feelings.

He had a baby with Rem. The two people who lived in Kararagi and called themselves a married couple, although it was just for form's sake—they were going to become a true family.

[Rem: Oo...foo...]

Being hugged, Rem nervously put her arms around Subaru's back. While hugging each other on the futon, Rem lets out a voice from her lips that sounded like crying.

It had to be the relief brought by the needle of his words breaking up the anxiety that had been growing endlessly.

[Subaru: Thank you, Rem.]



[Rem: N—No.....no, wait. I'm the one that should be.....]

[Subaru: Thank you, Rem.]

Still hugging each other, Subaru expresses his gratitude again to Rem, who let out a sob. When Rem accepted it, her throat clogs up, and warm tears fell down from her eyes.

The intense impulse inside Subaru's chest naturally goes to his throat, and then into his eyes, spreading all through his body, and he begins to shake.

[Subaru: Ah...haha...hahaha.....]

He tries to hide it before that impulse turned into tears and then into sobbing. His laughter was also shaky, and as a result, he couldn't hide anything anymore, though.

This was the moment where he just simply wanted to share the joy of being blessed with life as a married couple.

Because even if there were still things he had to think about, anxiety, and danger—

[Rem: Subaru-kun, thank you. —I love you.]

Subaru's gratitude and Rem's confession were, without a doubt, real.