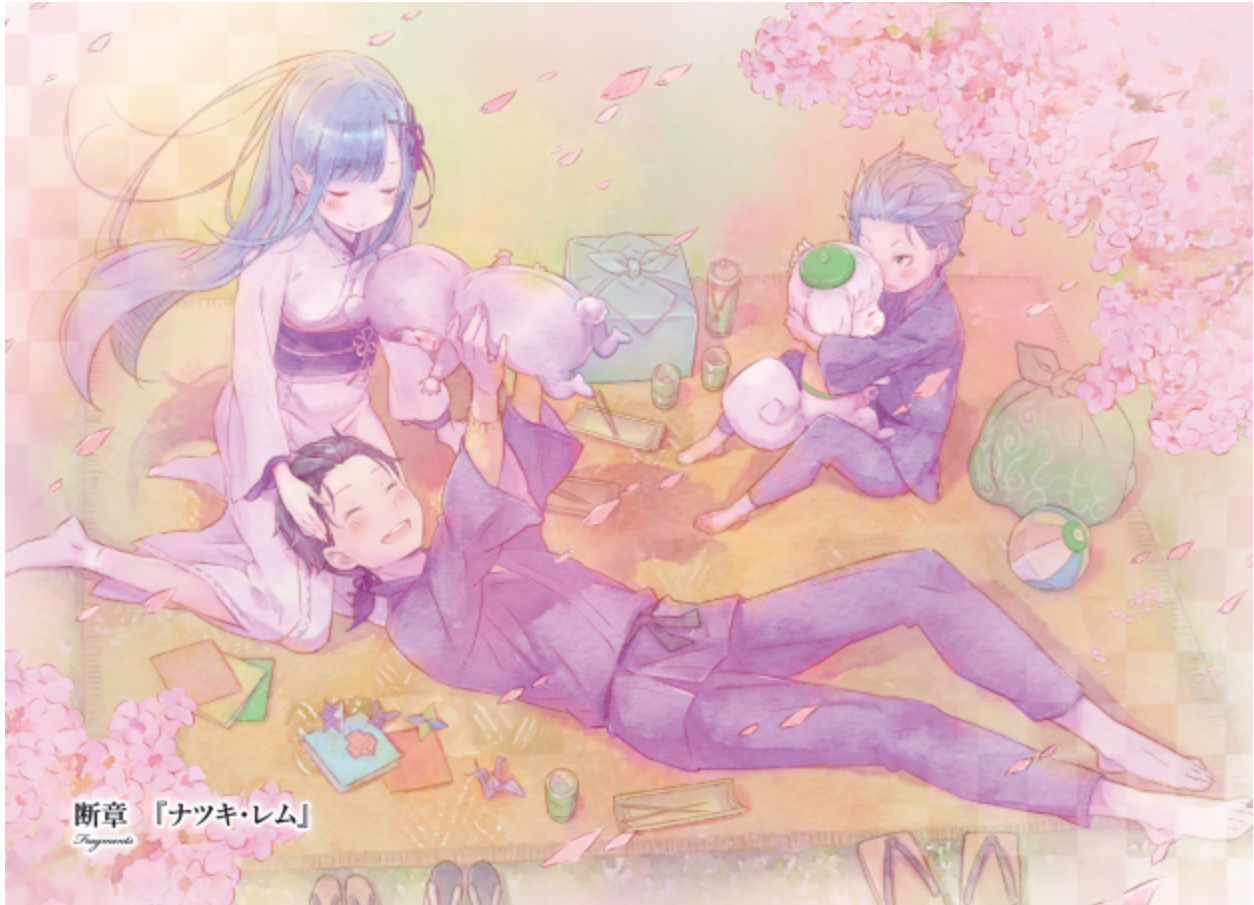


Chapter 4: 6 Months



This took much longer than expected. I kind of just took like a 6 day break so it ended up taking this long. I wanted to get this done before summer ends, but doesn't look like it's happening at this rate. A heads up, I may be taking a break for a few months this book. I want to focus more on school and I want more time to do other things. If I do take a break, it's just going to be a break though. I have pre-ordered an artbook that has all the store special stories, so there will be more short stories once that comes in around like october? I will be doing the Rem side stories in that package. I'll decide what to do once this book is finished. Also the site domain has finally changed to remonwater.wordpress.com.

Subaru and Rem's moving finished quickly.

Because all they did was move the undamaged belongings to the next room.

The tenement house room assignment went smoothly. The room they had originally lived in was left to Tia, while Subaru, Rem, and Halibel lived to the left and right of it.

They did propose the idea of leaving a room in between each of them, but—

[Tia: Suggesting to keep the rooms apart...So you're saying that you do feel guilty!]

Then, it had to be rejected because of Tia loudly suspecting them. After several nights, Tia would end up regretting the room assignments with a red face since voices could clearly be heard in adjoining rooms, probably because of the thickness of the walls.

In any case, the moving finished without any problems, and so began the life of the strange neighbors in the tenement house.

[Tia: I gotta make money.]

[Halibel: That's the first thing you're gonna say in the morning?]

Gathered at the breakfast table, Tia suddenly started the conversation like that, holding a chopstick in each hand.

The round tea table used as a dining table split into two last night, so they hurriedly forced the broken boards together for temporary use.

Two outsiders were sitting at the dining table for some reason—they were Tia and Halibel. They were shamelessly enjoying meals together, even asking for seconds, taking advantage of Rem's kindness.

Not to mention, Tia's face was so bad at using chopsticks that her whole face was covered with grains of rice.

[Tia: Listen here. I may be allowed to live in that shabby room, but I don't want to if it's a mess like that. Screw that. Which is why I'm asking you to hurry up and fix it. And then...]

[Halibel: Maybe if Su-san and Rem-chan were paying for it, but there's no way I'll lend you money. Borrowing and lending money doesn't work without trust. Like, you've already ruined any trust you had, how shameless can you be?]

[Tia: Hey, come on! What do you think?]

[Subaru: Your face caught my attention so much that I couldn't join in on the conversation, riceling.]

Her rice makeup was too next level for Subaru to understand it.

His point makes Tia's face turn sour. While she carefully picked the rice off of it, Rem nodded at her as she said, "I see."

[Rem: So Tia-sama is looking for a job. Well, that's not our problem.]

[Tia: You know, lately I feel like your words have been hitting me where it hurts.....]

[Rem: Subaru-kun's just one step away from being a regular employee. He's already far ahead of you. There's no recovering from this. Subaru-kun won.]

[Tia: Forget about that male's victory, I just wanna know what exactly you're trying to say.]

Rem roots for Subaru, breathing heavily as she laughed "tee-hee", and Tia urged her to go on as she raised her hand. Seeing that, Rem clears her throat, and then,

[Rem: I think you should use an employment agency. I highly recommend finding a job you're a good at and earning money.]

[Subaru: So your best bet is to get referred at Clane's employment agency.....hm. By the way, are you even good at anything? And do you have any qualifications?]

[Tia: My specialty is killing. I don't feel like killing right now, though.]

[Subaru: There's no way you'd find a killing job with that unmotivated attitude!]

Tia folds her arms, and she threw out her busty chest, rice still stuck on her face. Still, if they take her words into account and recommend murder, they very well might end up quickly regretting last night's decision.

Subaru gives Halibel, who knew the town very well, a quick glance, seeking help.

[Halibel: Hmm, let's see. Requests for murder aren't posted on the employment agency bulletin board.]

[Tia: M—Makes sense.]

[Halibel: Stuff like that are hidden in the back. If he knows you, that is.]

[Subaru: It's the dark side of the town I never knew about—!]

Perhaps even employment agencies recognized by towns have shady jobs. Subaru felt down, as he felt like he just found out about the good-natured lizard faced man's complicated circumstances.

[Halibel: No no no, it's a joke. Just a joke. You shouldn't take it seriously.]

[Subaru: Huh? A joke? Oh, I see, thank goodness. You really had me worried there. I don't know how I'd face that cute apron wearing lizard from then on.]

[Halibel: Clane doesn't accept those kind of jobs. Unauthorized employment agencies handle that sort of stuff.]

[Subaru: From now on, I will never use anything other than authorized employment agencies.]

[Rem: Actually, if you get fully approved this time, Clane-sama will never have to help you again, so make that your goal.]

[Subaru: Ohh, that's right!]

It's pointed out that his goal was being lowered by trying to keep things as they are, making him have a realization. While feeling thankful for Rem having his back, Subaru felt more motivated to work at the palace.

Yesterday, the staff also cared about him. Starting today, he'd go full throttle.

[Subaru: My motivation has went up now that I think about it that way. All right, let's go to work!]

[Rem: Yeah!]

[Tia: No! What about me!?!]

Tia erupted when Subaru and Rem got excited and stood up hand in hand. With her hands, she threw the food left on her plate into her mouth, chewed on it and swallowed, and then

[Tia: Introduce me to this guy I don't really know! And then I'll do a killing job!]

[Subaru: You idiot! Who in their right mind would let you do a night job like that!? Hal-san, tell her!]

[Halibel: I kinda do classic night work as a shinobi.....that said, I'm not too sure about letting you kill, so how about you try something else. Like suppression requests or bounty hunting.]

Halibel cracks his knuckles, and he gave those conditions, causing Tia to tilt her head. However, the adventurous ring to it made Subaru's eyes widen.

[Subaru: Bounty hunting! Suppression requests! That sounds awesome!]

[Rem: What kind of work are they exactly? Can Tia-sama do them.....?]

Rem had a pretty realistic reaction in comparison to Subaru, who thought adventurously. Rem sees Tia's side of the dinner table, which she got extremely dirty—she sees that she lacks things like the ability to do

delicate tasks and etiquette and hoped that the job wouldn't require those sort of skills.

[Halibel: The main jobs are catching evildoers popping up on wanted posters, sometimes beating them up. And then there's also the evil mabeasts that show up every now and then.]

[Tia: Basically, hunting. My specialty!]

It was like Tia's eyes shined for a moment. And then, when she energetically stood up from the tea table, she grabbed Halibel's neck as he tried to have a quick smoke, having finished his meal.

[Halibel: Hmm?]

[Tia: Now, show me the way. I have no idea what to hunt, after all.]

[Halibel: Wait! Su-san! Rem-chan!]

[Subaru: See ya.]

[Halibel: Oh, come on!]

Tia drags away Halibel, and resistance was futile. Subaru had no reason to stop her, and he wasn't so sure that he could stop her anyway.

With the noisy neighbors leaving, only the married couple was left in the room.

[Rem: Ummm.....is it really okay for us to let Halibel-sama take care of Tia-sama?]

[Subaru: Hal-san shouldn't have any problems. If Tia were to try and do something harmful, only Hal-san would be able to stop her, so it makes sense to have him near enough to keep an eye on her.]

[Rem: I see, that does make sense. Plus, moss might grow on Halibel-sama's body if he doesn't work like everyone else every now and then.]

Rem encouraged Halibel, understanding and moderate sharpness showing in her words.

Letting Halibel handle Tia was actually already an established thing—Halibel even gave his consent. That last interaction was just like something a play would regularly have, nothing more.

Fortunately, Halibel didn't have to stay with Subaru and Rem anymore to protect them since he now had a good grasp of the tendencies of Tia, the attacker. Hence why he didn't need to worry about working while being in constant fear of when she'd attack.

[Subaru: Now I just have to worry about if I'll become a full-time worker and Rem's stomach.]

[Rem:As of right now, I believe that I could work without any difficulties.]

[Subaru: It's going to be our first child. I don't want anything to catch us off-guard. Although. From the little knowledge I have, I remember that most childbirths take 9 months and 10 days.]

Going off of Subaru's knowledge, it would take roughly 10 ten months to go from pregnancy to childbirth—however, there was no way to find how how

long she has been pregnant. He guessed about three months since her stomach didn't look all that different. Besides, there was another problem.

Rem is an Oni—a Demi-human species, although they didn't look like it. Could a normal human's knowledge really be applied to having a feel for when she was pregnant and when she'd give birth? On top of that, there was also an irregular condition where it was a mix between a human and an Oni.

[Subaru: Is there anything else we can do on top of keeping in touch and seeing that healing doctor?]

[Rem: I'm sorry. I don't know much about this stuff. In a time like this.....]

[Subaru: ——]

[Rem: I—In a time like this, maybe we should find an experienced midwife.]

Rem hesitates, unable to find the right words, and then she says that. The reaction was unnatural, however Subaru did not say anything about it and just nodded as he said, "Yeah".

He knew what Rem was going to say. There was an unspoken agreement between Subaru and Rem to not never touch on that subject.

Subaru says "All right" to pull himself together and put that matter behind as he continued,

[Subaru: Let's just live like we always have until your stomach starts changing. However, if you aren't feeling well, tell me right away. Even if it's just a slight fever. I'll get mad this time if you don't tell me.]

[Rem: Understood. But if you do get mad, what would you do?]

[Subaru: You know. I'll lock you in the room, and I'll watch over you the whole time. Meanwhile, I'll borrow from Hal-san for our living expenses, making us go into deep debt. It'll be tough times once the child is born.]

[Rem: That's.....so...terrifying. I won't let your idea become reality.]

Rem giggles, bringing herself close to Subaru since the fear was too much for her to handle. He embraces Rem's slender body, and they hug each other in silence for a while.

As they did that, it naturally got closer to the time when they both have to leave for work.

[Subaru: All right, I'm gonna give it my all today too. I'll be praying for nothing to happen to Hal-san and Tia as well.]

[Rem: Praying, yeah.]

They smile at each other one last time, and then they left their new room at the tenement house.

—In the evening, they would find out that their praying was off in a good way.

[Halibel: This is actually a really good catch. Even I rarely come across them.]

These were the thoughts of Halibel, who came with Tia on her first job. Tia came back with a bag filled with her reward, and she proudly put her feet on the table, but Rem scolded her for her actions, disheartening her.

Food was set on the dining table, knocking the closed reward bag onto the floor. Subaru had doubts about the report, seeing Rem lecturing Tia on the side.

[Halibel: No, I mean, I see why you'd be suspicious.]

[Subaru: After seeing that, yeah. Well, as long as it went well, it's a good thing. So, what is this good catch? Tell me about it in detail.]

[Halibel: Hmm, so, at first, as decided, we chose a job on a wanted poster to catch a petty thief. But then that suddenly fell to our feet.....obviously, I couldn't just look. That became the reward we were dealing with, and then in the end it became a brutal arrest.]

Tia, who was brought to Clane's employment agency, experimentally participated in bounty hunting with Halibel's referral. Basically, they chose a random wanted poster on the store bulletin board, correctly tracked down the wanted criminal, and cornered him.

[Halibel: It was a petty crook committing theft at stores. But when we tried to break into his room, there were magic stones in it all over, causing a commotion. He ended up using them to try and suicide.]

[Subaru: So he was a really dangerous terrorist!]

[Halibel: Tia-chan socked him and tied him up. And then he said that he knew even more dangerous smugglers and that some of them are in town. We somehow got him to tell us their location, and we rounded up all of the idiots hiding in town, foiling their plan to destroy the city.]

[Subaru: That's the feature film like incident that happened on your end today!?!]

Subaru could only be amazed by the major event that happened behind the scenes and could've destroyed the town.

Subaru was completely unaware of the incident; he was even asking his female coworkers at his workplace what to do when the baby is born, and they laughed at him as they replied, "It's too early for that stuff".

[Subaru: Then, this heroine that saved the town got scolded because she put her feet on that dining table, and she's all quiet now.]

[Halibel: Indeed, she is.]

Subaru and Halibel nod deeply. In their eyes, they saw Rem hesitantly explaining the importance of manners to Tia, who was completely afraid. Rem did not scold people by yelling; the way she did it spoke to the heart, and so it was rather painful in an emotionally.

[Rem: And so, manners are important. That also goes for showing respect to the people you eat with and the food you are served. Do you understand?]

[Tia: Yes yes, I understand. I UN-DER-STAND.]

[Rem: Tia-sama?]

[Tia: I—I told you, I understand.....]

Perhaps this was a result of knowing that she was going to be a mother. Rem had no mercy when it came to being commanding, even with

someone who was rather stronger than her. Overwhelmed by her force, Tia obediently sits down in front of the dining table girl-style¹.

Faced with Tia having downcasted eyes, Rem lets out a sigh, and then she said,

[Rem: Tia-sama, take this.]

[Tia: What's this for.....]

[Rem: I'm giving it since it seems you have trouble eating with chopsticks. Please use it with care.]

A wooden spoon—that's what gets handed to Tia at the dining table, and Rem's smile makes her eyes widen. Then, after she closed her eyes tight she said,

[Tia: T—That's kinda smart. All right. I'll use it.]

As she said that, she accepted the present spoon. She had a grin on her face.

[Tia: It's not feeding, but something like it.....]

[Halibel: So, seeing her act like that, I guess Su-san wins the bet for now.]

[Subaru: If the bet is that Tia won't cause any problems, then Rem is the one who won. And she still is.]

[Halibel: Ahh, that's true.]

¹ When you sit with your legs in the shape of a W. It's called girl-style since not many men can sit very well like this.

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When Subaru sneered, Halibel replied by suddenly smiling. Seeing those two men act like that, Rem, who finished her lecture, clapped her hands.

[Rem: Now, let's eat. Tia-sama had her first job today, and even Halibel-sama worked too, so the food should be delicious.]

[Halibel: Great, but is there some for me?]

Everyone follows Rem's instruction and sits at the dining table. Subaru was curious as to why there was food for Tia and Halibel like it was the most natural thing, but the two of them had expectant looks on their faces, so he didn't say anything.

They express their thanks in unison(Tia did it reluctantly), and he stopped caring about his concern once they started eating. Tonight's menu was a fish focused Japanese style dish arranged by Rem. They dig in.

They were greatly pleased. Tia especially was digging in.

[Tia: I'm impressed, Rem. The light texture of the fish and the taste changes with the slightly burnt part. I can't stop eating.....!]

[Rem: Thank you very much, Tia-sama. There's actually white vegetable sauce in it.]

[Tia: —! No way! T—The the flavor is this refreshing!?!]

It seemed like Rem was happily feeding Tia, who kept overreacting. It looked like a rare animal enjoying food that didn't exist in its habitat.

It also seemed like the bloodlust disappeared and that she completely opened up to them, which made Subaru feel relieved.

[Halibel: Gotta bathe after eating. We made a lot with the reward, so you wouldn't get angry if I drank after taking a bath, would you?]

[Rem: As long as you don't make Subaru-kun and I drink, I have no complaints. Don't make Tia-sama do it, either.]

[Subaru: You probably shouldn't for safety's sake.....]

The three of them face each other, and they take a glance at Tia. She was focusing on picking the leftover grains of rice in her rice bowl, paying no attention to their conversation.

They were afraid of having no idea what she would do if they got drunk. Unfortunately, Halibel would have to drink alone tonight.

Furthermore, Subaru prefers to not drink, as he didn't really like alcohol, and Rem has an extremely low alcohol tolerance for an Oni, thus they have never accepted Halibel's invitations.

[Halibel: Damn, I'm so sad.]

In the end, nobody joined in to drink with Halibel, and he shook his whiskers in disappointment. Although his murmuring wasn't supposed to be a cue or anything, Tia, having finished destroying her grains of rice, tilted her head as she said, "What?" as she continued,

[Tia: What is this about? I'm stuffed, and I want to go to bed right about now.]

[Rem: You can't. You worked the whole day, so you're probably covered in sweat. —So you have to take a bath.]

[Tia:If it's like bathing in a river or a lake, then fine I'll do it.]

[Rem: No! Let's go to the bath-house!]

Rem leans forward, and she enthusiastically tried to convince Tia, who was uninterested. Her energy makes Tia's eyes widen, and she asks Subaru and Halibel for help. However, unfortunately—

[Subaru: —The bath-house is pretty nice.]

[Halibel: Sure is.]

Nobody was on Tia's side.

3

—About the “bath-houses” of this world”, they're pretty straightforward, and are quite literally public baths.

A bath tub lies in a wide space, and the water stored inside of it heats up with the use of a magic stone at the bottom of the tub. The structure of the bath-house was extremely simple, except for the fact that it used special tools.

At first, Subaru was surprised by bath-houses with how common they were.

[Subaru: Well, in manga I've read that in ancient times there were already baths during Roman period. The existence of bath-houses isn't all that strange in comparison to that.]

Plus, even ninjas finally showed up in Kararagi Wafuu culture. He definitely wouldn't be surprised by stuff like bathtubs and daikon radish.

[Subaru: I'm gonna act very surprised if I find a Japanese mascot.]

[Halibel: What have you been mumbling about?]

Then, a ninja soaking right next to him in the bathtub spoke. The ninja soaked in the bath all the way up to his head. His whole body was wet, including his fearless face, and his hair was sticking together.

Now he truly was a wet dog. With just his body and appearance, he could no longer find any similarities to when he was dry.

[Subaru: So I've been thinking about different world people, it's a pain living in a combined culture with all the differences races have. Once you get out of a bath, sometimes you'll have someone's fallen hair all over your body.]

[Halibel: You just have to pour hot water on yourself before you get out. Or do you have some sort of interesting idea?]

[Subaru: Let's see.Use the drain around the edge of the bathtub, control the flow of the hot water with a magic stone, and let the water run. Set a net for to catch the fallen hair that'll get inside, and the hot water that passes through will come back.]

[Halibel: Hmmm? Can you draw a picture for that? I don't really get it.]

It was kind of summer-ish. Halibel didn't really care too much about his pool based proposal as he looked up in the bathtub contentedly moaning, "Oh yeahhh." However, he didn't blame him.

Everyone reverts to a naked beast once they soak in warm bath. Which has nothing to do with the worries Subaru had about differences between races.

—Right now, he just wanted to soak in the motherly warmth of this bathtub.

[Subaru: Which is why I'd like to ignore the voice I can hear over the wall...]

[Tia: Hey, hey! Isn't this cool!? Wow, oh my, I've never seen anything like it!]

[Halibel: Oh, Su-san, that's probably not possible. See, look over there.]

Subaru was covering his face with a towel, but he heard a familiar high-pitched screech and was tapped on the shoulder by Halibel from the side, he couldn't ignore it anymore. He takes off the towel, and once he looked in the direction Halibel pointed at, he saw a tall wall—in bath-houses, the men's bath and the women's bath are separated. There was a wall separating them.

Often times, for some reason the baths are connected at the top of the wall, so—

[Tia: Oh! There they are! Hey, you two! Isn't it amazing how the bath feels so nice?]

[Subaru: ——]

Tia had crept up to the small hole at the top of ceiling and the wall, seeming to have climbed up the wall. She peeked through the hole, and their eyes met. She was nude, waving her hand innocently, but fortunately the wall was hiding the parts below her chest.

But still, her wet hair and the curves of her exposed nape and shoulders were quite charming, and to tell the truth, it was alluring. Also, the people at the men's bath were startled when they were suddenly peeked at by a heavenly beautiful woman.

[???: Kyaaa!!]

They weren't really shrill shrieks, but rough shrieks that resounded throughout the men's bath.

There were people who fell over, people who ran into the dressing room, and people who dove into the bath. Tia looks down at everyone running in confusion, and it makes her blink in surprise.

[Tia; Don't really get what's going on, but it does feel nice seeing males running away.....]

[Subaru: Like anyone cares about your fetishes! Get the hell down from there!]

[Tia: Aww, but I have such a nice view from here. Oh yeaah. Are there any differences between this bath and that bath? Can I check it out for a bit?]

[Subaru: You idi.....!]

Without any hesitation, Tia climbs over the wall and tries to join the men's bath. He tried to stop her immediately, but unfortunately he could not reach the top of the wall from the bathtub.

Something happened immediately after Subaru gave up and decided to overlook Tia's reckless actions, when the people in the men's bath held their breath.

There was a high-pitched, tremendous scraping sound, and then Tia was no longer seen on the top of the wall. However, she didn't climb over. She had disappeared into the women's bath. And then immediately after that,

there were successive sounds of large bodies falling onto the water, causing grand explosions in the bath-house.

[Rem: —Everyone, my dearest apologies for all the trouble. Please continue to enjoy the bath.]

Once the sound of the water completely disappeared, those polite words were forwarded from the women's bath to the men's bath. It was obvious who said those words.

[Subaru: Rem?]

[Rem: Subaru-kun, I'm sorry. I was in the middle of washing my body at the washing place.....but it's fine now.]

[Subaru: Oh, good call. But anyways.....]

It seems Rem had fixed the situation over at the women's bath. He felt like praising his wife for her clutch assistance, but there was something else on his mind.

That was—

[Subaru: That sounded like the nostalgic sound of chains, huh.....]

[Rem: It's for self protection.]

[Subaru: But this is a bathhouse, and Rem should be naked.....]

[Rem: It's for self protection.]

Her stubborn replies denied Subaru from any further questioning. Plus, since Subaru wasn't at the scene over the wall, he had no way of confirming it. The case was closed. It was unsolved.

[Halibel: Rem-chan sure is impressive.]

Then, Halibel, who floated in the bathtub with his tray and sake and acted unconcerned the whole time, let out those carefree thoughts, and he was licking the sake with his red face covered by his hair

Once that he finished, after getting out of the bath, they went to the bath-house entrance to meet up with the two people who were at the women's bath.

The bath-house entrance had a space that was like a lounge, and apart from the dressing room, visitors could relax as much as they wanted there. Most of the time it'd become a place where old people meet, and they'd wait patiently for visitors who entered the bath to get out.

There was one dead tired woman slovenly lying down on a couch in that space—

[Rem: Apparently it was her first time at a bath-house, so she went too nuts and felt dizzy after staying in too long.]

[Subaru: So that's why she using my special seat. I can tell that it's her first time, though.]

As he grumbled, Subaru saw Tia, who was lying down while moaning "Oooh" and "Ahhh", receiving a lap pillow from Rem. Her white skin glowed so much that at first glance you could tell she had a head rush. Had she been standing up with a serious face right now, she would've certainly looked charming.

Although, by lying down in a sad, exposed state, men lose interest in hitting on her.

[Subaru: Wow, you even borrowed a fan for this girl.]

[Rem: If she falls over on the way back, she'd get covered in mud after all that cleaning.]

[Subaru: Sounds better than trying to maintain her beauty.....all right, hand me the fan. I'll fan her. Whoosh...whoosh whoosh...whoosh whoosh whoosh!]

[Tia: Ooooooo...that feels so goood.]

Subaru takes the fan from Rem, who had been gently fanning her, and then he creates a storm. Bathing in that storm, Tia seemed to be enjoying it, although she was still groggy.

However, soon enough, his arms couldn't take it anymore. His fanning slows down, and stops.

[Tia: Come oon, can't you fan me more?]

[Subaru: Don't be so spoiled. Besides, Rem's lap is mine. And the fan is borrowed. Who do you think you are, a princess?]

[Tia: So annoying.....]

Tia grimaces at Subaru's point, and he takes the fan away from her. After that, while Tia started fanning herself, Subaru looked at the wrist of her right hand.

[Subaru: What's that? A friendship bracelet?]

[Tia: Don't know what a friendship bracelet is, but Hal gave it to me. He told me to put it on. Is it a charm?]

[Rem: A charm, huh. It's a bit surprising to see Halibel-sama give Tia-sama a gift.]

[Subaru: Well, it can't be Hal-san trying to put the moves on Tia.....]

She pouted, and she looked beautiful fanning herself quickly, but she also looked childish. Halibel's true motive was unknown, and there may be no particular reason behind his actions, but all he had to investigate and cool down.

He was warmed up now, so he was going to finish his business and leave before he caught a cold.

[Subaru: All right, it's time for the last bath-house ritual. You're coming, too.]

[Tia: Ritual.....?]

[Rem: Yes, a ritual. If you don't do it, it'd defeat the purpose of coming to the bath-house.]

Subaru and Rem, the married couple, confidently replied to Tia, who gave a dubious look. The firmness of their tones confused Tia, further increasing the surprise of the one who showed up afterwards.

The one who came was Halibel—however, the hair on his dry head was fluffy, and he looked like a completely different person, despite them being familiar with how he looked.

[Tia: You're the mutt, right?]

[Halibel: Yeah, it's me. Also, here, take this. Gotta drink it before it warms up, or else it'd be a waste.]

[Tia: W—Wait a second.....what's this? A beast's milk?]

[Halibel: Watch how you put it!]

What Halibel brought over in his hands was a white liquid in a bottle—what Tia said wasn't wrong, but put in a more tasteful way it would be:

[Subaru: It's milk for when you get out of the bath.....it's a universal ritual!]

One could call it “all worlds do it”, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration. Or at least, if the stylistic beauty was common between the two worlds Subaru knew, you could call it a ceremony passed across worlds.

Strictly speaking, this wasn't cow milk, and it wasn't fruit milk either, which would have been ideal. However, there at least was a skill to keep bottled milk cold, and it would be best not to expect more than that.

[Subaru: Uncork the bottle! Put your hand on your hip! Then drink up!]

While Subaru enthusiastically explained the steps, he performed the ritual.

Cold milk goes through his throat, flowing into his warm stomach. That refreshing feeling—the strong counter for his body that warmed up inside from the bath, that is the best part of bath-houses.

[Rem: Mm!]

Shouting cutely, Rem also drinks milk like Subaru. Then so did Halibel, along with other people who got out of the bath.

[Tia: Ahaha! Y—Your face! A mustache! It's making a mustache!]

[Subaru: It's part of what makes this beautiful!]

[Tia: Lame! So lame! You look like an idiot!]

Developing a white mustache after getting milk around your mouth was like proof that the ritual was a success.

Incidentally, it was hard for Halibel to get milk around his mouth because of its structure. After Rem sneakily finished drinking, she looked back and gently wiped her mouth without letting anyone see.

Dubiously gazing at the three of them, Tia uncorks the bottle with a suspicious look. Then, after she took a light sniff of the smell, she put her hand on her hip, and she drank—

[Tia: —It's so good!]

Then, a white mustache developed around her mouth, and she said that as her eyes shined.

4

The four of them were walking back in their yukatas as the refreshing night wind blew.

[Tia: Bath-houses aren't as bad as I thought. Oh, just so you know, that's just because I was surprised.]

[Halibel: It's not like I'm listening anyway.]

It was Tia, who walked with light steps, and Halibel going home. Tia was humming happily, perhaps because she had enjoyed her experience at the bath-house a lot.

Although she was off key and it sounded like there was no melody, it was the same thing Subaru had heard just yesterday. Since she was singing the same thing, it didn't seem like she was singing randomly.

[Halibel: What song is that?]

[Tia: Hmm? A nameless song. If I had to name it.....]

Tia puts her finger on her lip, and she went into deep thought for a moment.

And then—

[Tia: It'd be the "Die Song"!]

[Subaru: Pick a better name!!]

The words were just too dangerous, so Subaru reflexively butted in from the back. That makes Tia irritatedly say "What's wrong with it?" as she clicked her tongue.

[Rem: Subaru-kun's right. It's such a lovely song, after all.]

[Tia: This again...it's not like you'd ever going to disagree with your male partner anyway, Rem.]

[Rem: Yes, that's right. I pretty much agree with everything Subaru-kun says. Sometimes I do disagree, though.]

[Tia: Hey! So I had this realization...I don't think I like Rem's bossiness!]

Overwhelmed by something that was neither stress nor praise, Tia runs away with her head between her hands. Rem was the one who took over the humming for Tia.

Having heard it once, Rem somehow starts humming the same song.

[Tia:Not quite. That's not it, haha....hahaha.]

[Rem: Hmm, well I didn't catch it very well. Tia-sama, please let me hear it again.]

[Tia: You wanna hear it that badly? Really? Well, I guess I have no choice.]

Pleased with Rem, who gave a low bow, Tia starts to hum the song once again. Had they not know that it was the "Die Song", it would just sound like an enchanting song with a nice voice.

Subaru and Rem naturally start to speak less. Halibel also walked the street without saying anything.

There was only Tia's humming in the quiet street at night.

Stars in the sky, and below it, the light of the paper lanterns dimly lighting the street red. Considering only that, it looked very mystical, like a moment in a dream—.

[Rem: Subaru-kun?]

[Subaru: Yeah?]

Because he was immersed in the atmosphere, his response to Rem was a little late.

Rem smiles slightly, understanding how Subaru felt, and her face turned red as she said,

[Rem: I was just thinking...]

[Subaru: About what?]

[Rem: If only this moment could last longer for our child to see it...]

Rem says that with a gentle smile, and she rubbed her stomach softly. Her gesture and words make Subaru feel really embarrassed, and he couldn't put his feelings into words.

[Subaru: ——]

He simply gently held onto Rem's free hand, combining their warmth, and they went home.

And that's how the night went.

5

—The days went on slowly. Without any time to stop, like water flowing.

They were busy, noisy days.

Ever since the night Subaru met with the strange neighbors at the tenement house, the days were eventful in a good way, and hardly any of the things he was anxious about happened.

It somehow became a habit for Tia and Halibel to accompany Subaru and Rem at the dining table in the morning, and they'd spend time together until work while talking about their plans for the day.

[Tia: They need me, or else crooks will be on the loose. Even Clane said so.]

[Rem: Tia is as reliable as expected. I'm very thankful. Looks like you might get more food!]

[Tia: This is where you give me more! You don't mean "might get more", you *will* give me more!]

Tia decided on doing "bounty hunting" as her job after getting a taste of success with her first job. It seemed that it really was Tia's calling, and from what they'd been told, her arrest rate was quite something.

Jobs handled at Clane's employment agency are recognized by the town—because of this, a lot of the jobs are highly beneficial to Banan town. Inevitably, Tia's efforts were making the town more safe.

[Halibel: Put yourself in my shoes as someone who has to go with her. I haven't been able to take a lovely nap with the sun out for so many days. My internal body clock is going to get messed up at this rate.]

[Rem: Isn't this a sign that you're getting closer to being a proper citizen?]

[Subaru: Rem's right. Suck it up and follow Tia around. I'm sure you'll even lose some of that stomach fat of yours that you've been worrying about.]

As a married couple, Subaru and Rem soothe Halibel, who took a barrage of criticism while frowning. Seeing that interaction out of the corner of her

eye, Tia happily drinks her miso soup as she raised her bowl and said, “More please!”

Subaru frequently went to the Magoji palace at noon, even after the defined period of time.

He succeeded at obtaining the steady job that he’d dreamed of without any problems. This was all thanks to Riften and the landlady recognizing Subaru’s abilities, and it was the reward for living up to their expectations.

However, if there was one thing that was different from what he’d expected—

[Subaru: —All right, today let’s review the basics of making youfuku(Western-style clothes).]

[???: Yeeees, Subaru-chan.]

[Subaru: Good answer! However, I’m the Sensei now. Call me Sensei, okay?]

[???: You got it, Subaru-chan Sensei.]

Subaru was shrugging his shoulders as he smiled wryly at the playful women.

Subaru was officially hired at the Magoji palace, but her was no longer just a servant, he was also acted as a teacher in a little “class for lessons”.

The classroom was one of Magoji palace’s tatami rooms. In it, you’d mainly learn about sowing, Subaru’s speciality, and a version of fashion related western-style clothing—stuff you’d call embroidery. Even in Kararagi, where Wafuu culture was popular, it was hard for it to take root, even with fashion

culture from other countries coming over. In this place, someone with the knowledge and the skills becomes a teacher, and people would get the help they have always wanted with the western-style clothes women usually wore.

Most of the students were female coworkers working at the palace and bourgeoisie wives around the same age. Once in a while there'd be young women who would study the basics and planned on doing a job related to it in the future, but these were the kind of people who came, more or less.

If there had to be name for Subaru's job, you'd call it a cultural lecturer, the parallel universe version.

[Riften: I thought I told you that I have high hopes for your femininity.]

[Subaru: Well, I don't have any complaints. I don't, but this is one of those things you're into, isn't it?]

[Riften: What a terrible misunderstanding. I just wanted to see my beloved girls in something other than wafuu clothing. I'm just trying to make that small wish come true, that's all.]

[Subaru: For some reason you keep denying you're into cougars.....]

Incidentally, Subaru's lessons are mostly popular, and they were talking about increasing his lessons from three times a week to four times a week. If the knowledge from Subaru's world was helpful at all, he'd like to use this cultural school as an excuse to spread it to others.

At night, after Subaru's work ended at the palace, he said goodbye to the ladies and the gatekeeper, who he was familiar with, and he went to the tenement house—no, he went to Temple Elementary School to see Rem.

Ever since he found out that Rem was pregnant, he always made sure to walk home with Rem. Otherwise, he wouldn't know if something happened along the way, and it'd be too late after something did happen.

[Subaru: A stranger might suddenly attack for an unjust reason, after all.]

[Tia: What? I don't get it, why did you look at my face when you said that? You got a problem, Su?]

In front of Temple Elementary School, which bathed in the sun, Subaru and Tia came across each other at a street, and they exchanged those words as they both grimaced.

Subaru going to meet Rem was a natural thing to do as a husband. However, Tia frequently going to Temple Elementary School to meet Rem sort of ruined the married couple's time together.

That alone showed that she was attached to Rem, and sometimes it'd be too much.

[Subaru: Also, it doesn't feel right when you call me Su.]

[Tia: What a pain. Hal calls you that, so there shouldn't be a problem with me calling you it, too. Besides, I'm only here for Rem, you're not needed.]

Tia pouted and acted intimidating, and Subaru also pouted at her. This was better than her calling them by their sex by saying stuff like "males", but the arrogance of her responses wasn't any different how it was in the beginning.

[Subaru: Then I'm going to tell Rem and you'll get less food.]

[Tia: Y—You coward. You're so heartless.....!]

Still, their relationship was way more relaxed than before, just because they found a way to make her think twice.

[Rem: Subaru-kun, Tia-sama, thanks for waiting.You two didn't fight, did you?]

[Subaru: We did] [Tia: Of course we did.]

Plus, the thing they both felt the strongest about was Rem smiling.

Given that people have time, everyone eats dinner together at night after coming home, and that even includes Halibel, who always goes off somewhere.

It seemed Tia was uninterested in the reward for her bounty hunting, and ever since she earned enough money to pay off the tenement house reparations with her first job, and all of her rewards were handled by Rem.

[Rem: So, when all your work goes well, you can treat yourself. When it doesn't, spend wisely.]

[Tia: I can't just live large everyday with all the money I have?]

[Rem: If you do that, you'll forget to appreciate how special it is, and most importantly, you'd hurt Subaru-kun's pride as the breadwinner. This is my prudence as a great wife.]

[Subaru: But I'd be pleased if you don't tell anyone about this great wife's prudence !]

He forgave her since Rem looked cute apologizing with her tongue stuck out. It was also for the sake of his own pride, though.

Moving on, Tia worked hard to understand Rem's point as she nodded and went, "Uh-huh". Their relationship was a strange thing; Tia was the one who looked the most mature, but inside, she was like a child—she acted like a wolf girl. Rem interacted with Tia, who didn't act how she looked, affectionately, like how a mother or an older sister would.

Viewing her as a mother, this could be practice for the child. However, if Subaru viewed her as an older sister, that would be complicated and it'd make him feel like he was walking on thin ice.

[Halibel: Su-san, what's wrong?]

Seeing Subaru go into deep thought, Halibel, who was the only one drinking alcohol, tilts his head and asks him a question. In response, Subaru says, "No" as he tilted his head and continued,

[Subaru: It's nothing. I was just thinking about how nice it'd be if we got treated tomorrow.]

[Rem: Halibel-sama would really have to go out on a limb for that. After all, Halibel-sama is the reason why we can't be treated in the first place.]

[Tia: Really? Then I should spank him and make him work!]

[Halibel: Don't you think you're treating me too cruelly?]

And so, that's how the night went the exact opposite way the morning did with loud laughter at the dining table.

After they finished eating, they went to the bath-house, Rem watched over Tia, who acted a bit more responsibly than last time, Subaru and Halibel

took their time enjoying the bath, and they went home after enjoying milk upon getting out of the bath.

Tia's humming resounded throughout the street at night. Lately, it has been like a duet with Rem. In a way, listening to that added elegance to the time they spent going home, and Subaru loved it.

Their precious, busy, noisy time went on slowly.

6

[Tia: Woow, it takes a lot more time for a child to be born than I thought.]

Tia puts her arms behind the back of her head, and she said that in a carefree tone.

She was on the way home from Temple Elementary School walking with Subaru and Rem on the street during the evening, which became a daily thing. She was looking at Rem's stomach.

Rem was slightly smiling in a kimono—and her stomach was big enough to recognize it from afar.

[Subaru: Taking a glance, it's probably been about 6 months.....perhaps? So like in the middle stage of pregnancy.]

[Tia: Middle stage? Still only halfway there!? Wow, animals would never take this long.]

[Subaru: I'm not an animal! I'm a human! It takes quite a long time.]

Tia brings up a ridiculous example, Subaru lightly flicked her forehead, and she groaned while her forehead was being pushed. After that, she took a side glance at Rem and said,

[Tia: Isn't it rough having your stomach so big? It doesn't look like you could jump or hop.]

[Rem: I can't deny that it is rough. Often times it's difficult sticking out my chest, and there's no way I could jump or hop, so I'll let you do it, Tia-sama.]

[Tia: If you insist. I'm good at jumping and hopping anyways.]

While Tia got carried away, full of herself, Subaru broke into a smile with that interaction.

They've had a baby for about 6 months now—meaning, they've been neighbors with Tia for 3 months. Although they were worried at first, it was a completely stable life now.

Rem wasn't in the stable period of pregnancy, but they were able to deal with Tia's temper pretty well now.

[Tia: I wonder if it's going to be a male or a female.]

[Rem: Whether it's a boy or a girl, it'll probably be naughty like Subaru-kun. But it's acting up a lot in my stomach, so I think it might be a girl.]

[Subaru: If it's acting up, wouldn't that mean it's a boy?]

[Rem: —? Would it?]

According to Rem's self-diagnosis, apparently the baby is a girl. The way she came to that judgement made Subaru look dubious, but Rem tilted her head, and even Tia had a question mark above her because of Subaru.

In this world, people might think that girls are naughty.

Now that he thought about it, it did seem like a lot of the girls he got involved with in this world were active. —That's when his thought was interrupted.

[Subaru: Well, people are delighted when their first is a girl. Back at my home town, they say 'First Princess, then Taro'², meaning it's best to first have a girl and then a boy.]

[Rem: First Princess, then Taro?]

[Subaru: Princess is the girl, while Taro is the boy. It means the first is a princess, and the second is the eldest son. If I remember correctly, it means girls don't cry as much or something like that.]

Kids being hard to take care of is common knowledge, and it's even been engraved in Subaru's limited knowledge. Obviously he's never had any real experience with it, but at any rate, it's a lot of work to take care of babies when they're highly prone to crying—he was already being lectured a lot by his female coworkers at the palace.

[Subaru: By studying the fundamentals of childcare with our first being a girl, it will be easier to deal with the second one. It's like the wisdom of my ancestors, or more like advice they came up with from personal experience.]

² The saying is “一姫二太郎” meaning first princess, second Taro, a common Japanese last name literally meaning eldest son. In Japan, some think that girls are easier to raise than boys because they think they cry less and tend to get ill less. So they think a girl first is best for learning.

[Rem: I see.So I have to give birth to a girl first no matter what.]

[Subaru: You don't have to put weird pressure on yourself because of what I said, even if it is a boy.]

With a wry smile, Subaru scratches his cheek. To Subaru's side, it was unclear how seriously Rem took him, and she said,

[Rem: For Subaru-kun, do your best to be a...be a girl.]

She was saying this to the child inside of her. However, he's heard that the gender of a baby is determined the moment fertilization happens, so Rem was all too late to speak to it.

[Subaru: If you're a boy, just come out healthy already. Cry all you want. If we learn the hard parts early, it might be easier later.]

[Rem: Oh, that's right. First it has to come out healthy.....yeah, that's what's most important.]

[Subaru: Yep, that's what's most important.....Oh, it moved.]

The baby responded to Subaru, who touched Rem's stomach and talked to it while stroking it. The new life inside of Rem was already focused on turning and pushing.

Subaru really felt like it was a boy, but—

[Subaru: Maybe that's because I'm thinking too much about after it's born.]

Thinking rationally, he'd have the easiest time preparing if he knew whether it was a boy or a girl before it was born. The kind of choices he had for play equipment would be settled, and that'd go for clothes too, of course.

Before he had a kid, that's actually what Subaru thought, but strangely enough, now he thinks otherwise.

He felt like the things that were unknown until it's born were like blessings invoked by the baby.

[Tia: Still, about 6 months to go? Hmm, that sure is a long wait.]

[Rem: I'm sure that time will go by before we even know it. Would you prefer it be faster?]

[Tia: I don't mind.....It's just that, at this rate, I'll never get a clue for the light sphere.]

[Rem: ——]

The words Tia spoke while she pouted and glared at the sunset—hearing “light sphere” made Subaru's cheeks stiffen, and Rem also lost her breath for a moment.

light sphere—that's what Tia was looking for, and it was the very thing that started this life.

Tia did not hesitate to say that Rem stole it for sure. However the baby got in the way of forcing information out of her, she was let off the hook until childbirth, and they became good neighbors.

However, Tia really hadn't talked about the light sphere since the first few days, and she wasn't acting suspicious of Rem. Hence why the matter was kept in the very back of her mind.

She couldn't hide her shock from Tia still remembering it and going after it.

[Subaru:In any case, suck it up until these 6 months are over. That was the deal.]

[Tia: Yes yes, I know that. 6 months...6 months, eh.....]

Strictly speaking, a pregnancy period is about 10 months—if this is the 6th month, then there has to be 4 months left. Subaru still not pointing out that she was off by 2 months showed how he hoped to postpone 'that' moment.

It was not the same as when they had a terrible meeting. Tia was now an irreplaceable friend.

[Tia: If Rem gets pregnant again right after you're born, I'm going to be very troubled.]

Tia talked to Rem—no, she talked to the baby while saying those things.

She wouldn't hurt Rem while she had a baby. Tia was so attached to these days that she laughed off her own rule that she had made. Subaru felt that it'd be nice if that was the case.

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

[Subaru: Man, Rem, I'm not sure what to do when you make such a determined look.....]

Rem looked at Subaru with watery, serious eyes as she firmly clenched her fist, making him knit his brows. Were her cheeks red because of determination? Or were they red because of the sunset?

In any case, he shrunk back when Rem implicitly showed her determination to have a second child. Of course, Subaru was also in favor of having another so that the child would have a younger sibling, but family finances were a big problem.

They had their first one pretty haphazardly, so he wanted to be more careful with the second one.

[Subaru: But if Tia has a change of heart.....well, I don't think that'll happen anyways.]

[Rem: Maybe if we keep having kids non-stop until we die.....]

[Subaru: That idea kind of sounds like a horror!]

In response to Rem seriously making scary plans, Subaru took her hand and guided her downstairs. Rem follows his natural guidance, and Tia was waiting at the bottom, as she went down the stairs a little quicker.

Going home in the evening, the usual affectionate time. 4 days left—this might be the last of these times; it was a fleeting scene that made him feel regretful.

—Somehow that evanescence made Subaru's heart-ache as he squinted at the bright setting sun.

[Halibel: Oh. You must be beat. You worked all day again.]

When they came back to the tenement house, they saw Halibel smoking his kiseru sitting on a bench.

Lately, Halibel has tended to skip out on going to work with Tia. It seemed he was taking advantage of Tia being used to her job now, and so the “Eternal Playboy” made his comeback.

In other words, he was headed towards becoming a bum. Naturally, the three of them treated him coldly now.

[Tia: How lucky you are, yet again. Even though you're a mutt, you can't be a watchdog when you're staggering all over the place.]

[Subaru: Does the food taste good when you don't work?]

[Halibel: Woow, a storm of verbal abuse. That's not nice. Rem-chan, say something about this.]

[Rem: Let's see.I think food tastes the best when you're fulfilled with work.]

[Halibel: It's just the way you put it that's gentle. You're just as hurtful as Subaru!]

Halibel gets struck by Subaru, Tia, and then Rem with finishing blows, and he leaned back as he surrendered. After that, he slowly brought his bent body back into its original posture and said,

[Halibel: Yes, lately I haven't been working and have been lazing around, but today was a bit different.]

[Tia: A bit different, and yet it seems your laziness hasn't gotten any better.]

[Halibel: Let's not talk about that. Also, I've done all these things for you today, so I'd like you to take that into account.]

Hearing Halibel's statement, Tia pointed at herself with a blank look. Once Halibel calmly nodded, he pointed the tip of his kiseru towards the tenement house—towards the entrance to Tia's room.

[Halibel: Come on, Su-san, reveal it.]

[Subaru: You act as if I'm an accomplice for your schemes, but you haven't told me anything, either.....oh?]

After the calming instruction, Subaru opened the sliding door to Tia's room. Once he took a look inside, the scenery made his eyes open wide. Inside, there was—

[Rem: Wow. Flowers, sweets.....and even kimonos. Are these gifts?]

Rem, who viewed the Room like Subaru did, put her hands together, and she was impressed as her eyes sparkled.

As implied by Rem's words, Tia's room had a total make-over. This room, which Subaru and Rem previously lived in, had the minimum amount of furniture and was quite bland, even after the marks from Tia's rage were repaired.

And now, flowers were placed here and in the room, as well as kimonos and candy boxes on top of the tatami mats; it was full of all kinds of gifts.

[Subaru: For someone like Halibel-san, these touches are quite nice.]

[Halibel: Hehehe, what do you think? See me in a new light now, right? That's what I'd like to say, but these gifts aren't really from me. These are gifts from the townspeople.]

Receiving praiseful words from Subaru, Halibel quickly gives away the truth. It was too thoughtful for someone like Halibel, so he was convinced when he was told that he didn't do all this, but to tell the truth, he was shocked.

The people of Banan town gifted the owner of room—that is, they gifted Tia.

[Halibel: About Tia's work, I did say that her arrest-rate is impressive, right? But the employment agency job isn't the only job where Tia-chan is helping with all sorts of things.]

[Rem: She has a job on top of her employment agency one?]

[Halibel: It's more like a helper sort of thing. She frequently goes around doing favors.....they piled up, and this is how they've repaid her.]

Listening to Halibel give an explanation with his arms folded, Subaru and Rem looked at each other, showing that neither of them knew about all this.

Strangely enough, this is exactly what they had thought about. There were many times when people in town said hi to Tia in a very friendly way when they were on their way back from places like Temple Elementary School or the bath-house. Subaru thought that this was because of her achievements with her employment agency job, but that wasn't the case.

Tia had been deepening her exchanges with the townspeople without Subaru and Rem knowing about it.

Subaru and Rem were comprehending the situation, whereas Tia was silent in front of the presents she was given. Her cheeks were red, and she was just playing with her hair with her finger to show her confusion.

Without knowing what was this feeling welling up inside, as if it was too much to handle.

[Rem: Let's have a feast tonight. We have all this food, after all.]

[Tia: Rem.....]

[Rem: These presents are for Tia-sama. We can't let it go to waste. I may not be able to finish it all myself, so will you help me?]

Tia's eyes shook as she heard Rem's proposal. Then, after pondering for a little bit, Tia nodded deeply at Rem without saying anything.

Seeing her nod, Rem rolls up her sleeves—and so began the preparations for the feast.

7

Even though it was a feast, there was no clear thing they were celebrating.

But still, if they were having this feast for something, it would be—

[Rem: —To celebrate Tia-sama becoming a member of the town.]

Then, Rem tells Subaru that with a smile, and this was enough to convince him.

Celebrating becoming a member of the town—for Subaru and Rem, having the people around them kindly helping them out because they knew about their child was like proof that they were recognized by the town.

If something similar happened to Tia, that truly would be wonderful.

[———]

On top of the dining table, each and everyone one of the plates were empty.

Only four people were having a feast, but it was still a feast. Rem had put in her full effort, and she attacked with an amount of food worthy of her reputation. However, Tia faced all of it head-on, and with Subaru and Halibel's help, amazingly managed to finish it off.

And so, she gave in to the fullness of her big stomach, and she was now breathing in her sleep.

[Subaru: She becomes a cow as soon as she sleeps after eating. And now her beauty is ruined.]

[Halibel: Oh, Su-san, I'm surprised you're saying this when your wife is right next to you.]

[Subaru: I'm always praising Rem 100 times as much as that. Besides, I have no intentions of harming Tia. Tia is like...hmShe's like a little sister.]

Judging off their appearances, it wasn't clear who was older. However, by comparing their behavior and common sense, a whole audience would agree that Subaru was older than Tia.

In fact, neither Rem nor Halibel disagreed, and they just made gentle looks upon hearing Subaru's statement.

[Halibel: But I don't think she fell asleep just because she got full. She secretly took some sips of that.]

[Subaru: Some sips.....oh.]

As Halibel chuckled, he pointed at somewhere behind Tia's butt while she lay down—hidden in the hem of her dress was an awfully expensive bottle of alcohol.

This was probably one of her gifts as well. Although, Subaru and the others did come to the decision to not let Tia drink since it'd be risky.

[Halibel: Continuing to hide something just because you've already began doing it...children find it intriguing. Eventually, it turned out like this.]

[Subaru:But you were still wrong to let it happen while knowing about it.]

[Halibel: It's so cute how she sleeps right after having a taste of it. If she caused ruckus everywhere because of this, I would've had to take responsibility, but that didn't happen.]

Subaru frowned when Halibel judged that everything turned out alright in the end. However, when he looked at Tia's calm sleeping face, he started to feel that he was wrong to be mad.

Even if Tia got drunk off alcohol, would she would use violence on Subaru, like she did before, and get back her "light sphere" even if it meant taking Rem's life away? —It was very hard for him to imagine her doing that.

[Halibel: Um, about the light sphere...]

[Subaru: —! Learned something?]

[Halibel: I frequently went around investigating. Did you think I was just lazing around?]

Halibel opens one of his slit eyes, and he gave a wink that meant the opposite of what it normally would mean. Seeing him do that, Subaru raises his eyebrows in surprise as he said,

[Subaru: Yeah, I thought you were just fooling around.....now I think better of you!]

[Rem: Yes, I see you in a much better light now! Impressive, Halibel-sama!]

[Halibel: Here I was thinking about how skilled you guys are at acting normal as married couple...]

Giving a wry smile, Halibel scratches his own black-haired head. After that, in a low tone he said,

[Halibel: Sorry to get your hopes up. I haven't heard anything about what exactly this light sphere is or where it's at. The situation is still the same. I'm sorry.]

[Subaru: Sigh.....]

[Halibel: Can you hold in your sighs? Also, if I haven't heard anything about the light sphere, isn't that enough to give us some nice information? Such that even the existence of it is fishy.]

[Rem: So you're suspecting Tia-sama made everything up?]

Hearing Halibel's words, Rem's voice tenses up, and she says that in a bit of a criticizing manner. Subaru also felt disgusted by his assumption, although not as much as Rem.

Tia truly was determined to get her light sphere back. Hence why she was constantly checking for it on the way home today—there's no way she was lying and making stuff up.

[Halibel: There's also the possibility that she just can't think that it could be anyone else. Tia-chan isn't normal. Su-san, Rem-chan, you must know that, right?]

[——]

However, Halibel makes that assertion to the two of them who denied his hypothesis with emotional arguments.

Perhaps he calmly saw the truth objectively because these were the views of shinobis. Or maybe Subaru and Rem were simply too soft on Tia and they were just looking away from reality.

[Halibel: Once Rem-chan gives birth.....]

This was the first time Halibel put the time they had left into clear words. The inescapable reality was coming closer. It was the time when a decision would be made, as well as the time to make a choice.

Will it be up to Subaru, Rem, or Tia?

[Subaru: There's no need to give an answer right away.]

[Halibel: Maybe. —But an answer will have to be given eventually.]

As Subaru replied, Halibel quietly said that with his head down. Subaru becomes silent and says nothing in response to his words, and when Rem slowly stood up,

[Rem: I can't let Tia-sama catch a cold.]

[Subaru: Oh, I'll do it.]

Subaru takes out a blanket instead of Rem, who was near the closet. In the last few days, nights have been remarkably chilly. Of course, Rem wanted Tia to be especially taken care of.

[Rem: Tia-sama, I will be moving the alcohol. Would you like the futon to be spread out?]

Rem steps up to Tia as she slept, and she talked to her affectionately. And then, she collects the bottle of alcohol Tia hid in her hem, and she started to loosen the sash of her dress so that she didn't have trouble sleeping.

Suddenly, Rem's hands were caught in white fingertips.

[Rem: Tia-sama?]

It was the same old way she called out her name. Rem, who was looking straight at Tia's sleeping face, was the only one who was able to tell that something was wrong.

Subaru, who was carrying the blanket, did not notice it and neither did Halibel, who smoked his kiseru at the window.

—A trickle of tears was slowly rolling down Tia's cheeks.

[Tia: Give it...back.....]

A frail, low murmur came from Tia's thin lips.

Rem says "What?" as she tried to hear that voice melting in the ephemera atmosphere, and then she brought her ears closer—

[Tia: —Give back...me.]

That moment, a wind blew.

[Subaru: Ah!?!]

Subaru screams, and he immediately unfolded the blanket he was holding. Rem was blown away into him. Unable to withstand the impact, he gets blown away to the back. Subaru somehow forcefully wraps Rem in the blanket, and he crash into the kitchen with his back.

The cooking utensils make a loud noise as they fell onto the floor, and the food left in the pot gets thrown out.

[Subaru: Ka...ha.....]

While the pain disturbed Subaru's breathing, he looked forward with his eyes wide open, wondering what just happened.

He saw the room that changed within just a few seconds—the dining table and the tatami mats flew off, and the magic gem lights hanging from the ceiling were violently turning on and off. There was an opening in the middle of the room, as if a beast had torn into it with its nails. Standing before it was Tia, whose wide dress waved in the wind as she shed tears.

Wind and a bite attack—it was more than enough to remind him of the attack that had happened that one night.

[Subaru: Tia—!]

Subaru cries that. However, it didn't reach Tia as she continued to shed tears endlessly while she held her head. Her eyes looked confused, and she was muttering something.

[Tia: My arms.....my legs.....my...body.....where is it? Where did it go.....?]

Her steps were unsteady, her eyes made it seem like she was dreaming, but the danger was so clear—

[Halibel: —]

So, a shinobi had to deal with such danger in a way a shinobi would.

Halibel evaded the first wind by clinging onto the ceiling. It wasn't clear how someone tall like him accomplished that. However, after Halibel escaped danger, he got off the ceiling, and he free fell down onto Tia's head, dealing a blow to her.

What hit her was a fist axe, where he put his big hands together. It was such a powerful hit that it could've smashed a large tree. The force he struck with had a chance to kill Tia if it hit her, as she was frail. Tia, shedding tears, dodged it, and she kicked up the broken dining table, repelling Halibel, who dropped down.

In this small room, Halibel, jumping around lightly as a tall man, and Tia, who was trying to get the upper hand, were clashing with magic.

It was the return of that night. Although the location was different, the situation was the same.

Tia's invisible bite attacks could not reach Halibel because of the kunai he threw. However, the aftermath had serious effects on its surroundings, and the tenement house got cut up again and again, destroying it.

[Halibel: This isn't good! Su-san and Rem-chan are going to get crushed!]

Perceiving the collapse of the tenement house as dangerous, Halibel screams and steps hard on the floor. Then, the tatami mats just barely left on the floor sprung up from below one by one. Tia, who was on top of one, gets sent flying by the unexpected impact, and she was being blown out of the tenement house.

Turning over tatami mats—that is what Halibel pulled off, although it wasn't clear how he did it.

[Subaru: —!]

The moment Subaru realized that, he gave a jolt to his stiff lower half of his body, and he stood up. Inside his arms there was Rem, who was wrapped in a blanket. While holding onto her, he dashed out the back of the tenement house.

[Subaru: Rem, are you alright!? Rem!?!]

When Subaru started to feel how cold the air felt, he realized that his whole body was wet with cold sweat. He ignored how nasty it was and called Rem's name as he held her in his arms.

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

[Subaru: Rem!]

Rem called Subaru's name as she wheezed. Subaru screeches because of it, and he slowly unfolded the blanket to check if she was injured.

From what he could see, there were no injuries. His blood ran cold when he was inside of Tia's wind up close. Had something gone wrong, Rem might have been cut into along with the space. It was a miracle that she just ended up getting blown away—

[Rem: What about...Tia-sama.....]

[Subaru: Take it easy! Tia.....Halibel-sama is doing something about Tia now! What's more important right now is you. How's your body.....]

[Rem: I'm...fine.....ku!? Ah...ahh!]

[Subaru: Rem!?!]

Rem tried to smile bravely, but her body bent with an agonized look on her face. That makes Subaru's eyes widen, and then Rem held onto her stomach before his eyes, suffering.

The situation indicated the worst case scenario.

[Subaru: —!!]

Subaru hits his head, almost going into a panic, and he lifted Rem again with the blanket. There were still signs of Halibel and Tia clashing at the other side of the tenement house.

However, this wasn't the time for that. It wasn't, and yet...

[Subaru: Tia! Halibel! Stop! That's enough!!]

He ran to the front and yelled at the two clashing people to stop fighting. Hearing that, Tia slowly looked his way while Halibel stayed cautious.

Both of them had the same person in their eyes, and he didn't know why they felt so moved.

Regardless, the madness in Tia's eyes settled down, and Halibel really was no longer preparing for combat.

[Tia: Huh.....?]

Tia let out a stunned and dumbfounded gasp, and when he looked at Subaru and the others, her surroundings made her think back. She thought back about the marks of destruction, Rem suffering, Subaru looking desperate, and Halibel fighting.

[Tia: Huh.....?]

Tia just kept letting that out, looking like she didn't know what had happened. Halibel quickly ran up to Subaru and Rem without paying attention to Tia.

[Halibel: How's Rem-chan?]

[Subaru: She's holding onto her stomach and it looks like she's in pain! We have to get her to the doctor as soon as possible.....]

[Halibel: I'll carry her. It'll be faster that way. Su-san, you hurry, too.]

Halibel immediately picked up Rem along with the blanket, as if snatching her, and he jumped across the street with an extremely light leap, going off to get the old family magic user.

Subaru sees Halibel jumping towards the moon, and he hurries after him.

[Tia: Wai...Wait.....]

A shaky voice called out to him from behind. Subaru stops for a moment, and then he looked back.

He saw Tia standing alone, reaching her hand out for his back. She wasn't close enough to reach. She just had the will to try to stop him.

[Tia: I.....]

[Subaru: ——]

Subaru couldn't find the words to speak to Tia, who didn't finish her sentence.

He gave in to his impatience. —Actually, he was probably feeling irritated as well. He had no time to stop moving. He had to run to Rem as soon as possible.

The frustration makes Subaru's feet move, and he starts running. Leaving Tia behind.

[Tia: ——]

He felt like Tia's hoarse voice faintly reached his earlobes. However, Subaru didn't stop, and he didn't tell Tia to follow him, either.

Was he angry at her? Of course, that was one reason.

Was she afraid of her? Of course, that was another reason.

However, the biggest reason he ran away is because he was scared of speaking to Tia, as he didn't know what to say.

[???: Your wife is fine. She's calmed down.That was pretty dangerous for both the mother and the child.]

In the clinic he ran into, the old magic user said that after finishing the treatment, which took a few hours.

Hearing the calmness of Rem's breathing as she lay down on the bed, Subaru felt relief from the bottom of his heart, and words were not enough to express his gratitude towards Halibel and the old magic user.

And then, he went next to Rem as she slept, and he decided to wait as long as it'd take for her to wake up.

Even if Halibel returned to the tenement house and tells him that Tia isn't there, even if the old magic user tells him to take rest, he was going to wait as long as it'd take for Rem to open her eyes.

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

Rem woke up, he hears her voice, and he hugged her while shedding tears, confirming that she was okay.

Peace within his heart was restored at last, and after that, they faced reality.

—Tia never returned to the tenement house again.

And so, the noisy, fun life of the strange neighbors at the tenement house met its end.

The three months after that went by within a blink of an eye.

—The predicted date for Rem to give birth was coming closer and closer.