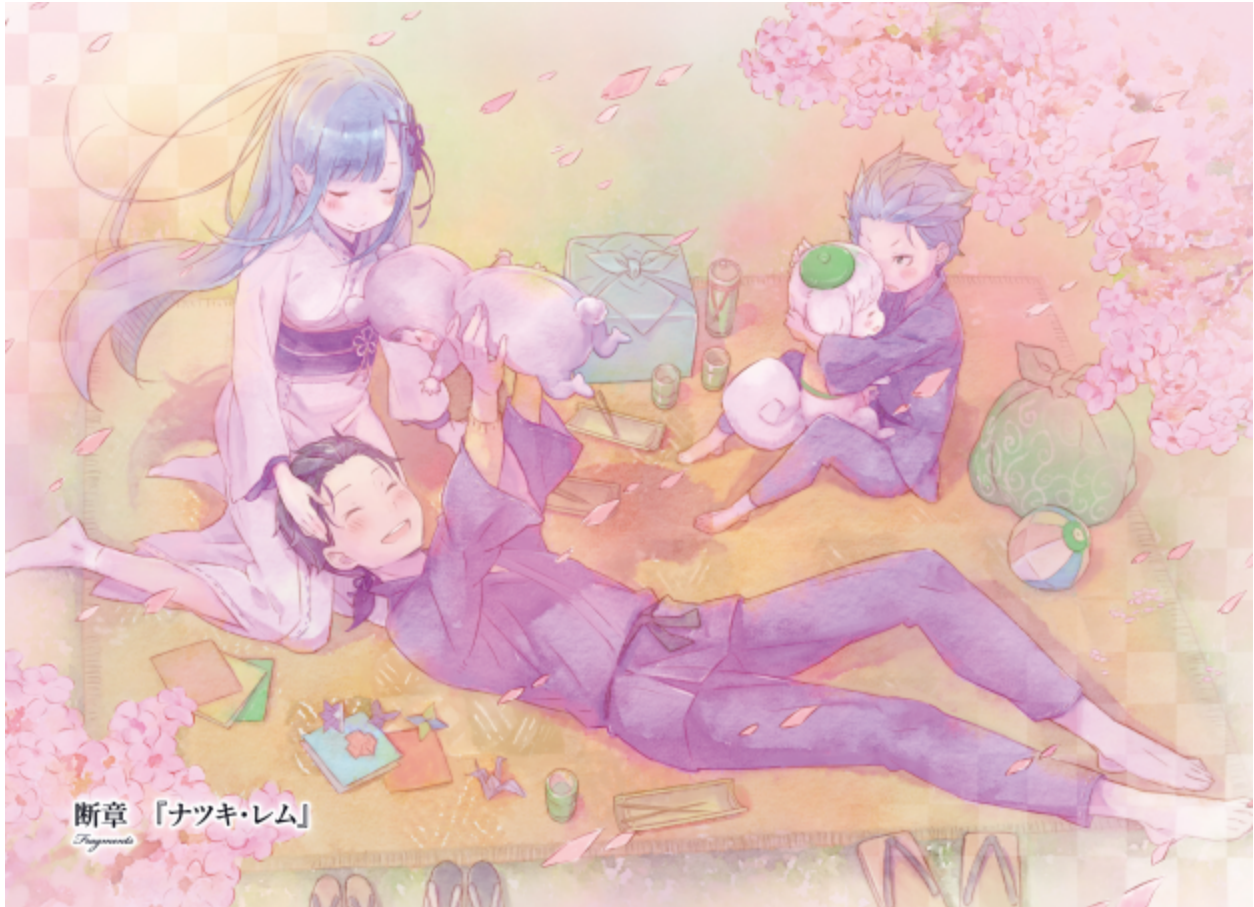


Interlude: Death Anniversary



1

—What erupted when she found that women were flames of unbearable rage.

Before the avenger became an avenger, she had lived in a village where “strays” gathered.

Onis are a race species. Rumors have it that their scarce kind created a hidden village somewhere, barely scraping by, but that was not the case for

her. When she was born, it was a child and her parent, and after her mother died, she had nothing but her own life.

The place this girl arrived at was a village where “strays” gathered.

Demi-humans with baggage and people who committed crime and left human villages lived there; not many decent people lived there. Because of that, she didn’t get rejected, as she was a high and proud Oni, and was accepted as a member of the village, allowed to live on.

As someone that had never lived with anyone other than her mother, life at the village was full of confusing things. Although the villagers were not good people, everyone had their own circumstances and anguish to deal with. Nobody intentionally acted cold to her.

Once time went by, even she was able to make friends before long. She was no longer confused with life at the village, had a set way she went about her days, and accepted these ordinary but peaceful times.

The girl went ahead and thought that this was like a sort of blessing. She had never seen what a blessing actually is. It might’ve been a misunderstanding. But still, she was glad.

—It was when she had these sort of thoughts that they all disappeared in a scene of flames

The village she was familiar with was engulfed in flames, cruelly burning down.

The neighbor who would always greet her, the young man who taught her how to grow crops, the elderly who was kind to her now, someone of the same sex that she’d talked to for the first time just yesterday, the man she’d been talking with frequently as of late—everyone burned.

She survived only because she got lucky.

But did she really get lucky? Could it be that she'd survived because she didn't have the best luck?

She brings out her horn, and it releases abominable power. Mana running through her body, she goes on a rampage to get rid of those who casted flames on the village. However, it wasn't enough.

She gets overpowered by sheer numbers, and her body burns in flames. They loudly laugh at her for screaming from the pain and despair, and she gets crushed by their feet.

[???: Not too baaaad I'd saaay. That's the kind of glare that I like.]

She heard a shrill voice nearby.

They stood next to her, and she poured something disgusting into her while she was down on the ground. It wasn't her body that rejected it; her soul rejected it. She let out a shriek. They wouldn't listen. Something slipped into her ears and was going into her body. Her insides get violated with moisture.

[???: Work's all done! Now, bastard, what do you like about me?]

The voice of a crazy, insane woman who wasn't okay in the head goes inside her ears, and it wouldn't go away.

It wouldn't go away. It just wouldn't. She gets tormented endlessly by the fear of going crazy at any moment. It was only when the villages, flames, and those people were gone that it finally disappeared.

But, her nose was still trying to find out where they went so that she could go after them. The thing that was poured into her—the shock that violently went through her sniffs out their location.

[???: —I will...punish them.]

She swears that in the face of the scorched village and became an avenger.

Now that she was an avenger, she needed the power she lacked in order to do an avenger's job.

To obtain it, she did something rash that put her life in danger. She snuck into a great spirit's nest, a place people went to impelled by their own insanity, just like she was.

—She wanted the power to kill them, the power to punish them—the power to slaughter them.

The blowing wind was turning her party into a pool of blood like a blade. Using a corpse as a shield, the avenger ventured inside. Whenever the shield became ineffective, she used a different corpse. She repeated that.

Before she knew it, the wind started sounding like a song to the avenger

The great spirit's nest lies deep within the cave. Somehow, the cave played the sound of mother nature along with the wind coming from its deepest part, and the song playing really wrung the heart.

The avenger was enchanted by the wind's song, and she moved further in while being in a trance.

She wanted power. She wanted to hear the rest of the song. This cave had everything the avenger wanted.

And then, when the avenger reached the deepest part of it, she heard a voice.

[???: —I want to...kill everyone.]

—She remembered replying “I do too” to that voice.

2

[???: I want to kill. I want to kill. I want to kill. I want to kill. I want to kill.]

The power the avenger took in was endlessly pouring that intention into her.

Originally, it should have been a thirst for death that would make you go crazy, a torrent of bloodthirst, an impulse to destroy—however, it went well with the avenger’s wish; it was even like a pleasant singing voice.

Thus, the avenger demonstrated her power for retribution with joy.

She absolutely destroyed those who got caught by her sense of smell. There was nothing left of them. They couldn't even be buried in a grave. It was the same as disappearing without a trace.

And so, the avenger achieved retribution again and again, until finally she’d reached a large town.

On the street at night, the avenger went after the “lingering scent” that her nose strongly reacted to, and she ran through an alley with an insane smile on her face. Her destination was close—right nearby.

This was her biggest target thus far. Maybe this was *the* target for the avenger—she got excited over the possibility that this might be the one who had that scornful laugh.

A black wind blows. Whenever that spreaded, people would recede out of fear. The target didn’t sense her with the wind. She waits at the end of the path the target walks on, looking forward to their face twitching in fear.

[———]

An enemy with an extremely unpleasant, strong miasma appeared in front of the avenger. She saw their face, but unfortunately, it wasn’t familiar to her. Doesn’t matter. She was still going to kill them.

With that sole thought on her mind, the avenger adds bloodlust to the wind, and starts to bite her target whole—

[???: ———]

A girl next to the enemy getting close to them caught her attention.

Somehow, at a glance, the avenger realized that this was a girl who had the same blood flowing through her as she did.

For a moment, she’s taken aback by the girl standing to protect the enemy beside her. And then, once the avenger’s stiffness was gone, thick, dark anger violently ate away her mind.

What is she doing there? That man is an enemy who should be punished.

Why is someone of the same position, same blood, and same race with that man without punishing him?

[???: —What...are you doing.]

In anger, her voice comes out.

It was not an intent to kill that came out, but a question.

Hearing that question, the girl did not choose to protect the avenger, but the frightened enemy, so her answer was clear.

The neighbor, the young one, the elderly, the person of the same sex...
—The man who had hoped to bond...

She was going to protect the enemy that burned her happiness? Someone of the same blood, loving a man so happily?

In that case—

[???: —Die.]

—Killing this girl will increase her self-esteem.

And so, after experiencing failure twice, the avenger now had the right to face retribution for the third time.

[???: Damn...it.....]

It was a white clothed woman who let out a cry of pain, hit the wall, and collapsed.

That forced voice sounded familiar. Of course it did. Inside the avenger's cranium, a voice was still endlessly telling her to kill. The voices were the same.

The voice...was the same. And yet, it was too fragile. It desired something else. They weren't in agreement. That's why it was repelled.

This wasn't the power the avenger wanted. It was something foreign, and it was too fragile.

Humbly saying that it wanted to become one would've been fine, but it was too fragile to do something like loudly tell her to obey.

[???: —Die.]

Thus, she demonstrated her power. She completely beat up the entity and reached for its core.

[???: Ah...oo...aah.....]

Lifted by the collar, the woman moaned with her body. She squirmed and tried to escape from her arms, but she wouldn't let go. Then, the woman's existence slowly, slowly turned into light dust, and it was taken in by the avenger.

Originally, the woman's existence had been a part of the power the avenger took in. She held down the entity that had parted from her once before, making it hers for good this time.

[???: —e...m]

It sounded like the girl said someone's name the moment she disappeared. However, the avenger didn't hear it, and she gets scattered by the blowing wind, vanishing.

The nuisance was gone, and her power was complete. She wasn't missing anything anymore.

[???: —Die.]

Now all that's left is to achieve retribution. An avenger carrying out her revenge. With that woman's death.

[???: —]

That woman is the one who's wrong. That woman is crazy for protecting the enemy that ought to be punished.

The enemy with the scent of the witch, and her abominable kind that got close to him.

Kill both of them. Both of them have to be killed. Kill. Kill, kill them.

Killing is the only thing that can comfort her for what she'd lost. This will be atonement.

—This isn't hatred; it's a duty. *Because of this sense of duty, that woman must die!*