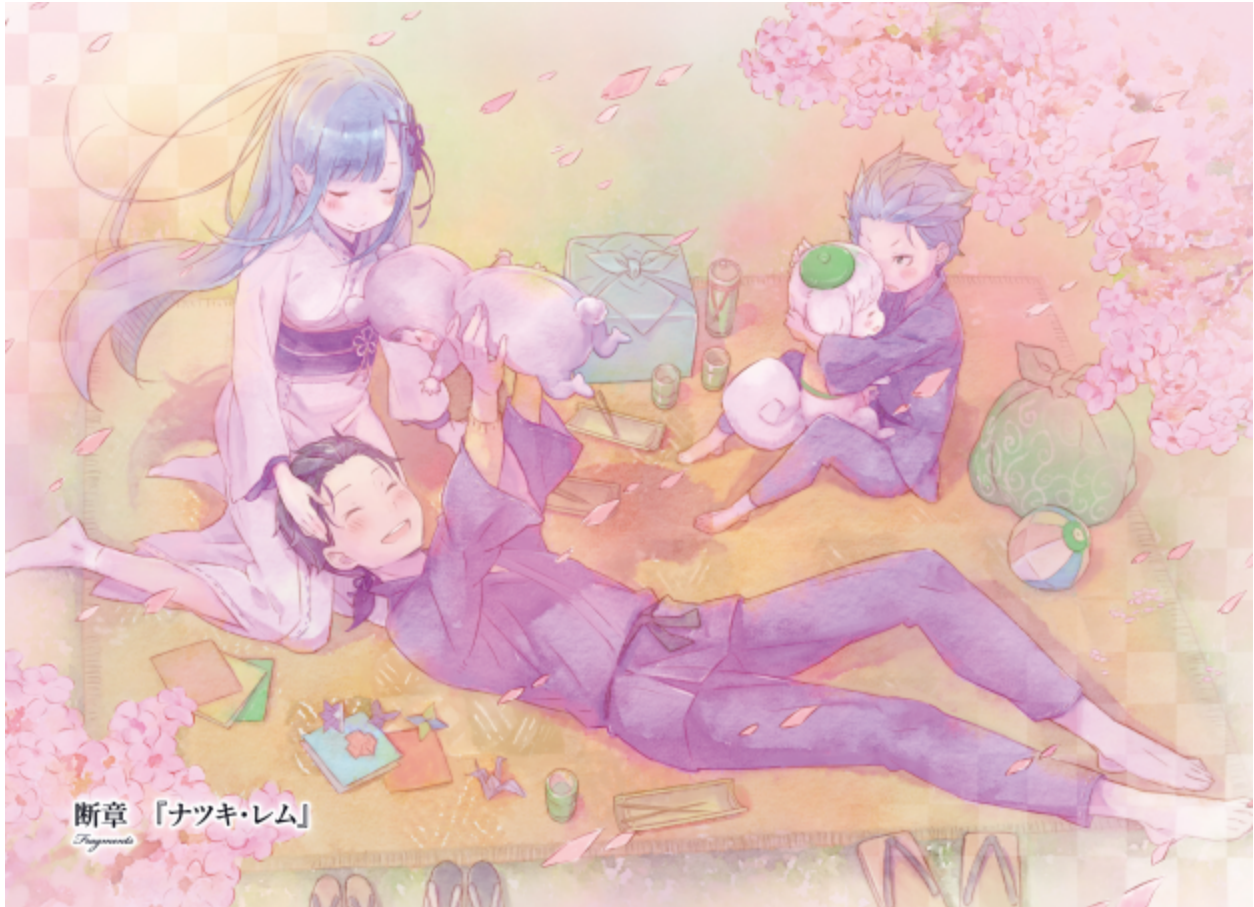


Chapter 6: The Last Month of Pregnancy



1

The old magic user looked at Rem, who was brought into the clinic, and made a very unpleasant look with his pale face.

[Doctor: Is it really possible for the breaks to be this short right off the bat? What's going on!?!]

[Rem: ...Hau]

The old magic user put his hand on Rem's stomach as she breathed with difficulty, and he mentions how short the intervals of pain were. The old

magic user clicked his tongue at Subaru, who was only confused by his point, and said,

[Doctor: Normally, the breaks between the pain during birth are long. It's a sign that the baby will be born, though the pace will pick up little by little. But, your wife's reactions are odd. Hey! Go call her over!]

The old magic user raises his voice in the middle of his explanation, and he shouts at the helper to call over the midwife. Meanwhile, the old magic user left the room in a hurry, and tension was starting to fill up the whole clinic.

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

[Subaru: Rem! Rem, are you alright.....of course you aren't. Damn it, ahhh, damn it, I'll be here for you.]

Subaru gets angry at himself for being unable to say anything useful, and he spoke to Rem as he held her hand. Rem held his hand back so tight that it made him feel pain, but it wasn't nearly as much as the amount of pain she was feeling.

Subaru seriously thought to himself, if crushing his hand would comfort Rem, then she can go ahead and do it.

[Rem: I won't...do that. It's my husband's precious hand, after all.....]

Reading Subaru's inner thoughts, Rem slightly smiled. The way she was clearly pretending to be tough made Subaru choke up.

Subaru was the one who had to do everything he could—say everything he could—to comfort Rem. So, why was Subaru being taken care of by Rem?

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

[Subaru: ...Rem, don't think about Tia right now. Focus on yourself.]

[Rem: That's...not it.Tia-sama said this before, right? That the baby inside my belly is trying to come out now because...the shackles of my mind...have been removed.....]

[Subaru: She did...say that.....]

Hearing Rem saying that falteringly, Subaru looks back on what Tia had said just before she bid her farewell.

The deadline of the promised made between Rem and Tia—until the child is born, Tia wouldn't do anything to Rem and would quietly watch for any slip-ups.

It was actually a pointless promise and a misunderstanding by Tia, though.

[Rem: Then, the promise became pointless, and so now.....the baby is finally coming out.....]

[Subaru:You might not believe me on this, but that's just a coincidence. The events just happened to occur at the same time. It's nothing to stress out about.]

It may be possible for one's condition to be affected by the mind. However, it's quite unlikely for that to even affect the timing of birth. It is true that Rem giving birth happened later than the magic user had predicted.

However, giving birth isn't so simple that you could just repress it through sheer will.

[Rem: It...it does stress me out. Because...I.....]

[Subaru: I? What is it? Tell me anything. Right now, I'll listen to anything you have to say.]

[Rem: ...I...was scared. I was scared of the child...being born.]

Rem held Subaru's hand tight, extremely tight, and said that while tearing up.

When Subaru's breath was taken away by her words, Rem closed her eyes tight again, and she continued to shed tears.

[Rem: I was so happy that you were glad that we have a baby. I really was. I was really happy. But, I was really scared. Because.....]

[Subaru: ...]

[Rem: Because...I...I wasn't able to be a good child...when I was one myself. I let...my parents down...and the villagers.....thought I was a...hopeless child.....]

Uncontrollable tears trickle down rapidly from Rem's eyes. And Subaru couldn't even wipe them away, as he was captivated by the beautiful, sparkling teardrops.

She was unable to be a good kid. That regret binded Rem's mind with anxiety.

[Rem: Despite all that, I have a child.....and I was so worried, I couldn't stop being worried. Being a good child...a good little sister! I couldn't be either of those...and I wondered...could I really be a...parent.....?]

[Subaru: Rem.....]

[Rem: I didn't...want to part with Tia-sama. I thought that, if there hadn't been a deadline, we would have spent our days at the tenement house like that forever...and ever.....But, I was wrong.]

Rem shakes her head disapprovingly and reveals the piled up inner thoughts she had kept hidden.

As if she was punishing herself for being far too sinful.

[Rem: I was... scared of becoming a parent. I was scared of...meeting face to face with the child. I was actually scared this whole time. I thought I couldn't be a good parent!]

[Subaru:]

[Rem: Because, I've always.....disappointed all the...precious people...around me.....]

Rem breathes heavily, and her face is red from agitation and grief. Using the hand that wasn't holding onto Subaru's, Rem wipes her face that had tears trickling down on it, and then covered it with her arm.

Rem's heartbreaking outburst hits Subaru, and it was tearing his heart into shreds.

It was a very intense, a very natural, and a very sad outburst.

[Subaru:]

Subaru swallows his saliva, and choosing his next words throws his brain into chaos.

What should he say? He didn't know the answer. "Sorry for making you worry"? "Sorry for not picking up on your worries?" Criticize her by saying "Don't be so pathetic"? None of them seemed correct.

Because Rem revealed what she felt deep down. She made up her mind to reveal that she was hated and disappointed others.

That's right. Rem said that she has always disappointed those who were precious to her. She confessed after she decided to make Subaru reveal his own true feelings.

And so, after that confession, what did he think? Was he actually disappointed by Rem?

[Subaru: Rem]

[Rem:]

Rem, who had her name called for a moment, shakes with her face covered. Birth pains and probably disappointment with herself were tormenting her chest. Her mind was a mess, no doubt about it.

Subaru was also worrying about what to say in this situation, right here right now.

So, Subaru held Rem's hand, and with his other hand, patted her head as he said,

[Subaru: I understand how you feel.I really do.]

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

Rem slowly raised her arms, as if she was surprised by the gentleness of Subaru's tone. Just how pathetic did Subaru look in her eyes?

Rem's worry truly was the same as Subaru's, as if they were mirroring each other.

[Subaru: You see, I... ..I'm the same way. No, I was even worse. I wasn't able to be a good kid. I couldn't...look my dad...or my mom in the face, either.....]

[Rem:

[Subaru: They were such great parents. My dad and my mom really were the greatest parents in the world. They loved each other, were nice to me.....told me that they loved me...]

Just like Rem did, Subaru started talking about himself as the tears trickled down.

He's lived with Rem for a year and a half, and was summoned to this world just under 2 years ago. In all that time, Subaru had never spoken about his past to anyone—not even once.

Because it was related to the memories Subaru never wanted to reveal. And they were in this precious place that was so wonderful and beautiful to Subaru that he was scared to even touch it.

Subaru looked up to his parents. ...From the bottom of his heart, he felt sorry that he had to be their child.

His parents were so kind, strict, gave him joy, sadness, anger, gifts, and yet their failure of a son couldn't give anything back. It was truly pathetic.

How could Natsuki Subaru, someone who was raised by such good parents and still couldn't be a good son, become a parent? That's what he was afraid of this whole time...

[Subaru: But, I can't..show you that I am. I.....I brought you with me. I'm the one who brought you with me. I wanted to give you everything I had to make you happy. I told myself that I had to do it.....]

That's why he hid his anxiety and eagerly waited for this day to come. He worked hard at his job, devoted himself to supporting Rem, and tried his best to be a good husband.

Believing that if he tried to be good husband, in the future he could become a good father too.

[Subaru: But, it wasn't that simple. Of course it wasn't. I'm going to be a someone's parent, you know. I can't just get the right answers by thinking logically. So, I'm still.....]

At the last minute, he threw everything out there, as if to repent his ignorance of Rem's anxiety.

Subaru and Rem both knew that neither of them were perfect. And they were afraid of whether they'd be able to fulfill their responsibilities as parents for the child that was on the way.

They were scared. So scared. And they were even scared of confessing that they were scared, but...

[Rem: Subaru...-kun.....do you regret it?]

After listening to his confession, Rem broke the silence by asking Subaru a question. Subaru impulsively lifted his head, and he looked straight at Rem's eyes that were right there.

Her light blue eyes were switching between despair and grief and were staring at Subaru. Inside her baby belly, there was their child. Labor pains have already started, and birth was just around the corner.

With all that happening, she had this confession. ...Did he want this child to be born?

[Subaru:]

Subaru knew that Rem's eyes were asking him that, and he rubbed his eyes hard.

He wasn't clear enough. Subaru made it this far regretting his lack of clarity, regretting his lack of action, running away from the problems before him and going to the more comfortable path—to the less painful path.

He made it this far by running away from his parents, running away from reality, running away from initiating into this world, running away from his promise that he made, running away from those who were precious to him, and running away from the fear of losing what he had.

Did he run and run and run and come this far, just to lose everything?

[Subaru: That's not...it. Rem, I don't regret it. I.....I've been saved.]

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

[Subaru: I've always been running. I threw away everything and ran away with you.....But, when I heard that we had a child, I was happy, and that's

when I was saved. Even after running and running with my back turned, there was something I could have. And that was...our child.]

He was worried. He couldn't lie. Subaru, as someone who couldn't look at his parents in the face, always had a fear of becoming a parent. He still does. It wasn't gone. It probably would never go away.

But, at the same time, Subaru knew something. He knew the love of the best role model parents in the whole world.

[Subaru: I was a...terrible son. I wasn't able to be a good kid. But, I had the best parents in the whole world. I know I had the best parents, and I know I was the worst child ever too. So, no matter what happens, I'll love our child.]

[Rem:]

[Subaru: My parents loved a hopeless failure like me. I know that. I do. ...That's why I'll be able to love my own child—love my family.]

In Subaru's mind, he saw their smiles—copying his father and his mother, he smiled. He threw his chest out with confidence, bragged that he knew the best role-models, and was proud.

Natsuki Subaru was raised by the world's best parents—the world's best role models—for 17 years.

[Rem:]

After Subaru declared that with a smile, Rem was speechless. Her teary eyes open wide, her red face becomes even more red, and her facial expression slowly changes.

The overflowing tears turned into just one teardrop, and with a slight smile Rem said,

[Rem: ...You're fanatical like an Oni.]

Then, with the same smile from that one moment, she said an awfully nostalgic line to Subaru.

Did Subaru nod back at that smile with the same smile he had on that day?

Then came...

[Doctor: ...The midwife's here. Birth preparations will begin. Get out. Go pray.]

The old magic user came back to the clinic room with a middle-aged woman. Subaru thought the timing was too perfect, but the old magic user had his usual sour look, so he couldn't tell what he was thinking.

Anyhow, it was time. Subaru looked back at Rem, and took her hand once again as he said,

[Subaru: Rem, all these feelings I've let out are the truth. Please believe me.]

[Rem:I'll...always...believe Subaru-kun.]

[Subaru: Ohh, that's right.]

The helper who came in quickly brings in the necessary tools into the room. The midwife gives instructions for what to do with them, and the old magic user jerked his chin at Subaru with a stern look. He was telling him to get out.

[Subaru: I can't stay for its birth?]

[Doctor: You really think men staying here would be helpful? Everyone I've called over are woman, including the midwife and the helper. I'm here just in case, but in this situation even I'm just a figurehead.]

The old magic user snorted to drop him a hint that he didn't need to do anything. He felt like his continuously blunt attitude was telling him that he trying to be more helpful than needed.

[Subaru: Doctor, please take care of Rem.]

[Doctor: Tell that to the midwife.]

He was waved at perfunctorily, and he gave a wry smile. After that, now was when he let go of Rem's hand as he said,

[Subaru: Rem, I'll be waiting. ...My wife and kid are in your hands.]

[Rem: Yes, your Rem's got this, Subaru-kun.About Tia-sama...]

[Subaru: I know.]

Hearing the words she added on with a smile, Subaru nodded to indicate that she didn't have to continue. Rem sees that, and after she closed her eyes approvingly, starts to breath heavily.

A fight only Rem could face was going to begin.

[???: Get out!]

The midwife speaks to him, and Subaru was forced to leave the clinic room. When he was about to leave the room, he heard Rem's cries of pain. Her long, long fight was beginning.

The truth is that Subaru wanted to watch over her fight outside the clinic room too, but...

[Halibel: ...Su-san]

Just as Subaru appeared at the aisle, Halibel spoke to him. He'd been planning this and that after he informed the clinic that Rem was going into labor.

He was also the one person who understood the situation besides Subaru and Rem.

[Halibel: How's Rem-chan?]

[Subaru: She's at the stage where birth really begins. They said that men will get in the way and kicked me out.I really am useless in situations like these.]

[Halibel: That includes me too. It's Rem's job and her job only. Also, we've got our own things we need to do.Su-san, you know that too, don't you?]

Subaru gave a wry smile, and then said "Yeah" to reassure Halibel, who lowered the tone of his voice.

With the expression Halibel had, and above all, with what had happened just before, he could imagine what he was talking about.

[Subaru: The person who stole Tia's power is coming to town to kill me. What about Tia.....]

[Halibel: Look at this.]

To answer Subaru's question, Halibel took out something from his kimono's sleeve. At first, this thing knitted with black thread looked like something you'd wear around your arm. ...Then, he had an idea.

[Subaru: That good luck bracelet is something you gave to Tia.]

[Halibel: Good luck bracelets are magic items because of the black braiding. I'll be skipping the details on how it's made, but two of these make a whole magical item, and if something ever happens to the owner.....]

As Halibel spoke, he shook the black braids. It snapped while he did it.

[Subaru: Which means that Tia...]

[Halibel: She lost a fight she picked herself. Even she knew that she had a low chance of winning. She realized it when she was about to leave it up to me to finish the job. What a ridiculous girl.]

Halibel put the snapped braids into his pocket and laughed loudly with his fangs showing. It probably seemed sad somehow because he was mourning Tia in his own way.

And so, he took out his kiseru instead of the black beads, put it to his mouth, and lit it.

[Halibel: I'm going to take care of Tia-chan's request. Su-san.....]

[Subaru: I know.]

Subaru interrupted Halibel and answered. Just like how he did when he to Rem.

Subaru's eyes lit up with determination and readiness, and then said this.

[Subaru: ...There's no running away anymore.]

2

[Halibel: About that girl.....let's call her 'the enemy'. About the enemy, she was outside of the town. I sort of tried getting a hit on her, but that wasn't a good idea. Doing it half-heartedly would just lead to more death.]

That was Halibel's opinion as he lit his kiseru. After that, Subaru racked his brains with a serious look, and he tilted his head as he said, "A hit"?

[Subaru: By "a hit", do you mean that you got in a fight? You fought?]

[Halibel: If I did, don't you think I would've gotten hurt? By I, I meant my team. Or in your words, I used a Shinobi squad.]

[Subaru: So Shinobi squads do exist! You really are a leader! You said they didn't exist!]

[Halibel: A Shinobi can't leak his secrets, you know? Nothing wrong with that, is there?]

Halibel tells Subaru, who wouldn't let the issue go, to calm down as he put his hand on his forehead.

In this situation, he didn't have the time to ask about hidden shinobi villages in Kararagi in detail. The information Halibel gathered and a plan were what were important...

[Halibel: She looks just like Tia-chan, but her skin is clearly black. We can stop her by attacking with a bunch of stalling tactics, but that won't work for long. What should we do?]

[Subaru: What would you do? Do you have some sort of idea in mind?]

[Halibel: The simplest method would be to confine you outside town and then accomplish our goal.]

Halibel put up his finger and presented the most reliable and simple plan possible. However, before Subaru could say something, Halibel bent the finger he had held up as he said,

[Halibel: But, that's not an option. I wouldn't want to lose a friend, and I'd feel terrible if I let Rem-chan's husband die and left her child on the way without a parent. Plus, it goes against my promise with Tia-chan.]

[Subaru: You sure do have a strong sense of duty. For a playboy, that is.]

[Halibel: You can't play without rules. So, an "eternal playboy" also has to stick to the rules that go with playing.]

Halibel responded to Subaru's joke with a joke of his own, and he shrugged. That gesture makes Subaru break into a smile, and he slapped his cheeks out of relief that he didn't have to worry about being sacrificed for now.

[Subaru: Let's discuss a little more. ...What do you know about Zarestia?]

[Halibel: I told you most of it at the house. She's said to be one of the four great spirits, a murdering spirit, a "phantom slasher", "the most beautiful shinigami", and she always sleeping in her nest in the west side of Kararagi. Sometimes she cuts up those who come into her bed.Also, she might have an old song.]

[Subaru: An old...song?]

When he raised an eyebrow at the unexpected word, Halibel said "Yes" as he nodded deeply.

[Halibel: I don't know the details, but those who know it will recognize it. If I remember correctly, what was it again.....it's like a lullaby.]

[Subaru: The song of the wind? The lullaby of the wind?]

[Halibel, Oh, that's it. Su-san, I'm surprised you knew. Even though you're not even a Kararagian.]

[Subaru: Well, of course I do. What kind of people do you think I'm surrounded with everyday at work?]

Subaru responded to Halibel, who acted impressed, and inside he was grateful—grateful for the nosiness of the ladies he worked with at the Magoji palace. Those ladies were the ones who taught Subaru, as he was going to become a dad soon, from general housework to babysitting. Among the things he learned, there was a song called the lullaby of the wind.

It was something that sung the story of when people defeated a certain large beast during ancient times.

[Subaru: ...Hal-san, you mentioned stalling tactics, right? How long can we stop her for?]

[Halibel:With sacrifices, half a day. Without sacrifices, 6 hours.]

Although Halibel hesitated for a moment, he looked into Subaru eyes and gave that answer. He did it because, right now, there was strong determination in Subaru's eyes.

He thought about the lullaby of the wind, all of his enemies, Tia, and then came up with one idea.

He was going to need time, money, and help.

And then there also was...

[Subaru: ...I'll have to go around with my head down, ready to live to return favors for the rest of my life!!]

3

She waves her hand, conjuring wind. A slaughterous wind that cut up everything and turned things into dust.

[???: ...Die.]

A brief order, then quick execution. In less than a second, the bite attack flew and devoured the sky.

A flash went through the sky, and steel was repelled by the wind that was following it. Throws delayed her, attacking her from all directions non-stop. It was depressing. The wind repelled the steel. No matter how many times she was attacked, it didn't matter.

[???: ...Die.]

She attacked her opponent who threw steel with wind. The effect was unclear. This was one of the flaws with the wind; the flurry of wind would turn into fangs and fade away after opening a space. She had to see the result for herself.

However, it was currently night time. The surrounding enemies were elusive and innately skilled at lurking in the darkness.

[???: ...Die.]

It was impossible to tell if any of the flurries of wind caught the black shadow. Even if they hit, they didn't even let out cries of pain and act shamelessly when they died. They were horrible enemies in every way.

[???: Kill kill kill kill kill kill kill.]

I hear a voice in my head. I know. I feel the same way. I want to kill everything.

But before that, I have to kill someone. There's an enemy who needs to be punished. I sense their presence with my nose. I know where they are, but the dark shadows are getting in the way.

[???:]

Suddenly, in her vision of hatred, she saw the black shadows move altogether. Her eyes opened wide, wondering what this was all about, and then all the presences surrounding her started to disappear, as if the wind had scattered them.

They withdrew. Suddenly. Without any changes in the situation. She thinks about what happened, about what they were doing. Her instincts were telling her to take this lucky chance to go towards the witch scent. However, if this is a trap or a plot, jumping into this would be the the height of stupidity. *What are you thinking? You have the power to scatter them now.*

The differing conclusions in her mind and her heart collide with each other. *I want to kill them. I should kill them carefully.* While they kept fighting each other, she came to the conclusion that she should settle down...

[???: ...]

The next moment, she was disgusted by a foul, strong stench.

Her eyes opened wide, and the stench that reached her via the wind makes her nose react. Without a doubt, this wafting stench, which slipped into her nose even if she didn't want it to, was an evil scent, the witch's scent, a miasma that needed to be punished...

The smell was quickly getting stronger, her senses and instincts cheer her on, and so she blasted the ground with the bottom of her foot.

[???: Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!]

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

The cheer in her skull and her own cheer overlap. She jumped on the ground lightly and went after her target. She went into town, smashed roof tiles, jumped over buildings, and went deeper and deeper until finally—

[Subaru: ...About your face...]

She landed with her limbs and looked up. In front of her, there was a man standing in a blue dress. A stench that pierced her sense of smell and disgusted her nose and mind.

The face with the witch's scent that she'd seen before—the evil face that had cowered in fear and trembled as it was hunted was smiling in a very provocative manner.

And then...

[Subaru: ...It's cuter when you smile. Almost as cute as my wife and my child.]

[???: ...Die!!]

She was greeted with a spiteful smile, and her bloodlust makes her strike. The wind goes straight towards the man standing upright, and it scraped off his existence from the earth along with his stench...or at least, it should have.

[Halibel: Unfortunately, I won't let you do that.]

[???: ...]

With that flat voice, all of the flurries of wind came to nothing. The winds were shot down by steel thrown from the darkness. Wind arose where the enemy wasn't, and the man opened his arms, unharmed. It was like he was saying that he was the one who did this.

[???: ...Diee!]

Inexcusable. She conjured even more wind, let her increase in bloodlust control her, and struck with her power.

She produces a blast. The ground was gouged out roundly, as if to draw a circle in the middle of the explosion. However, the man wasn't inside of the damage. Neither was the demi-human who interfered with by throwing things.

She looked up. She stepped onto the roof tiles, and on top of the building, there was a man. He was being carried by a demi-human on his shoulder, and he was trying to run.

...I won't let you get away. I want to kill you. Like I'd let you get away. I want to kill you.

[???: ...Die!]

She chased after the stench and the demi-human running away while the night approached dawn, jumping and running through the streets. It becomes wind, she attacks with wind, swirls wind, rides wind, and—

[???: ...!]

Inside the wind, a different smell was mixed with the stench. And her body was having a strong reaction to it. This was a person's smell, and a strong one at that. There were a lot of people. A premise...she sees a premise down there. The man and the demi-human fled into it. Peoples' presences...a stench that has another stench.

She was very hesitant about going in. But, the man was in there. Retribution was in there...

[Subaru: ...I can return by]

[???: ...!!]

After that inaudible utterance, her instincts went wild from the stench that became tremendously strong. Her cautiousness was blown away along with her reason. When she stepped in, she jumped towards the sky and looked for the demi-human running through the garden.

She aimed at him and the man he was carrying on his shoulders and attacked with absolutely unavoidable wind from all sides.

[Halibel: Sorry, Su-san!]

Sensing that the inescapable wind coming close, the demi-human yelled right before it trapped them. He grabbed onto the body of the man on his shoulders and threw him as hard as he could. The man's body went through a gap in the wind and escaped its cutting range. ...However, that wasn't going to happen for the demi-human that was left behind.

[???: ...Die!]

The wind cruelly cuts up the demi-human who closed his fingers and was left inside. The demi-human died. She starts to feel joy from killing him, and at the same time, realizes that this wasn't over yet.

The man had been thrown into the sky. She jumped towards it and opened her arms.

Let's tear his body limb from limb, take his remains, and bring them to her. Let's teach this woman who gave birth and snuggled up to the sinful enemy a lesson.

This is revenge. This is retribution. This is atonement for their blood.

...This is revenge for having the happiness that I was never able to have!

[???: ...D]

[Subaru: Now...!!]

When her hatred and joy crossed each other and she tried to strike with “death”, the source of the stench shouted.

[Subaru: Ready...gooo!!]

Right after that, she sensed that something was being thrown at her from all directions—at the edge of her vision, she saw something that looked like an unfolded cloth. It was thrown at her.

[???:]

Think. The stench is right before me. I can reach him and kill him. But, if I prioritize that, the thrown unfolded cloth will reach me. I can still get away from it. I can conjure wind, get on it, and foil the enemy’s plan.

[???:]

That’s right. No need to panic. Do what’s safe. There’s no need to go with the enemy’s plan...

[???: Kill kill kill kill kill kill kill]

Control the thirst for death that keeps echoing in your head, and you’ll get out of this situation.

Listen to me, just this once. If you do, you’ll be able to quench your thirst—

[???: ...I want to kill. But, I can’t.]

[???: ...!?!]

[???: ...Because I don't want Rem to hate me.]

Something inside her said that in the same voice that was telling her to kill.

Her hands and legs freeze. She couldn't move. She couldn't run or kill.

[???: ...Dieeeeeeee!!]

[???: ...Ahh, I can't get enough of that scream.]

When she heard a very cruel voice, her body was also hit by something that she was unable to dodge. It was the wet cloth. It wrapped around her. It wasn't attacking her. It just wrapped around her over and over.

Water...I'm wet. It's not water. This has a sharp smell.

[???:!!!!!!]

Then, she screamed as if her skull was breaking, and the rejection threw her brain into chaos. The entity that should've been shut inside went wild; it couldn't take it anymore, and it tried to come out and escape.

[???:]

Her head was aching. Her skull was being torn apart violently from the inside. It was strange pain that went beyond her imagination. She had never experienced this sort of pain. She had never experienced this sort of suffering. She had never imagined this sort of pain. *No, no, no, no...I don't want to die.*

It comes off. It came off; the power that made up her body fell apart. She lost the figure that had been the basis for her body—the figure that made her look formidable to demonstrate power—as if melting like ice.

Her body shrunk. Her hair color changed. She went from having inhumane beauty to being an ugly village girl. She went from having eccentric power to being a mere incomplete Oni.

And so, she even lost her power to get revenge, was abandoned by her bloodlust, and...

[???: I]

[Halibel: ...I'm sorry. I'm sorry.]

She hears the voice of a demi-human that should have been cut up earlier. She shook off the cloth that was on her. She could now see the black shadows jumping at her.

A small blade stabbed a part of her body—the center of her chest.

...That was the end.

4

In the palace's garden, he was looking down on a girl that had collapsed.

She had a light brown pigtailed and an ordinary but charming face. However, she was so pale that it looked like she could faint at any moment, ruining it, and she had awful bags under her eyes.

[Halibel: Her wounds are fatal, and she was hit with a curse that made her unable to get away. ...Now, she's done for.]

Next to Subaru, there was Halibel looking down on a girl, half-naked without his kimono on. Listening to his statement, Subaru knitted his brow and tilted his head as he asked, “A curse?”

[Halibel: I told you before, didn't I? I'm an expert on magic.....Killing with curses is my trump card. Stuff like my fur and nails are fused into the kunai I have, so if it gets stolen, it will cast a curse.]

[Subaru: What the hell, that's really dangerous. Is it even okay for you to tell me about this?]

[Halibel: It's totally fine. If you expose it to people, I'll just make you completely disappear.]

[Subaru: That sure is a crazy way to deal with it.]

Halibel acted relaxed, but Subaru couldn't hide the chills he had from his killing scheme.

Sorcery is said to be one of the arts in this world that are branches of magic. Since sorcery is an art that specializes in taking someone's life, there is a rule that the caster must touch his/her opponent, and even Subaru has had experience with this before. Sorcery is very hard to use because of this, but Halibel has solved it by mixing in parts of himself with his weapon.

[Halibel: On the first night we met, the kunai stabbed her. Her movement slowed down because it was effective. Even while harnessing a great spirit's power, you can't stop the curse from working.]

[Subaru: So she came to kill me before she would die?]

[Halibel: It might be why she rushed things. Honestly, I don't know myself.]

Shrugging his shoulders, Halibel took his kiseru out of his belly band, and put it in his mouth. It seemed that he had no intentions of being involved with what was going to happen now. He was being both kind and strict.

Subaru took a deep breath, and then looked into the face of the girl who was on the verge of death.

[???:]

Slowly, her eyes opened, as if she had felt his presence. They were light blue eyes. That common feature made Subaru feel some unnecessary guilt. However, he didn't stop.

[Subaru: It was.....It was a mistake for you to go after me. I have nothing to do with the Witch Cult. But, I can see why you still couldn't stop.]

[???:]

[Subaru: I won't ask you to forgive me. I'd like to, but there'd be no use in asking. I won't tell you to not hate me, so go ahead and hate me. But, I'd like you to hate just me.]

He didn't want her to hate his child that was being born, and of course, not Rem, either. That also went for Halibel and the other people who helped him out.

In this situation, it was Natsuki Subaru who thought about killing her, made a plan, and carried it out.

It was Natsuki Subaru who wished to kill her; it was him who filled her with hatred until the very end.

[Subaru: My name is Natsuki Subaru. That is the name of the man who killed you.]

[???:]

[Subaru: I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. Even though I told you that you didn't have to forgive me.....I'm sorry for apologizing.]

Ideally, he would listen to no complaints if possible, the dying girl would be left with no regrets, and he'd take her life. However, that didn't happen, and Subaru was being a helpless wimp faced with death.

“Death” is scary. “Death” is not salvation. Subaru knew that.

Subaru knew “Death” better than anyone in this world, so he felt very bad for the girl.

[Subaru: I have a child on the way. Rem is doing her best. I'm going to be a father. So, I couldn't die. I'm sorry. That's why I killed you.]

They were nothing but selfish excuses. And if their views became so conflicted that they decided to kill each other, there would be no time to understand one another.

Subaru's words weren't going to comfort her or enlighten her.

In response to Subaru's words, the girl stopped her distressed breathing for a moment and said,

[???: I.....]

[Subaru:]

[???: I.....hate...that...girl.]

The girl said that in a voice full of hatred as if she was coughing up blood—as if she was looking into heaven from hell.

Subaru immediately realized that she was talking about Rem. He realized it, but that realization made things inconsistent. She she should have been going after the witch's scent. That's how they came up with the plan to use Subaru as a bait. All of her hatred should've been directed towards Subaru.

[???: That girl.....has...everything.....I want...everything.....]

[Subaru: That's.....]

[???: I was going to...with him.....and yet...I...]

Tears flow from the girl's eyes. Her eyes were no longer looking at Subaru, or at anywhere in this world.

They were looking somewhere else—they were looking at a scene with happiness that she yearned for so much, enough to tear her heart out and drive her to get revenge.

Happiness that she was supposed to have too. She had that taken away from her, became an avenger, and now she was going to die.

What she held onto at the very end were her hatred and jealousy towards Rem, who had the same blood in her veins and reached a kind of life that was different from the one she had...No, it was probably envy.

[Subaru: What's your name?]

[???:]

[Subaru: What is...your name?]

He asked, crouching down and moving his face close. To his side, Halibel tried to stop him, but Subaru prevented him from doing so with his hand. The girl no longer had the energy to do something to Subaru as he got close.

He listened to the girl's last spark of life that was running out even in this moment.

[???: ...ese]

[Subaru: Reese]

Subaru picked up the name he was quickly told, and said that. He didn't have the time to confirm if he was correct.

[???:.....]

Light fades away from the girl's eyes. The girl envied Rem, cursed her fate, and breathed her last.

He saw that with his own eyes. ...No, it was Natsuki Subaru who put an end to her.

He'd never forget her name. Subaru would never forget the fact the girl had once lived—that Reese had once lived. He sacrificed Reese to protect himself; to protect his family; to protect his life.

And he would never tell anyone what this girl Reese had truly wished for. Subaru, who was hated by her, was going to carry that to his grave.

So that neither Rem nor the child on the way would ever find out about it.

[Subaru:It's over.]

[Halibel: Yeah. It wasn't done in a very satisfying way, though.]

Upon hearing Subaru's statement mixed with a sigh, Halibel responded while giving out smoke. He helped out with everything for this plan. Because of that, Subaru bowed his head to Halibel.

[Subaru: Thanks for going with my selfish, uncertain plan. I really appreciate it.]

[Halibel: I was the one who made the final call, and we got her just like you planned, so I have no complaints. The Substitution that I hadn't done in a while worked. It all went fairly well.]

He had said that he wasn't very good at Substitution, but in the very end, it worked out.

After Halibel let Subaru get away from the girl's max firepower, he used Substitution and survived by pulling a classic: switching with a log.

[Subaru: That sure showed the finesse of a ninja.Also]

Halibel wasn't the only one who helped out with this plan. He had the help of many others.

Looking around, this was the Magoji palace—after preparing a trap, he used the premise to guarantee the necessary space. And that was not the only thing he used; he used people and money too.

To prove it, there was Riften Magoji standing on the veranda of the palace. While touching his mustache, he bowed deeply to Subaru and said,

[Riften: I'm glad that things went according to plan without any problems.]

[Subaru: I sincerely apologize for the trouble I've caused you, Master.....]

[Riften: "Culture School" has only just begun. You still have to guide all these women with your feminine abilities. It's an essential investment. I love investments, you see.]

He had asked Riften, who chuckled, to supply the alcohol that was absolutely necessary for the plan on top of providing a place for it. He had used Riften's name, as he was a brave warrior, to literally gather strong alcohol from the town and get them to bring it all into the palace.

[Subaru: The lullaby hint, and Tia being poor with alcohol. And then there was the overreaction to the cooking alcohol.]

Those things led to the inference that Zarestia isn't fond of alcohol. The old anecdotes of an entity with extremely strong power drinking excessively and being slain were endless.

The lullaby also had details related to that. If there really were existences running rampant in this world that are like the ones in the legends, then it wouldn't necessarily be wrong to act out those legends.

A blanket with a large amount of alcohol was actually thrown at the Zarestia that was captured in Reese, and she came out after her body was soaked in alcohol.

With Riffen's wealth and reputation and the traditions of the ladies at the palace, he won. Afterwards, the people who helped him with the alcohol soaking plan...

[Subaru: ...Clane's employment agency.]

[Clane: After you said "Avenging Tia", I had to come too. Also, everyone loved that girl.]

Said Clane, in armor—not an apron—with his large arms folded. He and a lot of other non-regular employees came rushing over when they heard about avenging Tia.

If the plan fails, there will be an all out war with a being that has a Great Spirit level of power. Even though they had declined at first like that, many people did this for Tia.

[Clane: And if push came to shove, Halibel would've done something.]

[Halibel: What the heck? You expect way too much from me.]

"Give me a break, man" Halibel said as he shook his head at Clane, who scratched the nose on his lizard face. That behavior makes soft smiles go all around.

He had seen a harsh ending. However, having no victims other than the girl was the best conclusion among all the ones he thought of. It was the best one where he didn't lose anything.

So, all that's left was...

[Halibel: ...The final payback, huh.]

Subaru looked up, and Halibel knocked the ash off his kiseru. Riffen firmly sat down at the veranda and picked up the weapons that Clane and the others deployed.

A wind slowly comes down towards the palace's garden covered with tension, battle preparations, and caution.

Milky white hair, a pure white dress, and a face that had reached inhumane beauty via the hands of God. She had a rude side, which didn't go with the way she looked, and childish parts about her and was surprisingly friendly and sentimental.

It was the girl that had the title of a great spirit, which didn't suit her at all, who everyone here knew.

[???:]

Overwhelmed by the presence coming closer, Subaru stopped his feet from stepping back.

In his mind, he decided that he wouldn't run away. Believing that If he gets away from her—away from Tia...

...He'd also get away from those boisterous, noisy days of happiness.

5

Long, long ago before the world—before witches and dragons became this and that...

I was always free. I enjoyed my freedom without having anyone get in my way.

I conjured wind, spread fires, whirled up water, and dug up dirt, doing whatever I wanted.

Everyone approved of me. Everyone asked all these favors of me, who lived freely. I felt nice and they were well-mannered, so I did their favors.

I conjured wind, spread fires, whirled up water, and dug up dirt, doing what they had asked for.

After that, everyone was happy. Everyone praised me. Everyone smiled.

So, my mood got better and better, and I did everyone favors. Of course, sometimes I'd miss being free so much that I wouldn't do their favors, but in most cases, I still helped everyone out whenever I wasn't sleeping.

Eventually, everyone started bringing things whenever they asked me for favors.

They were things like vegetables, animal meat, sparkly gems, and burnished kimonos; they were all these sort of things that had "value".

I wasn't really hungry, nor did I have any interest in gems, and the cloth had some unnecessary fur on it so I wasn't happy with the things they brought.

But, I appreciated their thoughts, so I decided to work hard.

I conjured wind, spread fire, whirled up water, and dug up dirt. That's what I loved to do. By doing what I loved, everyone was happy. So, I did it over and over again.

However, eventually everyone's favors started to get weird.

Even though they were asking for favors, they kept bringing things with them. Before, I was happy doing what I wanted with fire, water, and dirt, but now I was being told what to do.

I loved being free. I loved doing what I wanted.

But, I liked being praised by everyone, and I also liked getting attention.

So, I reluctantly did everyone's favors. I conjured water, spread fire, whirled up water, and dug up dirt where they wanted me to.

Afterwards, everyone was happy again. My mood improved, and I forgave them.

Then, a lot of their favors were asking me to do what they told me.

Eventually...eventually it happened when I was getting used to doing what people told me to.

This favor was really weird.

They didn't need wind. They didn't need water. They didn't need dirt. What they wanted was fire.

I didn't like it. I wanted to start with wind. I didn't want to use just wind. I loved being free. For a very long time, I have always started with wind.

I didn't like how they weren't letting me do that. I said "No", refusing to do their favor.

When I did that, everyone left. I was left alone.

I was free. I thought to act freely like before, without caring about anyone. But, it was lonely being free. When everyone's gone, I feel lonely, I thought.

I went to see everyone. I said, "If fire's what they want, I'll give it to them."

Everyone was happy. I decided to bring fire, just like everyone asked for. However, fire isn't the only thing I conjured; I snuck in wind. I wanted wind with the spreading of fire, and wind was the one thing I had to have. Wind was my symbol of freedom.

There was no water. There was no dirt. There were only wind and fire. Everything became bright red.

I was glad that everyone was pleased.

After pleasing everyone, they called me over and treated me warmly.

I didn't really have any interest in food, dancing, or gifts. But, it felt nice having everyone treat me warmly. Also, the water that wasn't actually water was amazing.

Water that became hot when you drank it. Water that had a weird smell. The more you drank it, the more you wanted another.

I was having a blast, and drank water as recommended by everyone. I drank lots, got sleepy, and then fell asleep at a place that wasn't my nest for the first time.

...When I woke up, my limbs were gone, and my neck was about to get cut off.

I had always been free. I had always, always been free. I enjoyed my freedom.

Where did my hand that grew fire go? Where did my tail that whirled up water go? Where did my feet that dug up dirt go? Where did my freedom go?

When everyone heard my voice, they yelled with angry looks on their faces. They were yelling.

You tell me that fire burned the country, but I don't understand. You tell me that wind made it spread, but I don't care. You shout at me for not putting out the fire with water and dirt, but I don't get it.

Where did my freedom go? Why are people mad at me?

I said, "I want my limbs back." Nobody listened to me. Instead, I was showered with water that smelled weird. It was the water that put me to sleep.

The water was on fire. My body was burning. "Hot, hot, hot!" I screamed.

Everyone was happy about it. Everyone was happy that I was burning, like how they were happy when I did what I'd always do.

I didn't have the hands to spread fire. I didn't have the tail to grow water. I didn't have the feet to dig up dirt.

...But, I had the head to conjure wind. I had a mouth. I had a tongue. I had fangs.

Give me back my freedom. Give back me. ...Don't laugh at me. I'll kill you.

My mind was dyed pitch black. I killed everyone besides myself. I killed everyone—everyone who was happy, everyone who was crying, and everyone who was mad.

I killed everyone...I killed them and slaughtered them, but I still wanted to kill people.

Even though pleasant things happened, I wanted to kill. Even though sad things happened, I wanted to kill. Even if there were things that angered me, I wanted to kill. Even if there were things that bothered me, I wanted to kill. When I became sleepy, I wanted to kill. After I woke up from a dream, I wanted to kill. After wind blew, I wanted to kill. After the sun set, I wanted to kill.

Kill kill kill kill kill kill kill kill.

I want to kill everything. My bloodlust was everything to me.

I was free. So, I wanted to freely kill everything. I will kill.

I'm free. The last ones I killed called me a "Shinigami".

I'm free. Back when everyone was smiling, they told me I was "beautiful".

I'm free. Freer than anyone. I am the "Most Beautiful Shinigami".

...I am the "Most Beautiful Shinigami", Zarestia.

...I'm free. I want to kill everything. I want to kill.

6

“Death” is what Natsuki Subaru was feeling.

His instincts understood that what had manifested before him was an entity that brought along deep “death” with her.

[Subaru:]

Subaru was scared of death. He was scared of it more than anything. Many people feel the same way. But, for Subaru, “death” didn’t have the same meaning as it did for others.

“Death” meant the end. However, for Subaru, “death” wasn’t the end.

...It was the beginning of hell.

[Subaru: Since you’re in a white dress, should I assume that you are the Tia we know?]

The girl dressed in white lands while conjuring wind in the middle of the palace garden. She definitely looked like the Tia Subaru knew. Her appearance was exactly the same. The same went for her clothes; the white dress—for some reason, it was black when she became one with Reese, so it was easy to recognize the difference.

[Subaru: I would appreciate it if you’d tell me which one you are right now. Depending on your answer.....]

[Tia: Depending on my answer what? What’ll you do, Su?]

[Subaru:]

He called his name. A nickname he got used to hearing. He couldn't believe that she'd call him that in an affectionate way—no, maybe she was calling him that with affection in her own way.

Subaru was called by that nickname, and he blinked.

[Tia: What's up with that dumbfounded look? Could you not get charmed just because I'm cute?]

[Subaru:I only care about wife. If my child is a girl, then I'll be only care about my wife and my daughter.]

[Tia: Hah! Well said! Also.....I see there's quite a lot of people here.]

Tia's lips curled as they had an exchange of banter, and she slowly looked at all the people that had gathered for this battle. They were all very familiar faces to her.

Surely Tia also knew that they were here to save her.

[Tia: Hal and the other males working hard late at night, huh. Apparently, grown men are idiots.]

[Halibel: You're gonna make me depressed by being that harsh. Adults gotta stay up late like idiots every now and then, you know?]

[Tia: Ohhh, so did anything come out of staying up late?]

[Halibel: Actually, that's what we want to ask *you*. Tia-chan, how'd it go?]

When Tia was asked that question, she held out her arms and gently opened and closed her palms. And then, when she went “Mm” as if purring like a cat, she said,

[Tia:I got my light sphere back. I got me back. It's like the great spirit Zarestia has been completely revived here.]

[Subaru: Completely revived...But you're.....]

Once Tia returns back to normal, she won't be able to control her bloodlust anymore. She certainly did say that.

However, even after regaining the power that had been taken away from her, the Tia before them wasn't causing any havoc that they had been worrying about. Perhaps she was the same girl with a slight attitude from before.

In that case, maybe the things Tia said would happen weren't going to happen after all.

[Tia: Stop, Su. You shouldn't get your hopes up.]

But, Tia shook her head at Subaru's hopes with a stern look. When Subaru held his breath unintentionally, she sighed and said,

[Tia: Immediately thinking of things that sound nice is something that males do. But, it's not happening. I told you, didn't I? You guys are the reason why I got my light sphere back. I'm grateful for that.]

[Subaru: Then.....]

[Tia: Yeah, I'm grateful. ...I'm grateful, so I want to kill.]

[Subaru:]

Bloodlust intense enough to give one the chills filled the whole palace, went outside the premise, and then swallowed half of the town. The smell of “death” was felt so much by his skin that, for a moment, he had the illusion that his vision might’ve been covered by a black mist.

After it sunk its claws into his soul, he understood that it came from Tia, who was standing still before him.

[Tia: This is who I am. This is who Zarestia is—the great spirit that only kills.]

[Subaru: T—Tia.....Even so.....]

[Tia: You’re still not letting it go? You’re still saying this to me?]

Subaru was overwhelmed by bloodlust, had his throat caught by fear, and his heart went out of control. Even so, he wouldn’t let go. As if irritated by it, Tia kicked dirt at him.

If Tia acts, there will be total war. But, would it even be total war? Wouldn’t it just be a one-sided slaughter fest? That’s how stronger the abnormal power felt to him.

[Tia: This...weird water.....alcohol, was it? I remember now. I...hated...this stuff.]

[Subaru:]

[Tia: A long time ago...I was forced to drink this...and my head was cut off when I was sleeping. My limbs were cut off too. This was thrown on my face, I was put on fire.....After that, I always wanted to kill.]

Tia voiced her grudges to Subaru and the others, expressing just how cruelly she had been treated, revealing the reason why she hated the alcohol that became trump card for victory.

However, she still had a smile on her face. There wasn't any anger on it. There wasn't any resentment either. There was only bloodlust with her smile that came from the heart.

[Tia: I want to kill everything. Whether I'm smiling, angry, crying, frustrated, in agony, or happy. Whether it be bitter or delicious. Whether it feel great or bad. Whether it be cold, hot, sweet, sour. Whether it be at night, in the morning, or in the afternoon. Whether it be a child, an adult, an old person, a baby, a man, a woman, a dog, a cat, or a wolf.]

Every feelings, every emotion, every situation, every time, every target, every being—everything was connected to bloodlust for Tia.

[Tia: I want to kill. I want to kill everything. That's the kind of creature I am.]

[Subaru: Then.....What about...us?]

[Tia:]

Upon hearing Subaru's forced out question, Tia directed her silent murderous intent towards him. She just looked at him. An action that small had murderous intent. The embodiment of bloodlust—a being that has every conclusion lead to bloodlust.

There were no lies on that billboard. Tia was trying to kill Subaru and the others. Even though she wasn't killing them, she was trying to. Even though she didn't want to kill them, she wanted to kill.

[Tia: I.....]

Tia tried to say something. Words full of bloodlust come out.

Clane and his employees took defensive postures, Halibel put his hand in his pocket, and Subaru quietly clenched his fists.

And then...

[Tia: ...!]

7

...Inside the clinic, there were intense energy and the spasms of a life.

[Doctor: Push down...!]

[Rem: Oo...ooooo....!!]

She tightly clenched her teeth and grasped the rail of the bed propping her up with all her strength. The iron rail squeaked and clear fingerprints were left on it. Still, the pain didn't go away. She couldn't hide from it.

The feeling of her insides being pushed out and the pain from a life struggling bash her consciousness again and again. Rem had never experienced pain like this in her whole life.

[Rem: Goo...eeee...!]

...Actually, with the time length considered, this was more intense than any other pain she's ever experienced.

Even if she concentrated on her forehead, she could not feel her horn coming out. Right now, the Oni Rem was completely dead.

As if she had put all of her life force into the baby in her belly.

[Rem:]

Rem's horn has made her suffer a lot, and at the same time, has been beneficial.

Being an Oni has made Rem go through cruel, painful things. As she has confessed to Subaru, she wasn't able to be a good kid. To her parents, she was a failure of a daughter. ...To her sister, she was a bad little sister until the very end.

It has also caused her to never think that she was given blessings and not benefits.

Whenever was tormented by pain, suffering, or powerlessness, she would realize that she was an Oni, that she Oni blood—that she had power. Once she could no longer feel that for the first time, she realized that she was blessed.

Blessed by being an Oni. By being born as her parents' child. By being her sister's little sister.

She met Subaru, got married, had a kid, and in this moment when it was being born, realized it for the first time.

Surely, her parents too, had felt...

[Rem: ...Oo...Ahhh! Oooooo!!]

Breaks from the the pain become shorter and shorter, and now the pain was swarming her non-stop. Every time it felt like she was going to lose consciousness, the dull pain shook her awake. It happened again and again.

And Rem couldn't hear the midwife desperately cheering her on. She couldn't hear anything.

[???:!? Hey, do you realize where you are!? Looking like that.....]

[Rem:?]

Rem felt a strange, surprising presence, and she opened her eyes. In her field of vision blurred by tears, she did not see the midwife looking at Rem with an earnest expression.

The midwife was was sinking down next to the legs of the bed. Instead, the one right next to Rem looking into her face was...

[Rem: Tia...-sama.....?]

[Tia: Sorry to do this at a time like this, Rem. Also, I said we wouldn't see each other anymore, but I was wrong. This...this will really be the last time.]

In her open eyes, she saw Tia smile lonesomely. It was Tia's smile that Rem has seen many times...and yet, dark thoughts seemed to be appearing and disappearing.

Bloodlust...It was bloodlust. There was bloodlust in Tia's smile. It wasn't a fake smile, but there was bloodlust.

[Tia: This is the real me. So, I can't be with you guys. I...When I see you struggling, I just want to kill.]

[Rem:]

Tia's words had apologeticness, sincerity, and bloodlust. It made total sense.

She understood what she was saying. Tia's true feelings and her nature were always in conflict. She couldn't live with her. That's the kind of existence she is.

[Rem: You got yourself back.....]

[Tia:Yeah, I did. It's all thanks to Su and Hal's hard work. I want to kill.]

Tia played with her hair in an embarrassed manner, and she voiced her murderous intent while blushing.

Seeing her friend like that, Rem closed her eyes. A tear ran down her cheek.

[Rem: Tia-sama, I'm going to be a mom.]

[Tia: Yeah, I know.]

[Rem: Tia-sama, I...love Subaru-kun.]

[Tia: Yeah, I know that too.]

[Rem: Tia-sama.....I...love you too.]

[Tia:]

[Rem: So, I can't...live with you.]

Even though she loved her, she couldn't be with her. Her being unable to associate with others was an insurmountable wall. There was someone Rem loved and prioritized over Tia.

[Rem:]

It was after she told her feelings that Rem noticed how Tia looked for the first time. Tia, who had run over in a white dress, had someone in her arms. It was a senseless girl who wasn't breathing.

Someone's dead body...A girl's dead body. She somehow knew who it was and...

[Tia: I will bring her with me. / killed her. My other half...the fake me wanted to become one and loved me, so I killed her.]

[Rem:Tia-sama, did you...come to kill me?]

[Tia: I...]

Tia going back to normal meant that Subaru made things work out somehow. Subaru wasn't here. Only Tia, who wanted to slaughter everything, came back.

Logically thinking about it, this was a hopeless situation. It wouldn't be surprising if Rem was heartbroken and sobbed as she begged for her life.

However, Rem didn't do that, and she knew there was no need to.

...The days she spent together with Tia wouldn't let her.

[Tia: I...]

Tia says an incomplete sentence once again.

Tia's milky white hair shook, and, with Rem in her clear eyes, she broke into a smile as she said,

[Tia: ...I...love you guys...so I won't kill you.]

8

It was dawn when he arrived at the clinic after running from the palace without any breaks.

[Subaru: H—How is Rem!?!]

[Doctor: Still in the middle of fighting. Why are you guys barging in with stupid looks on your faces? You're just going to get in the way. Don't enter the waiting room either. Go wait outside!]

The old magic user acted so cold towards Subaru who was out of breath and checked if his wife was alright.

Although, that was understandable; because of Subaru and Halibel's negligence, they had an unexpected intruder at the scene of the child birth. Taboo things must have happened one after another in terms of professionalism for the one responsible for the clinic and watching the child birth.

[Halibel: But man, more than half a day.....Giving birth to a child is no easy task.]

Said Halibel, sinking down onto the waiting room chair and giving a long sigh. Influenced by seeing him relaxing, Clane and the others who accompanied him also all sat down. The ones who intruded included

almost all of the people who had been at the palace; there wasn't nearly enough room in the clinic.

In the end, more than half of them left the building, falling over on the way out, then they waited for morning and the baby's first cry. Of course, Subaru was waiting inside the waiting room, but he really couldn't settle down. He was just impatiently and restlessly walking around.

[Halibel: Su-san, I understand how you feel, but shouldn't you calm down a little bit?]

[Subaru:I get what you're saying. But, sorry, Even though it's pathetic, I just can't stay still. If I don't move, it feels like I'm suffocating.]

[Halibel: Makes sense. Well, I just wanted to say that. I did say I understand how you feel, but this isn't something I can't understand. Your worries are none of my business. It was just painful to watch, that's all.]

Although it sounded really irresponsible, he tried to get his mind off things even if it was just for a little while, and he appreciated the thought.

However, Subaru used up all the relief he got from Halibel in mere seconds, and once again started to wander around. Halibel gives a wry smile.

[Halibel: At times like these, men can only watch in silence.....No matter how many times I go through it, it's still rough.]

Halibel bit on his unlit kiseru, said just that, and went silent this time.

Deep inside, he agreed with his words. At times like these, men could only wait in silence. He looked up at the ceiling and continued to wish with his whole soul, like he was praying.

An awfully stale wish. A wish anyone would make too if they were put in this situation.

[Subaru: Please, God, Buddha, Christ, Jehovah, Mohammed, Angra Mainyu.....]

It didn't matter if it was a good god or an if it was an evil god. Even call a devil's name if you feel inclined to do so.

Subaru called the names of every supernatural existence he knew of, and prayed.

[Subaru: ...Tia, please.]

And lastly, he prayed with a name that was neither a god's name nor a great spirit's name, but his friend's.

I pray...

[Subaru: ...That both the mother and the child are all right.]

It was right after he gave a prayer when there was a disruptive change in the atmosphere.

Inside the clinic, a voice—the first cry of a bawling rang out, going through the clinic room door.

Subaru impulsively lifted his face, and Halibel also rose from his chair. Everyone who had been sleeping jumped to their feet one by one, and they waited eagerly for the clinic room door to open.

[Halibel: Have you decided on a name?]

Halibel asked that to Subaru, who was standing still and raising and lowering his head.

After that, Subaru pulled himself together and said,

[Subaru: Y—Yeah, I got one. I have one. If it's a girl, Spica.]

The “Subaru” in Natsuki Subaru is a name of a star. It's what his parents named him as they prayed. Imitating them, he'd name the child after a star while praying that he'd become a father who'd live up to his parents.

The door to the clinic room slowly opens. Beyond it, he saw Rem holding the baby...

[Subaru: If it's a boy...]