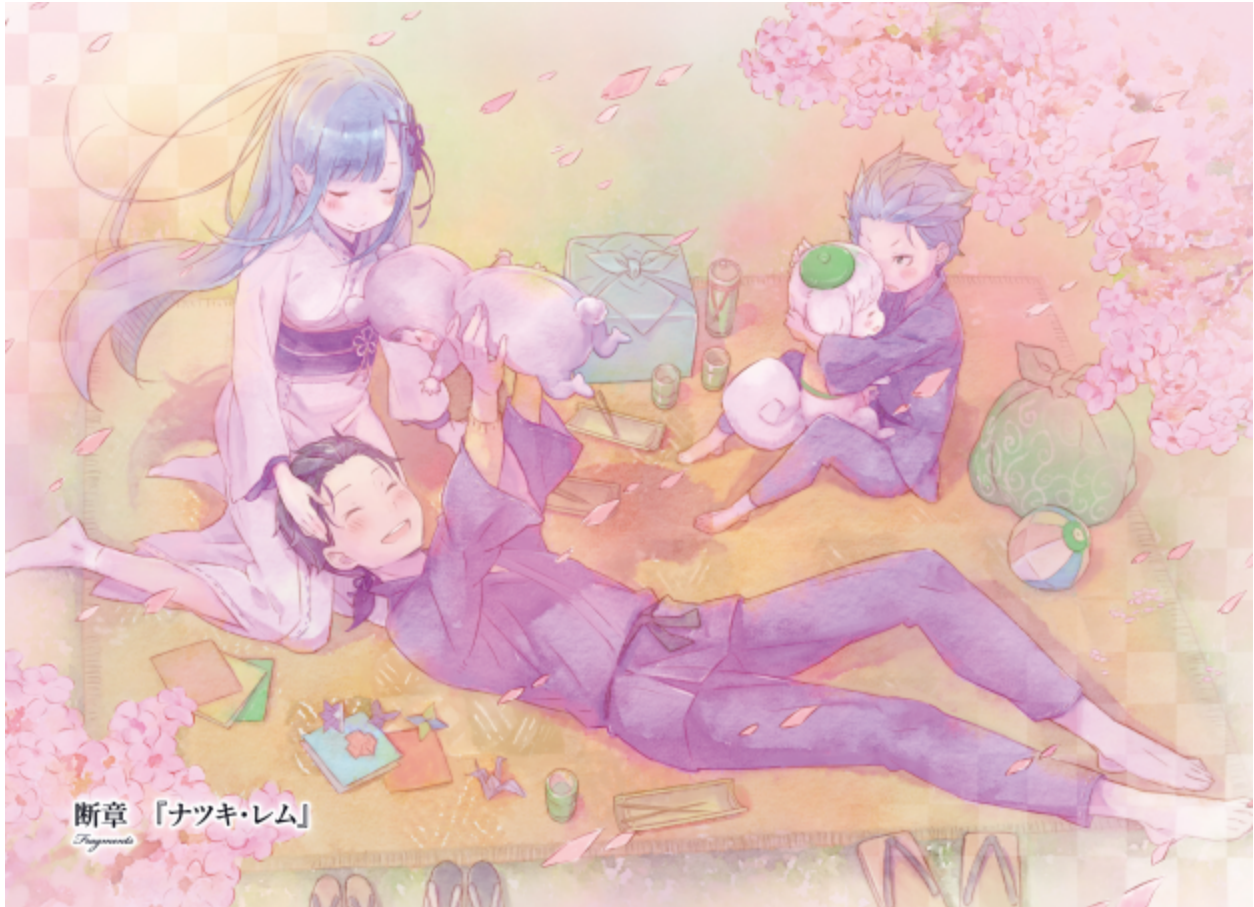


# Epilogue: Anniversary



1

[Rem: ...Rigel]

When the child had its named called by a gentle voice, it slowly stood up.

It was a child with light blue hair, and eyes that had the same color as its hair. It was turning six years old and was still at the peak of its adorableness...but the sharpness of its eyes didn't make the future look too bright.

Natsuki Rigel—that was the name of this child, a fitting leading character for the ending of this story.

[Rem: Rigel, where are you? It's time to go to Temple Elementary]

[Rigel: Mom, I'm right here. I'm already ready.]

When he responded to the voice that came from inside the house, a woman with long blue hair appeared all of a sudden. The lovely, beautiful woman suddenly smiled as she stared at Rigel, who was standing in the garden.

[Rem: Oh, you got ready quickly today. Good boy.]

[Rigel: Unlike Dad, I don't want to trouble you.]

[Rem: Hmph, don't say that, Rigel. You shouldn't bad-mouth your dad. Besides, I'm into taking care of your dad, so I don't mind. Hahh, it makes me so happy; I think the second one is coming now.....]

[Rigel: Could you not?! That's not funny!]

Listening to Rigel's voice crack, the woman—Rem, the mother, giggled. She had a baby belly, and inside of it there was Rigel's little brother/little sister in the making.

Although he was honestly anxious about having a sibling being born, Rigel had high hopes. *Surely it'll be a cute little sister. No doubt about it. I vote for a little sister.*

[Rem: So, even if it ends up being a little brother, don't bully him, and be his friend, okay?]

[Rigel: Well, that won't be a problem if you do your best to give birth to a little sister.]

[Rem: Oh, my. You really do seem to resemble someone.....]

Dealing with Rigel's sass, Rem put her to her forehead as if to say that this was unfortunate.

It's true that in the neighborhood Rigel was known to have a smart mouth. He was so quick-witted that you wouldn't believe he was a 6 years old, and it was acknowledged by the kids in the neighborhood.

However, Rigel knew that some other people had a big influence on this situation; he knew things were like this mainly because of his father and his workplace.

[Rem: It's great that I got my maternity and parental leaves approved as suggested by your dad, but now that I don't have work, I'm very bored.....]

[Rigel: What are you saying with that baby bell of yours? You should just do housework.]

Although Rem sighed with boredom, Rigel had nothing but respect for his mother's boldness.

This may not be her first childbirth, but how could a pregnant woman be this calm her second time? Rigel wanted to go around the whole town bragging about it, but his father was already doing that, so he held back.

[Rem: It was quite rough when I had you. This isn't so bad in comparison.]

[Rigel: Was it really that rough?]

[Rem: Yep, it sure was. It was a breech delivery, and I almost died.]

[Rigel: It was that rough!?!]

[Rem: It was rough. Your dad and Uncle Halibel almost died too.]

[Rigel: They were going to die!?!]

[Rem: They weren't the only ones. Had it taken a little longer, the whole town of Banan might've gotten annihilated.....]

[Rigel: Just how difficult was my birth!?!]

Rigel was told that his own birth put the town in danger, and it surprised him. *I can't possibly imagine this happening, but is it going to be a difficult birth like that when my sister is born?*

[Rigel: Will I stay alive and meet my sister.....?]

In his mind he promises to use the Substitution Halibel taught him on his father to sacrifice him if push comes to shove.

In any case, while they were having that conversation, the bell tower rang.

[Rigel: Ah, dang it. I'm actually going to be late!]

[Rem: That's not good. Here, bring this bento. Also, Dad forgot to bring his bento, so give this to him please.]

[Rigel: Alright.....]

Rigel takes the two packages and knits his brows at the difference between the two. One was kid sized. He could see that. That one's his. But, what was up with how grand the other one was?

[Rem: They're the same.]

[Rigel: Are they now!?!]

[Rem: I packed the same amount of love in each. For you to worry about such a thing.....Rigel, you're still such a baby, huh. Your sister's going to be disappointed with you.]

[Rigel: Why am I always at fault!?!]

Rigel pouted at what Rem said, and after that he put the two packages into his bag.

Then he waved at his mother, started to leave the house, and...

[Rem: ...Rigel.]

Upon hearing his mom's voice, he stopped and turned around. His mom gently waved while smiling and said,

[Rem: Take care.]

[Rigel: I'm off!]

After having that exchange, Natsuki Rigel started running to Temple Elementary.

[???: You sure are energetic again today, Rigel.] [???: Ri-chan, good morning.] [???: Good morning, Rigel.]

[Rigel: Good morning! Good morning! Good moooorning!]

Running towards downtown, Rigel was spoken to from every direction. To Rigel, this was the town he was born and raised in; the environment he was familiar with. But if he were to say that this was something totally natural, his classmates at temple elementary school would be surprised, so apparently he was just a little strange.

[Rigel: Mom and Dad seem to have done a lot of things.....]

He'd overheard the adults conversate as if they were talking about an amusing story. His mom and dad may have been involved in a serious event that shook Banan town.

Rigel honestly thought that it was fake. Would his mother, someone who acts reserved other than with his dad, really get involved in a serious event like that? As for his dad, it would not be surprising if an uproar was centered around him.

While having such thoughts, Rigel...

[???: ...Oh, Rigel. Come here.]

He hears a voice that didn't sound like it was greeting him. Rigel stops upon hearing that familiar tone of voice, and turns around. Then, right behind him, there was not a black wall...but a person in a black kimono.

[Rigel: Uncle Halibel!]

[Halibel: Ohh ohh, long time no see eh, Rigel. Have you been well? Have you been skipping your training?]

[Rigel: No I haven't! In fact, I wanna go onto the next training already! How about you, Uncle? Why have you been gone from town for so long?]

Rigel had his hair tousled by him, and broke into a broad smile from the rough way he handled his hair.

Halibel was his parents' friend, and to Rigel he was like an uncle. Though he may not look like it, he works as a shinobi and jokes that he's always finding those who bring the seeds of trouble into Kararagi city-state, purging them behind the scenes, assassinating.

Still, he really was like a shinobi, and he was secretly giving training.

[Halibel: You're pretty good at this. So good that you should even follow my footsteps if Rem-chan lets you.]

[Rigel: Like, following your footsteps to being an "eternal playboy"? No way. I'm going to support Mom and my sister and get a job that I can be proud of as a family head.]

[Halibel: I feel like I've heard this before, and what about your dad?]

[Rigel: Dad's a man. He's old enough to wipe his own butt. He'll be fine.]

[Halibel: Dahahahahaha! What the hell, Su-san has no respect going for him!]

After shrugging his shoulders, Halibel bursted into laughter while covering his face. Then, once Halibel's momentary laughter settled down, he said,

[Halibel: Hee...hee.....A—Anyways, I'm gonna go see Rem-chan. I'm on break for a while, so I'd like to be there to see your little brother/little sister being born if possible.]

[Rigel: It's a little sister.]

[Halibel: Hm?]

[Rigel: It's going to be a little sister.]

[Halibel: Y—Yeah, right.....]

Overwhelmed by an alarming sense of intimidation, Halibel nodded dubiously in response to Rigel's comment. And then, he put his kiseru to his mouth, and lit it as he gave out smoke.

[Halibel: You're going to Temple Elementary now, right? Take care. When you get back, I'll train you.]

[Rigel: It's a promise! Lie, and I'll make you swallow 1000 needles!]

[Halibel: Ohh, how scary. A Su-san type of phrase. I'm so scared.]

[Rigel: You'll be swallowing them from the bottom!]

[Halibel: Does that kind of stuff even happen!?!]

Halibel shrieked and laughed loudly upon hearing Rigel's reminder, and he left as he waved goodbye.

He was ecstatic to have met him again unexpectedly, but now he had very little time left. Was he going to have enough time to give his dad his bento?



He wouldn't care if not giving it would just mean that his dad would suffer, but he didn't want to make his mom sad. It was a dilemma.

So, as a solution...

[Rigel: ...Be sneaky about it.]

Rigel concentrated on his forehead, jumped very high, and went over the streets.

3

Jumping high and bathing in the wind in the sky felt good.

Inside the horn grown on his forehead, mana gathered from the atmosphere, filling his body with strength. In this state, Rigel felt like he was wrapped in a sense of almightiness, and that he could do anything.

However, since his mom would make a lonely look whenever he grew his horn, he tried to avoid doing this as much as possible. Of course, using it in an emergency like this was different, though.

[Rem: I'm sorry...that you could only grow one horn.....]

His mom had said that once when she was patting Rigel's head while he was pretending to be asleep. Rigel couldn't understand why she was apologizing for that. Judging from the way she had said it, it seemed having one horn wasn't enough, but wouldn't 5 or 6 of them look lame?

He thought there was a nice balance with having one horn in the middle of his forehead, and that it looked cool.

[Rigel: Well, it's not like I can look cool anyway with how much my face looks like dad's.]

Rigel steps on the roof tiles, being careful not to break them, and hops over the town.

His dad's workplace is called the "Banan Culture Promotion Group", which was in the east side of town, and it seems they plan all sorts of festival and events, and it is up to them to pump life into the town, or something like that. Apparently, it used to be a "Culture School" that his dad had worked at, but he didn't know any details about it.

Anyways, his dad's workplace was annoying all year round, and it was tiring to explain to his friends that it was "a job that spreaded the ritual where you hit Onis with beans" whenever they asked him about it.

That being said, it was true that he was supporting the household with his earnings. Thinking that this was the time as a son to thank his efforts for the family, he focused on bringing the bento and...

[???: ...Hey, you there.]

[Rigel: Ooe!?!]

He was called out to while jumping in the air and it freaked him out. Rigel looks right beside him, sees that someone is there, and was taken aback.

It was a very beautiful person. Milky white hair, a pure white dress, eyes attractive enough to leave you unable to speak.

[???: Wow, I can already guess whose kid is this. Isn't that something?]

[Rigel: Wh.....ugya!]

Rigel, surprised by the beautiful faced getting near him and smiling broadly, lost his balance in the air. He lost control, and at this rate, was going to hit the ground.

[???: Careful. You should stop jumping around if you're incapable.]

[Rigel: Ah]

He was grabbed by the neck, and was forced to stop. Then the person swooped down at once while holding onto Rigel—they silently landed at an empty street.

[Rigel: U—Umm...]

After landing, the woman and Rigel faced each other while she held him up. Rigel was stared at by a beautiful person he'd never seen before that smelled nice, and it made him nervous.

Seeing Rigel act like that, the woman sighed contentedly and said,

[???: I really enjoyed that. Yep, that's a face that says you want to kill.]

[Rigel: What's that supposed to mean!?!]

[???: Ohh, just like Su. I guess that should be expected. Given that your face looks that similar to his.]

The woman laughed foolishly and let go of Rigel, freeing him. While timidly looking at the woman, Rigel had no idea how to respond and had a question mark above his head.

*Since she talked about his face, she's most likely someone Dad knows. A lot of the people Dad knows are weirdos, but this woman in front of me is pretty fine woman. A beauty. No, but still...*

[???: Hey, don't get mesmerized just because I'm cute.]

[Rigel: No matter how much of a beauty you are, I have my little sister, so.....]

[???: Oh, okay then. So you've got a girl in mind.....wait, little sister!? Won't karma get you for that!?!]

*Karma...wonder what that means. I don't understand complicated things. I'm just a kid, after all.*

[???: Karma is when you have to live your life in a way that can never be changed. You'll understand soon enough. Anyways...]

[Rigel: Anyways?]

[???: You're Rigel, aren't you? Su and Rem's kid. Right?]

[Rigel: Uh, if by Su you mean Natsuki Subaru, then yes.]

The woman mentioned Rigel's mom and dad's names, and he nodded while being careful of her. The woman seemed very friendly. He also had a hunch that there was something else about her that was off putting, but he ignored it for now.

It was probably one of those hunches that wouldn't be worth worrying about after Rigel interacted with her.

[???: ...I'm surprised. You're an interesting one.]

[Rigel: Isn't that your karma? I don't really get it, though]

[???: Aha, you got me. Well done. ...You're the hero that slayed a monster.]

The woman smiled and exaggerated that he had slayed a monster. If this girl was a monster, then the world must be a pretty peaceful place.

[???: And so, I offer this as a reward for the hero that has slain the monster.]

[Rigel: ...? What's this?]

What the woman held out to him was something like a bracelet made with white thread. The woman made a devious look and went "hehehe" in response to Rigel's reaction of tilting his head.

[???: This is a small gift. I actually said I was going to give you my light sphere, but that's hard to do. So, I'm giving you a special white, not black, binding made by myself.]

[Rigel: What do you mean?]

[???: If something ever happens, I'll come rushing over to save you. That's what the tool is for. It's an amazing treasure. What do you think?]

*"Come rushing over", she says, but what can this slender girl even do if she does come?*

Those were Rigel's thoughts, forgetting about how he had been saved from jumping in Oni form. There was also the gift, but...

[Rigel: Mom said not to accept things from strangers, so.....]

[???: Huh!? .....Y—You're turning down my gift? I—I'll kill you, you know?]

[Rigel: That's a threat!]

The woman starts tearing up slightly, says something dangerous, and Rigel screeched at her.

This girl was wack. She looked way older than him, but was talking like one of his classmates. Or maybe something closer would be...a little sister. It was like he was talking to a little sister.

Plus, he knew that she had no ill intentions. Looking at her eyes, he could tell. She stared at Rigel so seriously that it felt uncomfortable, and she was putting words together.

[???: But...I...love you. I want to kill you, though.]

[Rigel: ...I have a little sister, so.....]

[???: You already said that earlier! Besides, she shouldn't even be born yet!]

She says that to Rigel, and rejected her for almost mesmerizing him for a bit. The women stamped her feet and tore her hair out, maybe because she was irritated by that, and said,

[???: Fine. Fine. F-I-N-E! If you insist, then FINE! I was actually going to leave, but not anymore! I'm going to talk about this with Su!]

[Rigel: With dad? I don't mind, but Dad's quite a pain in the butt.]

[???: I know. So is your mom. Let's go, Rigel.]

The woman said just that, and then started to walk. However, she was going in the wrong direction to get to his dad's workplace.

[Rigel: It's this way.]

[???: I—I knew thaaat. Aren't you being kind of bratty? Just how involved do you think I was with your birth? The town almost got destroyed, you know?]

[Rigel: Seriously, what the heck happened on the day I was born!?!]

When Rigel felt like this was a story that he had just heard about from his mother, he loudly threw a question. After hearing that, the woman put her finger to her lips and said,

[???: It'd take a looong time to tell you the story. Longer than the time it'll take to get to your dad.]

[Rigel: Then just come to our home. I'm sure Mom would welcome you.]

[???: .....]

When Rigel put his hands behind his head and told the woman that, her eyes widened. After that, she chuckled and said,

[???: O—Of course she would. I bought that house with the goodbye presents that I earned, after all!]

[Rigel: What are you to my family.....You haven't even told me your name.]

[Tia: My name? Oh, I'm Tia. I'm.....hm...]

The girl that seemed to be deeply involved with a bunch of stuff in the Natsuki family—Tia was messing with Rigel. However, he didn't mind it, and he was charmed by Tia's smile as she looked back.

Tia, with her broad smile, cheerfully said,

[Tia: .....I'm like...a part of your family.]

She finally said those words, and they both slowly moved towards his dad's workplace, standing side by side.

Before she knew it, the girl started humming in a good mood, and it sounded like something Rigel had heard before.

[Rigel: .....]

It was a lullaby his mom had put together long ago, before he was even born.

She had said that the name of the song was "Tia".

*...So, well, I guess I'll accept the fact that she said she's family.*

A light blue sky, a town that looked ordinary in every way—the scenery of a family's ordinary life.

That common, irreplaceable happiness definitely existed in one corner of the world.

There were things that were lost, things that were abandoned, places that were ran away from, memories that couldn't be forgotten even if they tried...



Despite having all these feelings, they would still live in this world that went on.

...And that was also an ending for one of the loves of a lost boy that wandered into another world.

