

RETURN BY MOE

COMMISSION STORY

BY CHALDEACHANGE



Everything had begun like a night unlike any other.

Actually, was that really the truth? Ever since Natsuki Subaru had found himself in this world of fantasy and death, where he was forced to, time and time again, die and rewind over and over until he finally found the outcome he desired, it had become difficult for him to say what was abnormal and what he should be considered ‘normal’. He was cursed, this world was terrifying, and yet thanks to his friends and his precious Emilia-tan, he still found the strength to move forward.

So being awoken in the middle of the night by the ground shaking uncontrollably? Well, at first it wasn’t all that unusual to feel an *earthquake*. It *had* forced him to roll out of his bed in the Roswaal Mansion and hit the floor with a painful *THUD* though. “**Gack!?** **What the hell was that!?**” Dressed in his favorite jersey, Subaru hadn’t expected such a rude awakening at *all*.

Sure, sometimes Ram would slap him awake, or prank him awake, or punch him awake... but never in the middle of the night! Only in the mornings when he was oversleeping! Maybe he needed to have a conversation with Roswaal about how the pink-haired maid was treating him, though.

Nonetheless, it didn’t take him *that* long to realize the ground was trembling and, to the best of his ability, he ran out front. What he saw was just as shocking to Subaru as it was to everyone else who was in attendance, including Rem, Ram, and Emilia. “**What the hell!?** **Is that a castle!?**” Not all that far from the mansion itself, a huge castle had appeared from nowhere, stunning them all.



“How did this responsibility end up falling onto *my* shoulders!? They’re just saying I’m the most disposable person at the mansion, aren’t they!” The day that followed the castle’s appearance had come and gone, and now it was the following evening. Cue Subaru in the courtyard of the castle that had appeared all by his lonesome, staring down the front gate.

The day that had led up to this moment had involved a number of things. Staff of the mansion had scoped out the castle from afar. Nothing they could find *appeared* to be dangerous, but there was still the matter of the interior. Who knew what lurked inside? And that was where things ultimately went south for the poor Japanese teen. In the end, he’d been duly elected to go investigate a portion of the castle’s interior.

And by ‘duly elected’, that meant Ram had forced him.

Walking up to the heavy front door, the boy groaned. There was no guarantee that what was inside wasn’t dangerous, and in fact? Knowing his luck, it absolutely *would* be. **“I bet I could get out of this by activating my Return By Death and just hitting the road before the castle appeared again...”** He grit his teeth. It was a clever idea, but that would involve him killing himself. In a worse case scenario he’d just die *in* the castle and then he could put that plan into action. Maybe there’d be a booby trap? Maybe it’d be painless?

It took all of his strength to push the massive, wooden doors of the castle open. His intention had been to leave them open once he passed through, because he naturally didn’t want to end up trapped inside. So he stepped into the main hallway – a grand hall that was surprisingly *lit*. Once he had gotten far enough away from the door though, it slammed shut behind him. **“HEY!”** He ran to it to try and pull or push it open again, but it wouldn’t budge? **“I’m trapped!?”**

This was shocking, sure. But considering his bad luck, Subaru almost found it comedic that, yeah, of *course* that had happened. **“So, what? Do I need to uncover the secrets of the castle to escape? Fight a gauntlet of bosses? It’d be just like a video game!”** He tried his best to pump himself up, but he also recognized that this attempt would only get him so far. At the first sign of trouble he was probably *fucked*.

No one else had come with him. Too 'busy to help' or something like that. And he *really* could have used Rem's strength in a situation like this. He bet she could have opened the door! **"Wait! That's it! I just need to stay holed up in the main hall! Eventually Rem will come to get me, right?"** This *was* a good idea, but who knew how long he would have to wait before Rem eventually arrived to do just that. If she even *could*.

At least there weren't any monsters around. He could take comfort in that. Yet Subaru didn't recognize the real, immediate danger. It was the castle itself. Anything that stepped inside would become a part of its mechanisms. Whether it was an obstacle... or a *challenger*. Naturally Subaru didn't understand what he had just walked into at all, but ultimately? Well, he wouldn't really understand even then. Not entirely. The trap he had just stepped into was far more elaborate than anything he could have ever anticipated, however.

"Ow!? The hell!?" The boy keeled over in pain suddenly, and the cause of that pain? Well, it wasn't exactly difficult to see what had caused it. After all, *an object had seemingly fallen* from the ceiling and had landed *directly on his head*. His luck was just as mediocre as it always had been, it seemed. **"What was that!?"** It didn't take him long to identify the offender: a golden staff with a big, blue gemstone at the tip. Was it used for casting magic?

Subaru wasn't afforded much of a chance to examine it more closely though, for the stone in the center began to glow a blinding blue that left him temporarily stunned. With everything that had been going on, it most certainly *didn't* help with his mood whatsoever. **"UGH!"** He was practically seeing stars once the light had completely faded, and he felt strangely... lethargic? The boy's first impulse would have been to send the staff flying with a kick after all that, but he just couldn't seem to muster the energy. **"Too much of a pain in the ass..."**

Not that he would have been in any condition to accomplish anything even if he *had* struggled, but this at least kept him from doing anything drastic. Like activating Return By Death, which would have made his predicament all the more complicated. Not that he really understood what *kind* of predicament he was in just yet. Still, there were already signs of it. The fact that he had just fallen under a spell at the behest of the staff's light, and the castle that had willed it into existence.

Little by little, the coloration of the Japanese youth's hair began to change. In tandem with each other, both the tips and the roots were seemingly bleached towards a light blonde – and while it *looked* fake at first, the color was legitimate. It had been ingrained into his biological

code, making it so that once it had *all* been dyed blonde, any hair that grew in the future would be the same color.

Which was convenient, because his hair *did* grow no sooner than the coloration change had been completed. “**Hah?**” It wasn’t exactly difficult for him to notice, not once the hair tickled his shoulders and bangs crossed longer between his eyes. “**What’s up with my hair!?**” Even with his energy subdued, he was still able to react with so much shock. Well, he *had* just discovered his hair had changed color and had – was – growing. Locks soft and sporting a floral fragrance, they curled out just above his ass. Plus an ahoge sprouted from their top!

“**That’s not right... What’s going on here?**” It had to be the staff, right? Subaru could be an idiot at times, but he wasn’t enough of a moron to not put two and two together there. Even with his gaze locked on the hair in his hand, the eyes through which he perceived this change in color and length changed in color themselves. Dark grey irises lit up with a vibrant and arguably girlish purple, eyes themselves seemingly rounder and lashes longer. “**Something’s wrong! Gah!? My voice!?**”

An unusual voice crack had shot the pitch of his voice up more than a few octaves, and once the sound had settled there? It didn’t revert. He was left sounding like a *girl*, but with his hair and eyes as they were? It didn’t exactly seem to be at all out of place. And the rest of his face followed suit to make it so that voice was even more fitting. Cheeks swelled full and round, though while lips inherited a glossy look? They didn’t actually look all that plump in the end... perhaps a touch more? This face looked smaller, cuter, and *younger*. Something Subaru did not have context for without a mirror or any other reflective surface nearby.

Though, he soon had bigger issues. Or were they *smaller* issues considering what was happening? “**Huh? Was this lobby always so...?**” *Big?* He squinted at his surroundings, uncertain, but inevitably the truth of the matter was laid plain to him not through his visual perception but by through the perception of touch. Specifically the feeling of his clothing upon his skin, or at least how it was moving. His jersey was loose and heavy, and as he’d realized too late? His track pants fell from his hips. There was only one logical explanation when you put all of these things together.

“**I’m... smaller?**” Perhaps Subaru’s exhaustion was growing, or perhaps he was becoming more and more desensitized to what was happening, but his shock had begun to taper off further in terms of energy. His body had shrunk, from his overall height to shrunken hands and feet (giving him a much more delicate look on the whole) and all he could really muster was almost an uncertain acceptance attitude wise.

Paired with his more youthful face, this miniaturized figure had seemingly robbed him of plenty of perceived age. His body looked more befitting of a child than even a teen by this juncture. One with a cute, girlish face and long, blonde locks. “**Long hair, a high voice, a small body...**” He recounted the changes he was aware of thus far, slowly piecing together what was otherwise obvious. But honestly? It was hard to *think*, at least on the intellectual level he had before. Almost like he was dumber? Or like the knowledge a teenaged boy might have had was reduced to more childish topics. Big words and complicated subjects were beyond his reach. Yet the conclusion he came to? He still had enough sense to arrive at it.

“**Am I... becoming a girl?**” There was a touch more pep in the shock of this realization. If it was true, how could he stop it? What would *she* think if he became a little girl? *She* would... *She*... Who *was* she? Someone important? It felt like she was *really* important, actually, but Subaru could muster an iota of reminiscence about who that woman might be! Was she older and wiser than a *little girl* like Subaru was? “**But...?**”

No, was that right? Was *she* a little girl? It didn’t seem possible, and yet there *was* a newfound absence between her legs. Her biological sex had been altered while she had been caught up in her inconsistent memories, and that had prompted an even bigger gap. No, had she been a boy? A young man? She felt like she could vaguely recall this, but it didn’t really make a lot of sense?

She blinked. Biologically, her body had undergone a few additional changes that meant very little at the time. Such as a subtle shapeliness to her figure that promised abundance when she got older, but for the time being it only gave her the general shape of a young girl that might one day become a beautiful woman. Of course, standing there in a loose boy’s jersey, it wasn’t all that easy to see. “**Wah!?**”

A flash from the rod on the floor took care of that little problem though. Temporarily taken off guard, the girl stumbled back – and she should have tripped over her old track pants, except they weren’t there any longer. Her old outfit had been erased, but she was now dressed in something new. Small, brown boots, dark purple thigh highs, a sleeveless witch’s gown fashioned from black and white, white gloves, and a big witch’s hat overtop a hairband that wrapped around a head of blonde.

She looked like a cute little witch, but she didn’t *feel* cute. She just felt *confused*.

“I... Huh...? What am I supposed to do like this...?”

The witch that stood where Subaru had seemed uncertain. Her mind was jumbled, a mix between old memories and new, yet despite their fusion there were still plenty of gaps. The cute looking witch felt like she was forgetting *something*. Not just *something*, but plenty of things – even when it came to memories of her past life.



“I need to... get to the throne room?” Considering this, she picked up the staff on the ground in front of her.

Was that correct? How could she be certain that this castle even *had* a throne room? It was a piece of knowledge that certainly hadn't been Subaru's, instead attributed to the ego of *Nobeta*, the young looking girl that she had become. She didn't really feel like she understood *who* she was despite having this name. Like something was just *missing*. And it preyed upon her psyche as Subaru, too. Little by little those memories of his past life felt *distant*.

Not forgotten, but like she could no longer properly grasp them. Among the memories of the girl she had become were memories of the castle itself. She knew there were crafted souls and challenges within the castle's depths that would try and prevent her from reaching the throne. If she did, then perhaps...? Those memories of who she was, and those memories of her past life that she could no longer grasp, might be returned to her?

“I need to move forward. I can't wait here...” Why would she have even remained? A memory of a maid with blue hair flashed in her mind, and while it was familiar? Nobeta couldn't really seem to fully recall who that was. Even if that woman arrived though, she wouldn't have been any use. That door could not be broken open regardless of the strength applied to it. **“And so I need to move forward, no matter what.”** It was all she *could* do, she didn't have any other option.

But at least, she thought, she would not have to fear death. While her shell had changed, the curse that plagued Subaru had not left her. *Return By Death* was still ever present within, and she seemed to hold memories of its existence even still. So if she died, where would she

respawn? Presumably in the exact same grand hall that she stood in now.

A checkpoint that would prevent her from returning to a time before she had been transformed.

Nobeta really *didn't* have any other option rather than to move forward.