

Picture Book

Von LeS

His stomach had started aching twenty-four hours ago and there was no recovery in sight. It didn't get better when he heard a door creak and slow, not quite tentative footsteps from the hallway. He rolled onto his side and cringed when sudden pain forced him to pull his knees up to his chest.

Subaru squeezed his eyes shut and only saw white. The pain was sharp and lasting. Another door creaked, and this time it was definitely much closer. He squinted at the intruder and gasped, realizing who it was that paid him an unwelcome visit.

"Seishirou-san?"

He wondered briefly if he was hallucinating, but when the man approached him, his eyes void of emotion, he knew everything that was happening was as real as it could get. Subaru tried pushing himself up, but was met with unexpected resistance.

Seishirou had placed a hand on his shoulder and was urging him back into the mattress. The man furrowed his brows, lifted his hand and covered Subaru's forehead with it. Subaru held his breath and waited while he felt his face flushing. The touch was too gentle, and he yearned for it so much that he followed the hand when Seishirou pulled it away. For some reason, Seishirou held still and let him press his cheek into it.

"You have a fever," Seishirou said and brushed his thumb over Subaru's eyebrow. "You should go to the doctor, Subaru-kun." He smiled.

Subaru shook his head. The moment was over, and Seishirou's hand got safely tucked away in his coat. "I'm fine. What are you doing here?"

"Hmm. My target entered this building, and then I lost him. It's rather embarrassing, isn't it?" Seishirou chuckled.

Subaru tried not to shiver at the thought that Seishirou had planned to kill someone in this building. He shivered anyway, because his muscles contracted and his body moved on its own. "Why are you here?" he repeated.

Suddenly, Seishirou's hands were on him again, pushing his shirt up. Subaru didn't know what to make of it, but it happened too quickly to form words of protest. Seishirou's fingers were pressing into his stomach expertly. "Does that hurt?"

"Seishirou-san – ah, oh God no." He couldn't even say where it had hurt, but Seishirou had pressed his thumb into his body and his whole world had exploded into hot pain, as if he'd been stabbed. His heart seemed to drop to that place. He wailed and moved away from Seishirou's hands.

Subaru felt tears sting in his eyes and swallowed. He licked his lips and looked up at the other man. Seishirou looked back at him with furrowed brows.

"Have you eaten something spoiled?"

"I haven't eaten anything since... since Wednesday?"

"It's Saturday," Seishirou said and checked Subaru's body again.

Subaru stared at him, eyes wide with confusion but also fear that he might find that spot again. And then Seishirou did, and Subaru cried out. "Stop it! Why are you here? Go away!"

Seishirou pulled the shirt back down. "I've studied medicine, Subaru-kun, and I'm telling you to go to the hospital immediately."

"You killed my sister!"

"Yes, that too." Seishirou pushed his arms under Subaru's knees and back.

Subaru jerked and gasped. "I'm not sixteen anymore."

Seishirou lifted him up. "You're just a little bit heavier, though you should be a lot heavier by now, considering your height, but that's a different issue." He smiled.

"Close your eyes."

Subaru didn't and shrieked. Blossoms swirled all around him, enveloping him, sticking to his hair and floating into his mouth. He coughed and threw his arms up to shield his face somewhat. Then the blossoms and the smell of cherry were gone. He blinked, not quite taking his hands down.

Seishirou set him down on a table. Subaru dropped his arms and looked around. What he saw didn't quite surprise him as much as it should have, probably. There was a desk with a PC on it, lots of ballpoint pens, templates for prescriptions, and a blood-pressure gauge. He looked at Seishirou. "Where am I?"

"At the doctor's."

"I see that," Subaru said through gritted teeth. He put one foot on the floor. Seishirou pushed him back up on the table. "I'm not staying here."

"Why, yes you are." Seishirou smiled at him and turned around.

The door opened and an older man, about sixty, Subaru guessed, entered. His eyes got big. He stared at both of them, turned around and talked in a low voice to someone. Then he went inside and closed the door behind him. He went over to Seishirou and –

Subaru couldn't believe what he saw, but the man embraced Seishirou. He opened and closed his mouth like a fish underwater. Then the old man's eyes fixed on him and he shut his mouth. If the pain hadn't distracted him, he would've remembered being polite and introducing himself. Then again, Seishirou had carried him off to this place against his will. There was no reason to be polite.

The doctor took one of Subaru's hands and ground his teeth. "Why would you bring him here? You know I don't like it when you... except if he is? Is he?"

Seishirou shrugged, his usual smile not faltering in the least.

Eventually, the doctor turned back to him. Subaru watched him warily. His lids felt heavy.

"I'm Doctor Narita." The doctor grinned. "You must be Subaru-kun."

Subaru frowned. "You know my name?" Not only that, he had used the same suffix Seishirou always used. Which probably meant that Seishirou had talked about him and called him by his name, and that in itself was weird enough. He didn't have the time to think about it. A fresh bout of cramps made him keel over.

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He awakened.

"You've been unconscious for about a minute, Subaru-kun," Doctor Narita said. "It's good you've brought him to me, Seishirou-kun, but give me a call next time. I have patients waiting."

"There'll be no next time," Subaru said. He didn't dare sit up and neither wanted to look at either of the men. He settled for the white ceiling. There were stars and animals on it. Had Seishirou taken him to a pediatrician? Why did Seishirou know one? Did the doctor know who Seishirou truly was?

Cramps, again. Subaru hissed and pressed his hands on his stomach.

"He hasn't eaten anything since Wednesday," Seishirou said.

"I see. I don't think that's the reason for his discomfort though."

Subaru glanced at the two men. He saw Seishirou nodding in agreement. The scene felt so unreal, he wondered if he was still unconscious.

Doctor Narita leaned forward. "Please strip to the waist, Subaru-kun."

"My name is Sumeragi, and I won't strip." He glared at the doctor. It was rather easy because the pain already caused his eyes to narrow. "Where am I? Who are you? Do you know he killed my sister?" Subaru pointed at Seishirou.

Seishirou snorted.

The doctor blinked. "Yes, I do."

Whatever had been left of his world crushed under the weight of these words. So there was someone who knew what Seishirou was and who had been granted life. Subaru knew his lips were quivering, but when he willed them to stop it only got worse. He turned his face away from the doctor, and away from Seishirou.

"Seishirou-kun, would you kindly tell my assistant to send the patients away for today and make new appointments for them? Those who feel very ill should receive a letter of referral. If she cannot do that, would you sign for me?"

Subaru raised his eyebrows and risked a sneaky look over his shoulder. The doctor had called him Seishirou-kun. Again. He hadn't really noticed the first time around, but now that he had heard it again, the significance struck him.

"Of course." Seishirou bowed slightly and left the room.

The doctor waited for a moment. "You're every bit as beautiful as I imagined," Doctor Narita said. "He's always had a fondness for beauty, but now I understand what he was talking about back then. Although... don't tell my wife that!" Doctor Narita laughed and plugged the stethoscope into his ears.

Subaru unbuttoned his shirt. "I don't understand?"

"Shh. Breathe." The doctor pressed the cold metal to his chest.

Subaru pulled a face, but followed the doctor's instructions. After a few moments, the doctor put the stethoscope back around his neck and pulled a chair closer to the table to sit down. The doctor moved back on the chair which, as Subaru could now see, had wheels, and picked a folder up. It had some kind of template on its first sheet. Doctor Narita took a pen out of his breast pocket and started scribbling something down.

"When has the pain started?"

"Yesterday morning."

Doctor Narita took note. "Could you describe it?"

Subaru told him that it felt like being stabbed, and then as if his intestines were torn apart. "It comes and goes, but a bit of dull pressure always stays."

"I see. Considering your stressful circumstances, you could be having a stomach ulcer. Let me do an ultrasound first though, to rule out other possibilities." He got up and pulled the console next to the table. "Watch out, this stuff is wicked cold." He took a bottle and squeezed a good bit of clear liquid onto Subaru's stomach.

Subaru winced. The coldness caused another cramp. He kicked the air. "Sorry."

"Ah, the children tend to bite me. Or pee on me. I'm used to worse stuff than people being in pain." At this, his face became wistful. The doctor shook his head. "Well, let's start. Are you ready?"

Subaru nodded. He'd never had an ultrasound before and though he didn't understand what was going on in the moving picture, he stared at it, completely enraptured with seeing what was happening inside of his body. He listened to the doctor's humming. At the bad spot, Subaru cringed. The doctor took some more time, and moved the device in his hand around to get a better look, or so Subaru assumed.

Eventually, the strange device was lifted and he was given tissues. Subaru cleaned himself up and watched as the man put some more notes down.

The doctor looked up from his notes. "I don't think your problem is physical. Not in the technical sense."

Subaru tensed. "What?"

"Your problem is entirely based on magic. It seems a purification rite has gone wrong and upset your nervous system." The doctor smiled. "You seem surprised."

"You know magic?"

"I'm not an onmyouji, but I proudly call myself an expert at healing magic. I can't save someone's soul, but as for physical distress and injuries, that I can cure."

No, he shouldn't be surprised. He was. "I see," he said, for lack of better words. His thoughts weren't any more coherent either.

"May I heal you with my powers?" The doctor tilted his head. "I don't want to start a fight with Lady Sumeragi because I touched her grandson."

"No. It'll be fine. I. It's okay." He could picture his grandmother's face, lips bitterly pressed together. He knew it wasn't okay to let a stranger use spells on you, but the pain was too harsh to endure. It had always been his grandmother's top priority that he would be able to work. That was impossible with cramps rendering him more or less immobile. "You have my permission."

Doctor Narita nodded and put one hand on Subaru's chest. "Try not to move." He used the ballpoint pen to draw something on Subaru's stomach.

Subaru tried concentrating on the movements, but couldn't make out any words. He

had never been trained at this sort of magic, only taught that it existed and that it wasn't allowed for obvious reasons. He hadn't understood what the obvious reasons were back then, but seeing a healer hug a murderer had enlightened him.

The magic rinsing him was warm and soft, like thousands of silken pillows. He let his lids fall and felt his breathing slow down. The pain subsided, got duller, and disappeared completely. He opened his eyes and sighed. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." The doctor chuckled. He put the folder away and returned the ultrasound console to its original place. By the time he came back to the table, Subaru had sat up.

He looked around, still feeling a little dazed in a good way. The magic had been tainted, but the doctor's intent had been pure. Subaru looked at his stomach where runes were disappearing. So that was what he'd used. Interesting.

"You call him 'Seishirou-kun'," Subaru said.

"Let me tell you a secret." The doctor crossed his arms and leaned on the desk. "I knew Seishirou-kun's mother. I was there when she delivered him."

Subaru didn't know what to say, but he did say something: "I can't."

"Picture Seishirou-kun as a baby? Let me tell you another secret. He was the most ordinary baby I ever saw. He cried just as any other newborn after the ordeal. To be honest, he was quite a frightful child. He was scared of the dark, scared of stuffed animals, scared of people..."

Subaru shook his head.

"I've raised him," Doctor Narita said. His gaze became distant. "When he was five, they started teaching him. He hated it, but they always dragged him back. When he was six, he stopped fighting. When he was seven, the housemaids were afraid of him."

The words sucked the breath out of his lungs. He listened, grinding his teeth.

"They wanted someone they knew everything about. Someone they had forged to fit their needs. Setsuka – his mother – had always been too unstable for their likes."

"They?" Subaru let go of the breath he'd been holding.

"The government."

The office blurred before his eyes. The door opened. The stark contrast of Seishirou's black coat burned an imprint into his mind.

"I see, you're feeling better, Subaru-kun."

Thoughts swirled inside his head. Too many to grasp more than one at a time.

Seishirou came to a halt in front of the table.

Subaru punched him. "Why didn't you go to him? You wouldn't have lost your eye! You decided to stay for the bet and lose your eye? The bet wasn't that important! It was just a stupid game for you and you could have saved your eye, [*<i>*why didn't you!?"

"Subaru-kun?" Seishirou inclined his head. His lips twitched.

"Why?"

The smile fell off Seishirou's face like a run over animal. "What did you tell him?"

Subaru knew Seishirou wasn't addressing him now. He didn't care. He punched him again, and this time Seishirou stumbled back. "The bet wasn't important, was it?!"

Suddenly, Doctor Narita appeared by their side. "Seishirou-kun."

Seishirou looked at him. "What did you tell him?"

Doctor Narita smiled and put a hand on Seishirou's cheek. For a second, Subaru could see a little boy with golden eyes. Then he blinked and the image was gone.

The doctor sighed. "If you want to fight, you two, then do it, but not in my rooms."

Seishirou shot his arms under Subaru's body. Subaru yelped and instinctively wrapped his arms around the first thing he found; the man's shoulders.

"See you soon!" Doctor Narita said.

He disappeared behind a curtain of dancing cherry blossoms.

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"What did he tell you?"

Subaru wasn't used to being thrown into bed. Neither was he used to someone looming over him right after. His stomach fluttered without the slightest twinge of pain, and only a bit of fear. Seishirou's face was one breath away. He licked his lips, careful to press his head back into the pillows.

"If I had kissed you that day, would it have changed anything?"

Seishirou furrowed a brow. "Huh?"

"Because I wanted to. I was scared, but I wanted to, but then you gave me the chance not to do it and I took it and ran with it." His breath hitched. He reached out, touched the other one's face. "Would it have changed the outcome of the bet?"

Seishirou frowned. He didn't answer.

"Probably not." Subaru felt his eyes starting to burn, as well as his lungs... and something farther below. "I should have done it anyway," he whispered and leaned forward.

Seishirou kept very still, his eyes open. Subaru closed his tentatively and added more pressure to Seishirou's lips. Finally, his efforts earned him a response. He breathed heavily through his nose as Seishirou weighed in on him, pushing him into the mattress. There was tongue, and there were hands on his neck, not bruising but caressing. The heat in his body flamed up. He threw his arms around Seishirou's back and clutched his coat. He wouldn't ever let go.

Seishirou pulled away without really distancing himself from Subaru's lips.

Subaru brushed his own over the man's slightly open ones. "Stay. Stay here tonight."

"Subaru-kun."

"The world is about to end. I don't want to die as a virgin."

Seishirou chuckled, somewhat breathless. "Many good people died untouched."

Subaru snorted.

"Why are you laughing?"

"I... just wondered if you..."

Seishirou kissed him again, softer, less passionate in a way, more so in another. "I don't have the time for sexual relief."

Subaru raised his eyebrows and tried to form a dignified answer. "Oh," he said.

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It took a while for them to get their bodies to fit together, but then one was moving in the other, slowly, patiently, gently.

A kekkai fell. They did not care.

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Subaru had not expected for Seishirou to still be there when he woke up. The surprise was far greater when he found a heavy weight that turned out to be Seishirou's head pressed into the crook of his neck. The man was curled up against him, with Subaru's arms around the tall frame that somehow seemed smaller now that the man it belonged to was sound asleep.

Subaru glanced down. Seishirou's lips were parted, his eyes moving rapidly under closed lids, his eyebrows relaxed. Both of Seishirou's hands were wedged between

their bodies.

He couldn't help himself, but a shiver ran down his spine. It was as if he was cradling a small child who had crept into his bed because of a nightmare. He knew that wasn't the case. The room smelled of their combined sweat, and he could still taste Seishirou's on his tongue.

Carefully, he brushed a strand of hair out of the man's face. Seishirou inched closer. Subaru smiled and, though he didn't know why, kissed his forehead. "I love you."

Seishirou muttered something. Then he opened his eyes sluggishly and looked up.

Subaru rolled him onto his back and kissed him. He couldn't say what had gotten into him. He'd *seen* Seishirou. Tired, just waking up, after sleeping like an angel. Which was true anyway in a sense, Subaru thought as he quietly chuckled. "I didn't think I'd ever say this, but. You're cute early in the morning."

Seishirou blinked, apparently yet to wake up fully. "Huh."

"I remembered something."

Seishirou yawned. "Hmm?"

"When I first met you, the tree I wanted to exorcise... that was your illusion. Back then, I couldn't tell turmoil apart very well, only see that there was some. When you revealed who you were, I didn't have the time to remember, and later, when I did think about this day, I pushed my suspicions away because I didn't want to believe in them."

Slowly, Seishirou's gaze cleared up. He was listening intently, golden eye fixed on Subaru's lips. A part of Subaru simply enjoyed the attention.

"It wasn't your victim's sadness that I felt that day. It was yours."

Seishirou opened his mouth. Subaru pressed a finger to his lips. "Don't. I don't care whether I'm right or wrong. I love you either way. I just wanted to tell you that."

For a moment Subaru feared Seishirou might break his bones again. He gathered all his courage to keep smiling at the man.

Eventually, the tension went away.

Seishirou sighed. "What do you mean by 'early in the morning'?"

"Ten past seven," Subaru said after a quick glance at the clock. "I have to go in an hour."

Seishirou stretched under him like a big cat. Subaru waited, entertaining himself on the feel of muscles moving against his body.

"Why did you come here yesterday?"

Seishirou laced their fingers together. "When a prey is about to die on its own, the marks I left on it signal this."

"Thank you, Seishirou-san," Subaru said.

This time around, their bodies accommodated to each other much faster.

They made it last for as long as possible.

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Subaru had sent his shikigami away an hour ago. He hadn't thought it would take the spirit so long to find what he'd been sent to find, and while he waited, he stroked the casket's lid. After 'Kamui' had given it to him, and after 'Kamui' had then left, he had immediately sent the shikigami to find Doctor Narita's office.

The flap of feathers caught him off guard. He flinched.

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He didn't have to say anything. Doctor Narita pulled him into a hug so tight his ribs felt like breaking. He let the man wail on his shoulder, and finally found his own ability to cry again.

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The procedure took three hours. It didn't hurt physically.

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Doctor Narita handed him a small box of ebony. He opened it.

Pictures of a baby boy, golden eyes gleaming in the sunlight of spring, a bright smile on his face. A happy child knowing nothing in the world could taint its soul.