Before They Arrived

"Oh, remember this?" Taiga pointed to the computer screen while she sat in her seat and looked up at her husband excitedly.

"How could I forget? It feels like it was just yesterday," Ryuuji said, standing to Taiga's left. He smirked at the photo of him, Taiga and Yasuko standing in a park filled with rich greenery under a soft, orange sunset. Ryuuji and Yasuko knelt down at Taiga's sides and pressed their ears against her round pregnant belly while they smiled for the camera.

"Huh? What's so special about it?" Katsuko asked. Taiga and Ryuuji's three daughters, now in high school, were crouched at Taiga's right.

"Yeah, it's just a photo of you three in a park," Haruko added.

"This was from the time we went on an outing after getting an ultrasound. We were so excited to meet you three, so we thought we'd celebrate coming so far. Can you believe I was only six months in at the time?" Taiga said.

"The doctor even thought it was nine," Ryuuji added.

"Hey, one of the lamp posts is tilted," Mitsuko said as she pointed on the computer screen, a little black lamp post in the background imitating the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

"Oh, that must've been damaged by an earthquake," Ryuuji said.

Taiga clicked an arrow to go to the next image in the album she was viewing. The picture of her and her family at the park had changed to a picture of an ultrasound. The heads of three fetuses were circled in red. Each circle was labelled with the names of their daughters, Haruko's being in the bottom left, Mitsuko's in the top left and Katsuko's in the top right. Taiga and Ryuuji's eyes lit up at the sight of the photo.

"Speaking of, here's the ultrasound!" Taiga exclaimed.

"You already decided on our names before we were born?" Haruko asked.

"Yeah! Ya-chan teared up when she found out we were naming you three after her."

"Aw… You named us after Ya-chan?" Mitsuko said warmly.

"How the hell do you even tell who is who? Don't babies move around in the belly or something?" Katsuko asked.

"Oh, that's simple."

Taiga pointed at Haruko's head.

"You're labelled based on who's closest to the cervix. Haruko's the closest, so she was going to come out first. Babies don't shift positions too much either since they stay close to their placentas, which are stuck to the wall of the uterus."

"Uh… The what is stuck to the what?"

"You really need to pay more attention in biology class," Haruko said, planting her fist on her sister's head.

"Ah, I remember the day you three were born…" Ryuuji said, resting his hand on his cheek as he reminisced. "While we were delivering you three, we'd shout, 'Haruko's out!' or, 'Katsuko's stuck!', things like that. Even though you three were still babies, we could easily tell you three apart."

"Now that's just crazy," Katsuko uttered.

"Well, who would know better than Mom and Dad?" Mitsuko added with a smile.

Author's Letter:

I am writing this as of 20th May 2025. Today, I've uploaded the third chapter of Toranoko! Keepers. Looking at what I've made, I can say for certain that I still have a lot of learning to do. I can't say that I'm happy with what I've made, but I suppose that's what's to be expected for my early writing endeavours. I'm just glad that I even made it.

I got really flighty and made the third chapter public before really rereading it, so that probably isn't a good thing, but I'll rely on any feedback from the public that comes my way. I've been working on that for more than a month and I've got a lot to focus on now that school's started up again for me. This ended up being the largest chapter yet.

Speaking of, I'll be taking a little break from writing, and I'll get back into it once I'm free again. In the meantime, I'll be drafting the 4th, 5th and 6th chapters of Toranoko! Keepers rather than working on them one by one. I thought I'd change up my workflow and see how that would turn out. Maybe this mode will be a little easier.

I hope to receive more support in the coming months as I publish more content from this series. Thank you for reading.

- **IF270**