

## The End of a Band

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# **The End of a Band**

by [Nemasta](#)

## Summary

Being in a highschool band is fun, but what happens when something gets in the way? What if that something is life itself?

## The end of the band?

They looked at each other with tears in their eyes and smiles so bright they could light up the darkest of paths. Celebratory gowns and fancy dresses on, this was it. This was the day they were dreaming of since the school year started. Graduating highschool seemed so far three years ago, but there they were. Not only that, but they managed to be in the same classroom for their third year, which was like a miracle.

"Arisa" the calmed voice of Kasumi denoted a hint of sadness. "We did it. Are you proud of us?"

"Of course" the blonde girl replied. "With how airhead you are, it's a surprise you even passed the entrance exams to begin with."

"Arisa~~" she fake cried while the rest of them laughed.

"We have come a long way since then" Saya intersected, wiping a tear of her eye.

"Not only in school, but as a band" Tae added immediately. "What we've accomplished with PoPiPa is my biggest achievement."

"Even though we had our ups and downs, we always pulled through." The sweet voice of Rimi was about to crack.

"Why are you all gloomy?" Said Arisa, trying to lighten up the mood. "We should go to a family restaurant, now that the graduation ceremony is over".

Everyone's eyes lit up.

"Famires!" Kasumi shouted and the rest followed along.

The trip to the restaurant was the same as usual. Food, drinks and jokes were the main ingredients. Everyone seemed to have gotten over the somber humor and cheered up after a nice meal and time with friends. However, the mood was short-lived, and the clouds returned on the way to the train station.

"He- hey, do you guys want to hang out at the warehouse?" Arisa quickly suggested.

"Sure" was all the response she got.

"You know, grandma is making dinner today, I can ask if you guys can stay." She continued to fight the atmosphere of defeat.

Everyone nodded, but kept silent. She gave up and said nothing more on the train ride to her home.

"Ok, what in the world is up with you?" She cried, exasperated once they were in the warehouse.

"Wh- What do you mean?" Saya stuttered.

"Don't give me that" she replied calmly, "you guys have been acting weird all day. You can't expect me not to notice."

"Well" Kasumi spoke, "we just graduated, no? Which means we're going to college."

"That's the plan" said Arisa, confused.

"And college is way harder than highschool"

"I'm not following"

"Doesn't that mean we will have less time for things such as the band? If we want to have good grades and graduate, at least."

"Arisa", Rimi called. Arisa raised her head and met eyes with her. "Kasumi and I had a talk a few weeks back. You are going to have an intense schedule going to such a prestigious University. Tae and I will need to commute for at least three hours and Saya has to spend more time at the bakery after her mom's passing..." her voice faded with each word at the point of going silent.

It hit her like a bullet train. She was absolutely right. How could she overlook it? Without her noticing, a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Arisa!" All four of them instinctively went to comfort her.

"How could I be so stupid?" She said, her voice cracked. "I was so excited, I didn't think about it".

No one said anything else for a few minutes. The room stood still except for Arisa's quiet sobbing. The rest of the girls looked at each other with knowing looks.

"You're right" was all she could reply. "Can we discuss this another day? I don't feel very good."

"It's also getting late" interrupted Saya, "I need to get back to the bakery."

"Let's meet up tomorrow" Kasumi quickly added, "we haven't finished this talk".

Everyone said their goodbyes and went home.

Arisa hadn't stopped crying when her grandmother entered the basement.

"Are you having dinner?" The old lady asked, "it's almost 9."

"Not hungry" she replied, in a whisper.

"Are you sleeping here? I'll bring food in case you get hungry" grandma said worryingly.

"Th- thanks." And that was the end of the discussion. She plopped down on the couch.

Is this the end? She kept asking herself. It can't be. All this effort, it wasn't in vain. Was it? Her mind was spiraling out of control. She felt helpless. Forming a band, something she had never dreamed of, until she met a girl with star-shaped hair and big dreams. She cried. And cried. And cried. And cried until she fell asleep.

It was not the morning sun that woke her up, considering she slept in a basement with no windows, but the pain on her back and right shoulder. It seems couches are not meant to sleep on them. She got up and stretched, trying to get rid of the pain, but that only made it worse. This was going to be a long day.

With a heavy head and wearing the same clothes as the day before, Arisa went upstairs. She was greeted with a kind smile and the delicious smell of a recently cooked breakfast.

Grandma watched her go back and forth, changing clothes and watering bonsai with a worried yet gentle look. Finally, she sat down and started to absent-mindedly nibble on a piece of toast.

"You look like you didn't sleep very well" grandma broke the awkward silence.

"I guess so" was all she got as a reply.

"Are the girls coming today?"

"I think so"

"That is nice, they're nice to have around"

"Yeah, it is"

Determined to get more than three-word answers, she tried to change the subject.

"Are you excited for college?"

"Not really" Arisa continued to avoid eye contact.

"Why not?" grandma added. "I'll admit that I was surprised when you told me you wanted to major in music but it suits you well"

"You really think so?" She finally looked up.

"I do. I saw how hard you worked to balance studies, student council and band duties in school." Arisa blushed a little at the compliments.

"Don't say embarrassing things!" she quickly interrupted.

Grandma let out a big laugh. "But even after all that you are still you" she finished.

"Th- thanks" was all Arisa could reply. "Anyways, I'll be in my room" said as she left the table.

All alone in her room, accompanied only by her own thoughts was not the best place to be, but she did not have the energy to even leave the house. She chuckled to herself. It had been some time since she felt that way. Her mind wandered through those feelings and started to reminisce about past days. Happy days. Sad days. Lonely days. Heart-pounding, sparkling days. She smiled, although it was a melancholic smile.

# The girl with a dream

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Daddy, daddy!” the little girl was shouting while running toward him.  
“What do you have there?” He said with a smile on his face. “Is that another gold star?”  
“The teacher said that I did well today and gave it to me!” She was grinning.  
“I’m so proud of you.” her dad complimented. “Where are you putting it today?”  
“Hmmm” the child pondered, “how about here?” she said as she put the sticker on a nearby lamppost.  
“I think that’s lovely.” He replied as they continued their way home.  
“Daddy?” she suddenly tugged his jacket.  
“What is it?”  
“When I grow up, could I be in a band like yours?”  
He laughed heartily.  
“Of course you can, but you have to practice very hard. Are you up to the challenge?”  
“I am!” she shouted.  
“That’s my girl!” he said, proudly.

She was only nine when it happened. It was a day like any other, she had gone to piano lessons at the conservatory right after school ended. Practiced, and got a gold star. She put her in her pocket, ready to show it to her father. Nothing out of the ordinary. Said goodbye to her teacher and went outside to wait for him. Five minutes passed. Ten. Twenty. Something's wrong, she thought. Dad is never this late. Maybe he forgot? No way, he never forgets. She was about to leave on her own when her teacher saw her.

"Arisa" she called. "Why haven't you gone home?"

"I was waiting for dad" she replied. "But he must be running late."

"It's getting late, I'll walk you home" she offered.

They started heading back to the Ichigaya residence. The path was the usual, except for a small detour due to a commotion on one block. Soon enough, they had arrived.

"Thank you, teacher!" She waved goodbye and went inside.

"Arisa, you're finally home" grandma let out a sigh of relief. "Where's your father?"

"He didn't come, the teacher walked me home." The little girl said.

"That's strange. Well, anyway. Go to your room, dinner will be ready in a bit."

She went to her room but could not stop thinking where her father was. How come he didn't come for her? She felt very uneasy so she decided to ask her grandma what it could be. She entered the living room but stopped, as the old lady was on the phone. She just stood there and listened to one side of a conversation.

"I see... I see... Which address..? Well, is he..? I understand. Thank you." The call was over.

"Grandma, who was it?" She took a step.

"Arisa, sweetie" she beckoned. "Come here for a moment."

Her stomach dropped, something was definitely wrong.

"Sweetie, dad had an accident today. He is currently in the hospital." She felt nauseous.

"A- a-" she could not get the word to leave her mouth.

"Come, sit" the lady called. As she sat by her side, she pulled the little girl in an embrace.

"Everything will be ok, I promise."

"A- acc-" nothing.

"I know this will hurt" grandma continued, "but you deserve to know. The doctors don't think he will make it."

Still in shock, Arisa could not say a word. An avalanche of feelings rushed down and engulfed her so quickly that she could not react at all. She did not move for what seemed to be hours, letting droplet after droplet roll down her cheeks. All her willpower, all her energy; everything was gone in an instant. She had felt this way before, once. Her emotions were overwhelming. The room was spinning, and she couldn't stop it. Exhaustion got the best of her after several hours as she collapsed on the couch, asleep.

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There weren't many people at the funeral. Arisa, her grandma, a few friends and some distant relatives. For most of the process, Arisa was lost in thought and barely interacted with anyone. The world, her world, had crumbled and fallen to pieces.

After this, she stopped going to the conservatory, and even going to school. She rarely left her room. She changed completely and closed out her heart to the outside world.

Since her mother died during childbirth, she never knew her, so it was never painful. Her dad had raised her along with her grandma, but now he was gone too. It took her years to be able to interact with other people, and even then it all came down to a few phrases before storming away. Grandma tried to help her the best she could, getting her into hobbies that would distract her. One of them stuck and she became an avid Bonsai keeper. Caring for them and keeping them safe gave her a sense of accomplishment and pride. Eventually, she started also helping with managing Ryuseido, the family's pawn shop. Organizing and reorganizing antiquities eased her mind.

It wasn't long after that she finished junior high school. While she simply kept her routine of attending only when necessary. She had no idea what high school had in store for her.

## Chapter End Notes

A bit of backstory before having the story move forward. Most of it will be told from Arisa's perspective, so this was important.

# Getting it Back

## Chapter Summary

Not willing to let go of her dream, Arisa decides to take matters into her own hands and fix it before it breaks. She pays a visit to the local bakery.

Okay, everyone was being ridiculous, she thought. This is no time to be mournful and just give up. They've always come out on top in every situation. Otherwise, these last three years were in vain. But, how do you keep together something that's about to break? Her thoughts kept spinning and spinning, unable to find that spark, that "eureka" moment. The ceiling stared back at her for what seemed like hours, or maybe it was just mere seconds. Decidedly, she got up and got ready to leave.

Passing by the living room, waved a quick goodbye and ran to the commercial district. Her heart was racing, not only because of the exercise (her physical condition hadn't improved in the slightest) but also because of where she was. A big, tinted window, a small wooden and metal door, and a simple wall was all separating her from anxiety. The letters, carefully added to the glass read the same as the sign above the door frame: "Yamabuki Bakery".

The blonde, twin tailed girl stood there. Watching people go by. Some ignoring her. Some others just started for a couple seconds, at a distance. There was one person who approached her and asked if she was lost. The only thing lost at the moment was her courage, she thought. She kept rocking back and forth, practicing a speech she'd come up with on her way there.

Her plan was simple, go in there and speak with Saya. Let her know how you feel and get a feel for how she feels. She's the reasonable one, isn't she? This has to look like nonsense to her too.

A bell rang carelessly when she pushed the door open. Any other day, she would have just ignored it, but today it was nerve-wracking. A familiar voice greeted her when entering.

"Welcome!" Saya called cheerfully.

"H- Hi" she replied

"Oh, Arisa. Hey" she sounded genuinely surprised about seeing her.

"Hey..." there was a long pause. "Are you busy?"

"Not really, it's been a slow morning"

"Do you think we could talk?"

"Sure" Saya smiled, then called behind her "dad, could you take care of the counter for a moment?"

A yell of what sounded like agreement was the only response.

"Okay, shall we go?" Saya asked, taking off her apron.

"Yes" Arisa replied, nervously.



Once they were in Saya's room, neither of them would speak. Saya kept looking out the window, and Arisa had her eyes glued to the floor. She had a plan at the beginning but decided that it was best to just go straight to the point. Both opened their mouth to speak, only to stop at the last second. They both smiled nervously.

"Do you like Popipa?" The twin tailed girl spoke first.

Saya didn't reply immediately.

"I do" continued Arisa, "as much as I don't like to admit it, it's a dream come true."

"It is" Saya finally spoke up. "I never imagined I would feel the same emotion. When I quit the band with Natsuki, I decided I was done, but then Kasumi and the rest of you showed me that I could do it. I could have fun, and be happy, and be in a band again."

"I know how you feel. Thanks to all of you I was able to come out of my shell. I've become a better person now".

They looked at each other. They were both smiling still, but this time it was more of a melancholic smile.

"I don't know why everyone feels this is the end" she continued, "but I'm not willing to give up that easily."

"Arisa..." she started, but interrupted herself.

"Anyways, I was just testing the waters." Arisa said calmly. "I have to speak with the rest."

"Thank you" she whispered. Arisa was taken aback.

"Why?" She immediately reacted.

"For not giving up."

"Hey, someone has to be the voice of reason" she laughed meekly.

"I guess so" Saya also let out a chuckle. "I think you should speak to Rimi next."

"Don't you mean 'we' should speak to Rimi?" Arisa gave her a look.

"I got it, I got it" Saya conceded.

"I think I'll go home, but I'll text you later, you know, to coordinate." Arisa tried to make it sound like in a spy movie, and half succeeded.

"I'll be on the lookout, then" she replied in a cheerful laughter.

The visit might have only taken about thirty minutes, but felt like an eternity. But it was good, the first step was taken confidently and decisively. This was the right path and she was ready to save what saved her. She would have gone straight to the Ushigome residence but Saya needed to be included. She started to make her way back home when a text message caught her by surprise.

*From: Toyama Asuka.*

*Arisa-san, I'm sorry to bother, but I would appreciate it if I could have a word with you. It's about my sister. Thank you.*

# Will she be okay?

## Chapter Summary

Asuka asks Arisa to meet with her at a nearby park, stating it is important. At the park, Asuka explains that she is concerned, as Kasumi has been acting strange lately. She expresses her concern and asks if there are problems with the band. Arisa reluctantly tells her what happened the day before and what she is planning. However, Asuka feels the need to also take part and commits to help Arisa reunite the band.

She was definitely taken aback by that message, but figured she might as well get a beat on what Kasumi is feeling at the moment. She made her way to the park where they agreed to meet, while imagining what Asuka wanted to talk about. Her heart was racing but also trying to keep a positive attitude. It was almost noon and the sun was high in the sky. She was starting to sweat a bit, so she went to get a drink from a nearby vending machine. She sat at a bench and waited. Her leg was moving up and down on its own. She tried to breathe slowly to calm herself. It only took around fifteen minutes for Asuka to arrive. Both sit side to side but none said anything for a while.

“So, Asuka”, Arisa figured she might as well try to get the conversation going. “How are you doing?”

“Good, it's good.” She replied shyly. “Starting to get ready for third year.”

“That’s good. It will be tough, so be ready” she let out a small laugh.

“Yes, I’m a bit nervous” Asuka’s eyes were glued to the floor.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure you will do just fine.”

“Senpai”, Asuka stuttered a bit. “Did something happen with Kasumi?”

“What do you mean?” Arisa tried to deflect the question.

“Well, yesterday when she returned from band practice she seemed...” her voice slowly dimmed.

“She seemed sad?” Arisa finished.

“Yes. I’ve neer seen her like that.”

“I know. Have you spoken with her?” She wanted to get something out of Asuka to maybe use on her quest.

“I tried. She’s not telling me anything.” Asuka’s voice could not hide her sadness.

“Let me fill you in,” Arisa started.

“As you know, we just graduated. And it should be a very happy moment. However, everyone was gloomy and melancholic. It felt weird. No one was speaking with me so I had to dig in until someone let me in on their little secret. All of them were thinking the same thing. So they let me know that they believed we should disband. I could not believe it. It felt as if someone had hit me in the head with a shovel. We had a big discussion and I cried myself to sleep.

“I’ll be honest with you, Asuka. I don’t know what to do. I feel as if all my effort was for nothing. However, I decided that I cannot let this happen. I must do something about this. I will not let this band go. Popipa has given me a lot. They gave me courage, friendship and a reason to come out of my shell. I’m at a loss but I know I have to do something.

After explaining all of this, Arisa let out a big sigh. Asuka listened attentively and nodded. They both stayed silent. Asuka was the first one to speak.

“I understand now.” She started slowly but her voice was different. It had a hint of conviction.

“Yeah.” Arisa wanted to say something else, but stopped herself.

“Senpai” Asuka started again. “I want to help.”

“What do you mean?” She was confused. “Help?”

“Yes. Popipa cannot disband. You have been an inspiration to a lot of people and this happening would make a lot of people sad.”

Arisa could not say anything.

“So, I cannot let this happen. I’m pretty sure there are several people that would think this way. Rokka for example. So, I’ll do what I can to help.”

“You don’t have to” was all Arisa could say.

“Yes, I have to. Because I’m sure Kasumi does not want it to happen. And neither does any of you.”

“In that case. I can only say thank you.”

“You can count on me.”

“I will. Once again, thank you.”

That was the end of the conversation. They said goodbye and each left on their own way. With renewed energy she started to make her way to Rimi’s house.

# Reminiscing and Surprising

## Chapter Summary

Saya looks back at her time with Poppin'Party, and gets a very unexpected surprise.

She stared at the wall for a few minutes after Arisa left. Her emotions were really jumbled, but she felt happy. As if something was accomplished. However, there was still something inside telling her that it might not have been enough. She tried to shake those feelings away, and move her head side to side. Her hair following it and resting down after a while.

She went downstairs and continued working the Bakery's counter for the day. It was a beautiful day, although a bit warm. While restocking shelves of Melon Bread and Choco Cornets, her mind kept going back to her conversation with Arisa. Remembering all that she went through with Poppin'Party.

She could see it in her mind, a brighed-eyed and cat-ear-shaped hair (as much as she insisted it was meant to be a star) girl pulling her from place to place. The day she appeared at school with a guitar and decidedly shouted she would start a band. A circle of friends coming together. The concert in the basement. She could not help but smile. Writing their first song. Running to reach the festival on time. Their Space audition.

They have gone through a lot together. Happy moments and sad moments. Almost losing Otae. Their failure at the first Anniversary concert.

It all seemed like a dream sometimes, like when they played Budokan. And when things got difficult, everyone was there. Her mind brought her back to everyone visiting her mom at the hospital, having to cancel lives for it. Her chest still ached a bit when remembering that, considering how recent it was. Everyone also went to her funeral when she passed away. And they were also there to help her get through it. For that reason she could not give up so easily on it. She was glad Arisa visited that day, as it made her come to reason.

Closing time for the bakery was there before she noticed, and dinner had to be prepared. They usually took turns and today dad was cooking. She went upstairs to her bedroom, and sat on the bed. Motionless and in the dark. The night felt really cold, compared to the afternoon's warmth. Why did she decide to leave the band again? Oh yes, the feeling of being a burden was something she always carried with her. People jokingly called her "Poppin'Party's mom", she always laughed at it. But for her, that could not be farther from the truth, when all she did was impose her own problems on everyone else. But then again, Arisa came looking for her. Maybe it wasn't as bad as she thought.

There was a knock on the door.

"Sis?" Sana's voice came from outside before slowly opening.

"Sana, is dinner ready?" Saya asked.

"Not yet" the little girl replied, "but, could you come for a second?"

She gave her little sister a puzzled look.

"I want to show you something," Sana continued.

Before she could reply, Sana was grabbing her by the hand and pulling her out of the bedroom.

"You have to promise you will not laugh" she added while both stood at Sana's bedroom door.

"I promise," Saya replied.

The door opened slightly. The room was the same as usual, with the bed neatly made and a desk with notebooks and a few toys. She was still a kid, in the end. However, there was something else. In the middle of the room, a collection of metal pots and lids sat in a familiar formation. Saya's jaw dropped for a second.

"Sit at the bed," Sana gave her a light push. She obeyed.

Then, the little girl sat at the makeshift drum kit. Still sloppily, but with great intent and clear signs of practice, she played for her big sister. Not only that, the song was very recognizable. It was that song, the one she had written with Kasumi. The one that made her realize she wanted to be in a band again.

The little girl finished playing and looked at her sister expectantly. Saya did not realize but tears were running down her cheeks. But they were happy tears. She got up and immediately hugged Sana.

"I am so proud of you," she whispered.

"Big sis, I want to be a drummer, just like you".

She nodded.

"I want to have friends like yours, and form a band that gives people happiness, just like you".

She could not respond.

"I want to be kind and caring, just like you".

They stood there, hugging for minutes.

"Sana" she finally spoke. "You can be whatever you want. Don't forget that."

"Do you really think so?" Sana's eyes were glowing.

"Of course. You just have to follow your dreams." She was choking a bit but pushed through the phrases. "And I'll always be here, supporting you no matter what."

"I love you sis" was all the little girl could say before bursting into tears.

"I love you too" Saya replied, hugging her and patting her head.

# We are adults

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### Arisa's POV.

Speaking with Asuka was definitely unexpected. Arisa was still a bit shaken by it, however, it also gave her renewed strength. She was more convinced now than before that she could turn the situation around. After going in circles around the park for a few minutes, she started making her way to Rimi's house.

Although the conversation with Saya went better than expected, there was no guarantee that Rimi would be the same. While she walked, she was also trying to come up with replies to what the bassist girl would use as excuses or counterpoints. However, she felt that doing so would not let her be sincere. She was definitely still nervous.

Slowly, she made her way to the apartment building where Rimi lives. Rang the bell labeled "Ushigome" and waited. 5 seconds passed. 10 seconds. 15 seconds. There was no response. They might not be home, she thought. Maybe I should come back later. But right before she made her way back, a voice came up over the speaker.

"Who is it?" The sweet voice of Rimi asked.

"Oh, hi Rimi. It's me, Arisa".

"Arisa-chan? What are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to talk to you" Arisa's voice was barely audible.

"I see" Rimi replied. "I'll let you in"

The building's front door buzzed open and she made her way to Rimi's apartment. She greeted Arisa with a smile and they went to her room. You could almost hear their heartbeats getting faster and faster. Why was it harder to talk to Rimi? Was it because she was going away? However, Arisa had no time to look for an answer to that question. She gathered herself and started speaking.

"I'll get to it immediately," she began. "I don't want to break up the band". She paused, waiting for a reaction.

"I know" Rimi whispered.

"Look, I know you are going away for college and it might be a little more difficult to get together and practice. But there's just something special about Popipa, and I can't give up on it just yet."

"Arisa-chan" she spoke up. "I will always be thankful with all four of you for what you have given me", her voice almost cracked. "And thanks to the band, I managed to grow and step out of my comfort zone."

Arisa didn't reply, anticipating.

"But," there it was, "we are no longer highschoolers. We can't just run around and do whatever we want." Her tone was getting more and more defensive. "I am an adult. I have responsibilities."

"Rimi..." but she could not say anything else.

"Look, it is hard for me too. And I will never forget what we've gone through. But we must move on."

A single tear rolled down Rimi's cheek. But she kept her head high. Arisa felt tears welling up on her eyes as well.

## Chapter End Notes

A shorter chapter, and a late one! Sorry if it took too long, uni and life were getting in the way of my writing, but I hope to update this faster in the future!

# Is it the best for everyone?

## Chapter Summary

Rimi rejected Arisa's argument but, is that really how she feels?

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Although her tears were about to fall, Arisa kept it together. She didn't say anything, though, afraid her voice would crack. They looked at each other for a couple seconds in silence. Rimi finally spoke:

"Are you staying for dinner?" She asked, trying to lighten the mood.

"I don't think so," Arisa replied, in a whisper. "Grandma is waiting for me."

"I see" was all Rimi replied.

"I guess I'll talk to you later?" Arisa headed for the door, hoping Rimi would stop her.

"Sure" Rimi said, walking alongside her.

Exchanging goodbyes, Arisa left. It was crushing, to say the least. Considering how well things went with Saya, she thought Rimi would also react the same way. It obviously did not and now her goal seemed further than before. Defeated, she headed home, thinking on how Tae and Kasumi would react.

Rimi sighed. She did not expect Arisa's visit to affect her so much. She was making the correct choice, right? College is very different from high school. Significantly harder too, if Yuri's word was to be trusted. And GuriGuri was a clear example of what college can cause to a high school band. They've not actually "broken up", but they barely practice and haven't had a gig in quite some time. It was obvious to her that they were done, and if Popipa were to do the same, they would meet the same fate.

Her mind kept going back to the short conversation. There was this itch. She tried to distract herself with TV and games but could not stop thinking about it. She grabbed her phone and sent a message to her sister. Seeing it was six o'clock already, it seemed like a good time to do so.

Rimi

— Hey sis, good morning! How are classes? Text me back when you can

Yuri

— Rimi! I'm actually free right now. How's it going?

Rimi

— It's going good, I was about to make dinner. How about you?



Yuri

— Not much, just working my butt off in classes lol... How's everyone? I saw the graduation pictures, they were lovely

Rimi

— Thank you, everyone was really sad but happy at the same time, I'm still in shock i think

Yuri

— I can imagine! Although, you usually text me later than this, something on your mind?

Rimi

— You know me too well...

— Yes, something happened

Yuri

— Spill the beans sweetie

Rimi

— Popipa is breaking up

There was no messages for about a minute, untill:

Yuri

— WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAT????????

— Rimi, what do you mean? Did something happen?

— Why are you splitting the band?

— Woooooow, I did NOT expect that

She fumbled her thumbs for a second.

Rimi

— I just... We just feel that it's going to be really hard to keep this up with college and everything

— Especially since Tae-chan and I are going to move out

Yuri

— I mean, I get it but I'm still shocked

— And everyone agreed?

Rimi

— That's what I wanted to talk to you about

— Arisa-chan came to see me today, to say she doesn't want to break up the band

Yuri

— Really? What did you say?

Rimi

— I told her I still think it's the best for everyone

Yuri

— Well, let me ask you this: why?

Rimi

— What do you mean?

Yuri

— Why do you think it's the best for everyone?

Rimi

— I just think that, being in college means less time to practice, and I'm afraid they will eventually lose interest and just end it anyway

Yuri

— Are you afraid they will eventually quit, or that you will?

She froze. When it came down to it, that was her actual fear. What if college made her lose interest in music, or the band? What if she committed to continue and ended letting everyone down? She would hate herself if that happened. She had convinced herself that it was the best for everyone to quit before that happened.

Yuri

— Rimi, I know you, and I know how much you love music. I also know how much you love Popipa

— If you decide that quitting is the best, I will support you, but not if you do it out of fear

— My sweet Rimi, don't be afraid

She did not reply immediately. Yuri was right, she should not be afraid of what might happen. But how could she not? The way she saw it, everything was hanging by a thread. Her head hurt. She was not so sure about her decision now.

Rimi

— I'll have to think about it

That was the last thing they said about the topic.

## Chapter End Notes

If someone's still reading this, thank you! Hope you enjoy the chapter. I'm trying my best to keep it interesting enough so, hope you stick around!

# The cheerful girl?

## Chapter Summary

Arisa returns home with only half a victory. On the other end, Kasumi is not herself.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Leaving Rimi's apartment, Arisa started heading home. She tried her best not to cry. It was definitely a possibility that at least one of them would reject her. She knew that from the beginning. Still, it hurt like hell. She let out a muffled scream. Dragging her feet, she made her way home.

When she arrived, it was already dusk. Without realizing, she spent all day outside and had forgotten to water her bonsai. Immediately, she prepared her watering can.

"What should I do?" still to this day, she talked to them. "I don't know what to do."

Of course, she knew they would not reply, but it was a good way to vent and hearing her problems out loud helped her rationalize them.

"Saya said yes, I know." She moved on to the next bonsai. "But Rimi said no. And what if Kasumi doesn't want to come back?"

The sounds of crickets started to fill the silence between her phrases.

"And Otae is a complete wildcard". She looked up to the sky. The stars started to appear as the sun completely set.

"I just wish I had seen it coming." a bird flew nearby and stood on the table, right next to the bonsai.

"I hate this feeling." She finally sighed, finishing watering them.

Coming in, she realized she had not even entered home. Grandma greeted her as she opened the door.

"Welcome home, Arisa" she smiled sweetly.

"I'm home, grandma." she replied.

"Did you have a good day out?" she was preparing the table for dinner already.

"I wouldn't say that, but it was productive" she looked at the floor.

"Dinner is almost ready" grandma changed the subject. "Are you eating?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Okay, you can sit then."

Dinner went on in silence, and as soon as she was done, Arisa went straight to the basement. I still have to practice, just in case. So she did just that. She practiced for a couple hours, trying to make herself feel a bit better. Finally feeling better, she went to sleep.

Kasumi's POV. Earlier that day.

She woke up and looked at the clock next to her bed. It was about 8 am. She was still “hungover” from yesterday. Not because she drank or anything, but because she went to bed crying. Remembering what transpired yesterday still gave her a headache.

"Doesn't that mean we will have less time for things such as the band? If we want to have good grades and graduate, at least."

She looked across the room. Random Star was sitting on its stand. A somber feeling washed over her. She shook her head. It was almost time for breakfast. She got up, washed her face, and got dressed. Coming down the stairs, both her mom and sister were already setting up the table.

“Good morning, honey” her mom greeted her.

“Morning sis” Asuka added.

“Good morning” she replied, still rubbing her eyes.

“Will you have breakfast?” mom asked.

“Yes, thank you” she sat at the table.

“Is everything alright, sis?” her little sister inquired.

“Yes, everything is fine!” Kasumi immediately smiled towards Asuka.

Asuka gave her an inquisitive look, but she averted her gaze.

As soon as the food hit the table, she immediately dug in.

"Are you practicing today?" Mom asked.

"No, not today" she replied, still with food in her mouth.

"What? Really?" Both Asuka and mom were genuinely shocked.

"We want to take a break, you know, rest a bit" Kasumi added, still not looking up.

"Sis—" Asuka wanted to say something, but stopped herself.

"Thanks for the food!" She slammed her plate down. "I'll be in my room" and without saying anything else, left the table and went upstairs.

A break, she murmured. You liar. Random Star stared at her from across the room. She hugged her legs and curled back to bed.

...

...

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...

Three rapid knocks on her door snapped her out of her thoughts.

"Sis, can I come in?"

She uncurled and sat up. "Come in."

The door opened. Asuka stood at the door frame for a few seconds. Hesitant. Then, she entered the room.

"Is everything ok?" She sat at the edge of the bed.

"Of course," Kasumi replied, almost out of reflex.

"Come on, don't lie" her little sister pressed.

"What are you talking about" she was still struggling to push away the somber feelings.

"This isn't like you, sis" Asuka insisted, "something is completely off."  
"I swear, everything's fine" she fought back.  
"Does this have to do with this 'break' the band's taking?" How can she be so observant?  
"I– I don't..." The words stick to her throat.  
"I knew it" Asuka immediately interrupted. "Sis, what happened?"  
"I don't know" she was now fighting back tears. "I just don't know what to do."  
"What's the problem?" Asuka had always been a calming presence, she thought.  
"Nothing for you to worry about" Kasumi gave her a wide grin. "Anyways, I think I'll practice by myself today!"

And just like that, she was back to her old, cheerful self. Or at least pretended. Asuka knew she would not say anything, so she decided to leave her alone.

Grabbing her guitar and strapping in, she played for a couple hours, distracting herself. She, however, did not play a single 'PoPiPa' song. Everytime she tried to, she felt a weight in her chest, as if something was pushing against her really hard. She played her favorite songs, songs from Roselia and Afterglow. She even tried to write a new song, although that was not very successful. However, as best she could, she spent her morning making music. Just not their music.

Her phone vibrated. It was a text message. Otae invited her for lunch. She felt happy. She went downstairs, to of course ask for permission. Mom had no issue, other than her already starting to cook for three, but after a few minutes she was already in her way.

## Chapter End Notes

Hello! If you are reading my story, first: thank you! And second: sorry chapters are taking so long to come in! I appreciate every kudos and comment, anyways, I hope you enjoyed the new chapter!

# What it takes to be a leader

## Chapter Summary

Kasumi makes her way to Otae's house for lunch, meeting by chance with someone unexpected.

Luckily, the day was warm, so not taking a jacket actually was not a bad idea. She let the wind blow her hair for a couple minutes while staring at nothing. It was refreshing being outside. As she was making her way to the train station, she saw a familiar figure. It took her by surprise, as she had not seen this person for a year now. Standing at a vending machine, the coral hair and serious demeanor of Sayo Hikawa drew her in. She made her way over to Roselia's guitarist and greeted her promptly.

"Sayo senpai, long time no see," Kasumi was as polite as ever.

"Oh, Toyama-san" Sayo greeted her.

"I hadn't seen you in so long," she continued with some small talk.

"It's been a while," Sayo replied. "I came back for a few days, since I had some free time."

"That sounds lovely," Kasumi said. "How's college? I'm about to enter and I'm terrified!"

"Well, it's definitely something," Sayo smiled. "I expected it to be difficult, but I did not expect the chaos that came with it."

"I did not expect that from Sayo-senpai!" Kasumi let out a chuckle.

"What can I say?" she laughed back. "Anyways, how is everyone at PoPiPa?"

"Eh? Well..." she hesitated for a couple seconds. "Everyone is very excited for college."

"Hmm. Is that so?" Sayo was already in inquisitive mode. "Is that all that's going on?"

"Wh- what do you mean?" Kasumi instinctively got defensive.

"Nothing, really," she replied. "It's just that you're not your usual cheery self".

"As direct as always, senpai." Kasumi sighed.

"Let's walk to the train station, Toyama-san." Sayo asked, Kasumi just nodded.

"You know" Sayo broke the silence that had settled as they walked together. "I remember when we graduated. Everyone was really scared as to what would happen to the band."

"Really?" Kasumi was really surprised by that. She would have never imagined Roselia disbanding.

"Of course. After all, everyone except Udagawa-san would be going to college." Sayo's eyes were wandering, as if looking for something. "In the end, it all worked out."

"Senpai, if I may," Kasumi hesitated. "How did it work out?"

"To be honest, I have to give all credit to Minato-san." Kasumi did not look surprised. After all, Yukina was someone everyone, including her, looked up to. Not only because of her musical talent, but also because of her talent as a leader.

"She was the one who sat us all down and made us discuss what would happen." Kasumi kept listening very closely. "I'll admit, I was hesitant that it would work. However, we worked really hard to get Roselia to where it is now. It would have been a waste to let it all

fall apart just because of a change of circumstances.”

“I see,” Kasumi replied, “so it is possible to keep it going. But you require a strong will.” She let a sad smile show, just for a second.

“I think so,” Sayo started again, “in the end, determination is one of, if not the most important part of success.”

“Senpai-” Kasumi said.

“What is it, Toyama-san?”

“PoPiPa is breaking up.”

“I figured something like that had happened” Sayo showed no emotion.

“Eh? Wha- How?” Kasumi looked puzzled.

“I imagined something had occurred when you didn’t greet me screaming, as is your usual M.O.” Sayo chuckled. That was a sight to behold. “You may not realize, but you really do wear your heart on your sleeve.”

“Ehehe,” she was perplexed, but not surprised.

“Anyways. If you all have reached that decision, I assume there was a lengthy discussion. Although I am surprised for sure. You all seemed very resilient.”

“About that...” Kasumi looked slightly embarrassed.

“What is it?”

“I kind of decided it for myself.” Sayo definitely reacted to that.

“Toyama-san? I would not have expected that from you.”

“I know,” her head was hanging low, “what a coward, huh?”

“I am not one to judge someone’s decisions.” Sayo was as cold-headed as always. “But I will not deny that you would have been the one who would have resisted that decision the most.” Kasumi did not reply.

“Well, as I said, I have no reason to question your decision. But I do want to say something. After all these years working with Minato-san, I’ve learned that a good leader does not burden themselves with every difficult decision but instead, ensures everyone’s feelings are considered.”

The conversation had Kasumi so distracted that she didn’t realize they had made it to the station.

“Anyways, the next train is mine.” Sayo suddenly said. “It was nice seeing you, Toyama-san.”

“S- Same, Sayo-senpai.” Before the train doors shut, Kasumi quickly said, “Thank you for today.”

Sayo did not reply, but simply gave her a knowing look and a smile.

“Did I make the wrong decision?” Kasumi thought out loud. Did she rush to end it all? As short as the conversation was, Sayo’s words gave her a perspective she had not considered at all. As the leader of the band, she was supposed to make those decisions, no? After all, everyone counted on her to be the leader.

Before knowing, the train arrived. She got in and sat at an empty seat next to a window. Not wanting to arrive to Otae’s house all gloomy, she left her mind wander while she looked out. The train moved with an almost silent hum, as her eyes half focused on sections of the street. People going about their days as normal. Shadows of lampposts and buildings hit her face, followed by the warm and bright sun in an erratic pattern. She started focusing on the intervals between shadow and light, trying to keep her mind distracted. It was refreshing for a few minutes not having her mind filled with thoughts of regret.

It took about the same time as usual to get to the station near Otae's house. She got off the train, guitar at her back, and began to walk the already well-known way. People passed her by. Some faces were already familiar, as they greeted her by name. Some she did not recognize. Such is life in the city, anyways. After a walk of about 10 minutes, she reached her destination. Using one of the outside windows, she composed herself. Taking a deep breath, she rang the bell.

...  
...  
...

There was no answer.

She rang again.

This time there was an answer, although no one opened the door.

"Comiiiiing..." a voice (Otae's?) screamed across the house and through the door.

"Otae, is everything ok?" she yelled back.

No response again.

She figured she might as well let herself in.

"I'm coming in..." she said, trying to project her voice through the door.

As she opened the door, the first thing she noticed was the smell. It was definitely not pleasant. And it was definitely the smell of something burning.

"Otae!" She rapidly made her way to the kitchen. "Are you okay?"

The scene at the kitchen was something straight out of a cartoon. Otae's face was black, smoke was pouring out of the oven and on the kitchen counter, there was a tray of what she could only assume used to be whatever Otae was trying to bake.

What had she gotten herself into?



# **We don't have to make a decision today**

## Chapter Summary

Kasumi and Otae get together for lunch. Otae tried to cook something with unexpected results. The girls have a heart to heart conversation and try to decide if quitting the band was the best decision.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“I guess cooking is hard” Otae looked genuinely confused.

Kasumi just stared in disbelief at the girl with the long, black hair and cute apron on. Otae’s reaction did not match the situation at all. Of course, after all these years, this was fairly common for her airhead friend.

“I thought following the instructions would be easy”, she continued while using a wet towel to clean her face. “I did everything the recipe said, step by step”.

“Why don’t we go through the recipe, just to make sure,” Kasumi suggested.

“Ok, let’s do that”.

Kasumi began reading the recipe, starting with the ingredients, Otae confirmed every one of them. Then she read the instructions on how to bake the cookies, to which Otae nodded. Finally, she reached the part of the recipe that involved the oven.

“Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.” Kasumi read.

“Fahrenheit?” Otae’s head tilted to the side, like a puppy’s.

“Otae, what temperature did you put the oven to?”

“Well, my oven only goes to 260 degrees, so I used that.”

Kasumi let out a big laugh.

“Otae~” she let out in a sing-song voice. “Our ovens are in celsius, not fahrenheit!”

“Ohhh...” her eyes went wide open. Kasumi kept laughing uncontrollably. “I guess that explains it”.

They both laughed.

“You know what” Otae continued, “let’s just order delivery”.

“That sounds good,” Kasumi agreed.

They took their time deciding what to have for lunch, and the food arrived only 15 minutes after ordering. They sat at the dining table, side to side, and started eating. Suddenly, the

silence had become awkward, but neither of them was willing to break it. They looked at each other a couple times, both trying to build up the courage to address the elephant in the room.

“Kasumi” Otae started.

“I know,” she replied.

“Was it really the best decision?”

“To be honest, I don’t even know anymore.”

“Neither do I.”

“Oh,” Kasumi remembered the unexpected encounter from earlier. “I ran into Sayo senpai earlier!”

She then relayed all the details about their conversation to Otae, who just listened and nodded along the way.

“So, after that, I’m not so sure anymore,” Kasumi added, after finishing the story.

“It does sound like something Roselia would endure,” Otae replied. “Maybe it is worth some thought.”

“I think so too.”

“Can I be honest with you?” Otae’s face was very serious.

“O- Ok” Kasumi hesitated.

“I’m scared”

Kasumi did not reply.

“I’m very very scared as to what will happen when we’re in college. Besides Hana-chan, PoPiPa are the only friends I’ve had, and breaking up the band feels like saying goodbye to my friends. We’ve had something like this before, and after that I promised myself I would not let you girls go. However, this time it feels as if everyone is readying themselves for it. And that is terrifying...” her voice kept getting lower and lower in volume, until Kasumi could hardly hear her.

There was silence for a few seconds. A faint sniff could be heard coming from Otae, as if she were holding back tears. Kasumi did not move at all.

“You know,” Kasumi finally spoke. “All this time, I had felt as if I was not made to be a leader. Many things happened to us where I should have spoken up, or stood up, but I did not. Even when PoPiPa helped me find that sparkling, heart-pounding feeling, I did not do enough to protect it when I should have. And breaking up the band is me once again showing my weakness.

“I’m also scared,” she continued after a brief pause. “I’m so scared that everyone will drift away and I will lose you. Scared that, if we keep going, we’ll just end up not having time to practice, until someday we just stop, not even talking to each other. Scared that I will not be able to manage the pressure of the band and college. Scared that I will screw up one more time and that being the straw that breaks the camel’s back for everyone. I’m so scared to keep making mistakes.

Otae finally raised her head to look at Kasumi. She continued to speak.

“But at the same time, something inside of me tells me that this is not the right time to finish this. Something tells me that we still have so much to give as a band, and that giving up would make us all feel empty. I’m so conflicted that I’m paralyzed. And I hate that feeling.

Otae reached out and grabbed Kasumi’s hand.

“It is scary, isn’t it?” Otae smiled.

“Very scary.” Kasumi smiled back.

“I guess we don’t have to make a decision today.”

“I guess not, but we do have to eventually” Kasumi finished.

## Chapter End Notes

Hello! If anyone is still reading this, I hope you like this chapter! And I know is coming months late, since I have been dealing with a horrible writer's block, lol! But I do like how this one turned out, so please enjoy!

# Backup

## Chapter Summary

After their talk, Kasumi and Otae spend the afternoon together. Otae gets a strange call and Kasumi a funny text, that are, somehow, connected.

The girls continued their lunch in silence, but this time it wasn't awkward. There was an understanding. After finishing eating, they sat in the living room and tried to jam for a while. Although their fingers did move accordingly, it felt as if there was no emotion. Still, they did have fun in the end.

They decided to watch TV instead. As they were sitting in the living room, deciding which movie to watch, Otae's phone rang.

"Hello?" She answered.

...

"Oh no" her expression became worried.

...

"I'm not sure it's the best moment," she said, doubting for a moment. She glanced at Kasumi for just a second.

...

"When is it?" Kasumi felt like she was missing an important conversation, only hearing one end of the call.

...

"Give me a couple days, I'll get back to you" she did not sound convinced at all.

...

"Ok, bye".

As soon as she hung up, Otae just stared at the TV, not really watching whatever show she had picked. Kasumi nudged her softly, pulling her out of her stupor. She flinched a bit.

"Otae, is everything OK?" Kasumi asked.

"I..." she hesitated. "Yes, all good." It looked like she wanted to say something, but stopped herself.

"Well... Who was it?" she replied, trying to sound casual.

"Huh?" Otae was completely distracted again.

"You know, on the phone. Who called you?" Kasumi inquired.

"Oh, that." she was deliberately avoiding making eye contact with Kasumi.

"It's fine, you don't have to tell me." she retracted shyly. "But you look pretty concerned."

"Yes... I'm sorry. I am just thinking really hard" Otae replied.

At that time, Kasumi's phone vibrated. She had gotten a text. She looked at the screen. It was a message from Rokka. As she opened the message, she was definitely not expecting it to be a picture of Rokka with a cast on her left arm.

[Picture]

"Kasumi! Look what happened! Rokka slipped while cleaning Galaxy and broke her wrist. She even did a flip and all, it was really cool"

She was very confused. Why was Rokka talking about herself in the third person? And she knew for a fact that Rokka called her "senpai". But as she was about to text her back with all these questions, more messages arrived.

"Asuka says I should clarify that it's not Rokka sending the messages, but I, Ako. Signed: Ako"

She let out a laugh. However, immediately Rokka's broken wrist came to mind.

"Oh wow, is Rokka Ok? I guess you went to the hospital"

"Yeah she's ok, the doc said it should heal on six to eight weeks"

"That's a relief, but she should be more careful"

"Will you sign her cast? I already did a cool signature!"

A new picture text came in. This time it was a picture of Rokka's casted arm, but there was a drawing on the cast. It was a drawing of Ako as a demon princess. Although it was pretty hastily done it looked kinda cool, she thought.

"Otae, look" Kasumi raised her view. Otae was staring at her, her head tilted to the right. She showed the two pictures and explained what had happened.

"So that's what it was," Otae whispered to herself. Or so she thought, as Kasumi could hear her.

"What was what?" she asked. An uneasy feeling crept in.

"It was Chu2, the one who called," Otae replied deadpan.

"Really? Why?" Kasumi still did not understand.

"Well, RAS has a live show in two weeks," she began explaining.

"And Rokka is injured" the other girl finished the sentence.

"She's asking if I can fill in for a couple shows, while she heals." Otae looked down.

"Oh." was all Kasumi could reply.

There was a brief pause.

"But I didn't say yes." Otae spoke again. "I don't think I could, nor should."

"Why not?" Kasumi immediately replied.

"What?" Otae was taken aback.

"Why shouldn't you?" she insisted.

"I mean... Popipa is not in the best shape right now. I feel like I should focus on that first..." her voice slowly became silent.

"Otae. you don't have to worry about that right now. Remember?" Kasumi tried to smile like she usually does. "Maybe if you play with RAS, you can clear your mind a bit?"

Otae did not reply.

“I... I’ll have to think about it.”

# Childhood friends

## Chapter Summary

Otae is still considering Chu2's offer. Before giving a reply, she gets together with Layer to play in front of the train station, and chat a bit.

Of course, after such an offer, Otae was completely taken aback and could not think of anything else for the rest of the day. Eventually, it started to get dark and Kasumi left. She was still shook by the time her mom got back home. After a couple strange looks between them, she finally told her about the call.

She wasn't completely sure whether she should do so or not. So she decided to sleep on it. It was, predictably, a restless night for her. Not even her dreams were comfortable, as when she finally fell asleep, she dreamt of her on the stage with RAS, and PoPiPa drifting away slowly.

She awoke in a cold sweat. Her long black hair was messy and sticking to her forehead. Her phone vibrated a couple times, signaling she had received a text. It was a message from Rei. She immediately opened the message.

Layer

—Hana-chan, good morning

Otae

—Layer, good morning

Layer

—I guess Chu2 already called you, huh?

Otae

—Yeah, she called yesterday

Layer

—I'm sorry, she did that without consulting anyone

Otae

—That sounds like a Chu2 thing to do :D

Layer

—I guess so ☺

—You don't have to do it, we can use a backing track

Otae

—I know, but I haven't decided yet

Layer

—Well, if you decide to do it, do so because you want to

Otae

—Don't worry, it's not like last time

Layer

—That's reassuring

Otae

—Yeah, but I still have a lot to think about

Lay

—Definitely

—Hey, wanna go to the station?

Otae

—Yes! See you in an hour?

Lay

—Sounds like a plan

Even feeling down, she would never refuse to spend time with her dear childhood friend. Especially if it was playing and singing at the train station. After getting changed, she went to the dining room, where her mom was already getting breakfast ready. The thought of hanging out with Rei already had her in a better mood.

She finished eating and went straight back to her room to get her things ready to leave. She put her guitar in its case, grabbed a coat and grabbed the two mint-colored mini speakers. It was such a nostalgic memory, teaching Kasumi how to play “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” with these. She shook her head and continued with what she was doing. She left home, waving goodbye with a smile.

The trip was short, as usual. And when she got there, Lay was already waiting, with her bass at her back. They greeted each other with a nod and a smile, but didn’t say a word. Otae pulled out the two mini speakers, and got them connected to their instruments. After a couple minutes of tuning, they gave each other a knowing glance and started playing “I won’t cry, I won’t cry”.

For just a couple minutes, all her worries just disappear. Singing along with Lay always felt just right. Ever since they were kids, they complemented each other perfectly. And know even more, with their choice of instruments. When the song ended, she began feeling uneasy. Did she feel this connection to the PoPiPa members? Was that the reason she felt as if the band couldn’t continue? Was she looking for an excuse to not deal with the pain of not connecting to her friends?

A slight tap on the shoulder brought her back to reality.

“Are you ok?” Lay asked. Her voice was tender and worried, just like a mother tending to their child.

“I’m... I’m not sure” she decided to be honest with her childhood friend.

“I get it,” Lay replied. “Don’t pressure yourself.”

“I’m scared, Lay,” Otae continued. “Am I really letting go of PoPiPa?”

“Well, of course that’s a tough call, and if you feel this way is because you do care about your friends” Lay said, while she grabbed Otae and sat on a bench nearby.

“I just don’t want to make the wrong choice.”

“What did the others say?”

“Arisa took it really badly.”

“I assumed she would not be happy” Lay let out a little chuckle.

“But if we don’t do it, what will happen to us?”



“That’s the thing, we can never know what the future holds, can we?”

“The future is rather scary,” Otae sighed.

“It is.”

There was brief silence. Lay got up and started walking. Otae looked confused.

“Come!” Lay was beckoning her.

“Where are we going?” Otae replied, getting up while grabbing her things.

“We’re gonna visit someone.”

# Food for Thought

## Chapter Summary

Rei recruits Masuki to speak to Tae. Masuki takes her for a ride and gives her some advice.

Otae followed her childhood friend, rather puzzled. They kept on walking in a direction that felt familiar. After some time, they made it to where Rei was intending to go.

“Why are we at “Galaxy?” Otae asked, genuinely confused.

“I told you, we’re visiting someone,” Rei was grinning.

“Masking?”

“Well, yes. But, no.”

Otae’s head cocked to the side, like a lost puppy. Rei only smiled back.

“Wait here,” she muttered before running into the live house. A few minutes went by. Otae simply paced around for a moment. Finally, Rei and Masuki came out the door. Rei was whispering something to Masuki, and although she tried, Otae could not catch what it was. The two RAS members gave each other a knowing look. This sent chills down her spine.

“Grab this,” said Masuki, handing out a helmet.

“Wait, what?” Otae was beyond confused.

“Trust me, you’ll need it,” Rei smirked.

“Ok...” she grabbed it and started to put it on. As soon as the helmet was on her hands, Masuki bolted around the corner.

The sound of a bike engine startled both of the girls, who had stayed silent for a couple seconds. Not long after, the origin of that roar appeared around the corner.

“Ready?” The blonde rebel asked.

“Su... Sure” Otae stuttered.

“Well, hop on then”.

Still afraid of what might happen, she got up on the bike. Not wasting any time, Masuki bolted out as soon as she felt Otae was safely seated. She had never been on a bike before, so her instinct was to grab on to Masuki’s body as tightly as possible. Masuki let out an enormous laugh.

“Relax, you’re safe” she shouted over her shoulder.

“I have never been on a motorcycle before,” her passenger yelled back.

“Are you serious?” Masuki was a bit baffled. “Riding bikes is great. Helps clear your mind when you’re on the road.”

Otae shook her head.

"I know Chu2 asked you to play with us," she wanted to get that out.

"Yes, she did."

"And you are unsure whether you should do it or not."

"A little."

"What's up with PoPiPa?" The question caught her off guard.

Otae did not reply.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have mentioned it"

"No, it's OK," she eventually spoke. "PoPiPa is ending." She said this in a whisper. Masuki did not hear it.

"Well, whatever it is, I'm sure you'll get through it," Masuki replied.

They didn't say anything else for the rest of the ride. After going around the city for some time, Masuki stopped at a Ramen shop. She had a smile on her face. Otae, on the other hand, was still dizzy from the bike ride. Her legs shaking and her ears ringing. When she took off her helmet, her hair was a mess. Masuki just laughed.

"Well, here we are," Masuki smiled, as she pointed toward the shop in front of them.

"Ramen Ginga, huh?" Otae had heard about the shop from Rokka, but had never been to it herself.

"Are you gonna come in?" Masuki asked, already holding the door open.

"Welcome!" the voice of the shop's owner greeted them as they entered. A woman in her thirties with shoulder length and bright red hair. She was wearing a black T-shirt and a bandana holding her hair back while she cooked noodles and rice.

"I'm back," Masuki replied, like a kid returning home.

"It seems the young lady picked up another stray cat, huh?" The owner laughed.

"You know ramen heals a broken heart" she laughed back.

Otae introduced herself, and the owner did the same. Then, she immediately started preparing something in the kitchen. In the meantime, Otae told Masuke what had happened with PoPiPa, and her talk with Kasumi the day before. Masuki listened very carefully, and did not interrupt. Once Otae went silent, Masuki tried to say something. She scratched her head, as if trying to dig into her brain for a word, anything she could say. At that point the owner interrupted.

"Here ya go ladies," as she placed two large bowls of ramen in front of the girls.

"Hey, I know you might feel awful right now", Masuki mustered up some courage. "But if there's something I've learned from PoPiPa is that you always work as a team."

Masuki continued. "Maybe you all feel this way because you made this decision with your heads. But, isn't it your whole thing to follow your heart?" She paused for a second, waiting for a reaction. Otae didn't even move. She just stared at the food in front of her. "Look. Maybe what you need is a distraction from all of this. Just take your mind off of this mess for a few days and I'm sure you'll start to see clear again."

"I don't mean to pry," the owner interrupted. "But it seems to me that your band hit a bump on the road. Or a rather nasty pothole." She chuckled at her bad joke. "And trust me, I've been in that position before. Sometimes we have to give up our dreams and face reality. But you're young. There will be plenty of time to give up, once you're older." She seemed to not

only be talking to Otae but herself. “Don’t let your dream get away from you just because you’re scared. Young ladies are meant to rule the world, not watch from the sidelines.” Otae finally lifted her head up. The owner was looking at her with a sweet, even motherly smile on her face. “And listen to the young lady. Take a few days, clear your head and then make a decision.”

Otae nodded. Without a word, she began eating her ramen. Masuki let out a sigh of relief. She too got to her plate. The owner simply looked at them and went back to cooking.

After finishing their food, the two girls went back to “Galaxy”, this time slower than the ride there. Masuki tried to make small talk and Otae replied with something generic. They definitely felt a bit awkward after the conversation at the ramen shop.

“Well, you don’t have to make a decision right now,” Masuki said after they parked the bike and began walking. “But the concert is in two weeks, so we would like to know if we can count on you for rehearsals”.

“I’ll have to think a bit more.” Otae replied, deep in thought.

“Well, see you around, Hana.” Masuki started to walk away.

“Massu,” Otae interrupted.

“Yeah?”

“Thank you”.

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