

Starless

Haa... What should I do... Liore agency. An agency that trained all sorts of talents, such as actors, singers, dancers, etc. It also happens to be my father's company. Unfortunately... He died in a car crash and now I'm to take over. The problem is... None of our talents respect me. As soon as my father died, they terminated our contracts and left. We're practically going bankrupt...

"Wow, who's this? Asterina?"

I look up at a familiar voice suddenly calling out my name.

"... Brother William..."

Brother William is one of the only talents who used to have a contract with my dad I'm still on somewhat good terms with. He always found me cute and lovely, even offering to look after me when I was little. I was also the one who scouted him... Technically. No, I did not like... Drag him to dad and say we should hire him when I saw him on the streets. However, once dad took me along to see the auditionees to become trainees. Dad originally was not too sure about brother, but I was able to successfully convince dad to give him a chance. He actually turned out to be great at this whole thing and debuted quickly. He was willing to stay but... He was part of a group and the rest of the group were really against it. I did watch dad work and could deal with it for a few months until I got the hang of things because dad planned ahead a few months in advance always, but... That went out the window.

"Hey, I didn't expect to see you here! What's up? Anything new?"

"Well... You know... People terminating contracts left and right because of trust issues, company going practically bankrupt since dad died, you know? Just the usual. Nothing new at all."

He looks away awkwardly. He apologized multiple times, even when I said it was fine and he had no reason to apologize. But... He asked, so kind of his fault.

"Umm... Asta. You don't have to take it if you don't want to, but... Here."

He holds out a black ticket which has VIP written on it in gold letters.

"What's this?"

"It's... As you can see... A VIP ticket. It's for this club restaurant thing down an alleyway. There's a map on the back."

"A club?! I'm like... 16!"

"Not like that. It's also a restaurant, and you don't need to get drinks with alcohol anyway. The place is called 'Starless' and it's a place where lots of people show off what they can do by performing in front of the guests. They apparently also hold lots of competitions where you can vote for your favorite performer and stuff. I feel like you could get new people there. Think of it as a treasure hunt! A chance to find a jewel you can cut and polish to make it truly shine. Plus, I heard VIP get a special extra something other customers don't."

"How did you get this?"

"I was passing by and I turned out to be the hundredth customer passing by. They gave me a VIP ticket due to that. I was interested as I heard about it from time to time and was planning to go, but... I think you'd benefit more than I. So, here you go."

"What?! No, no. I can't take this!"

"Please do. It's the least I can do."

"If you insist... Then... Thank you!"

"Of course. Bye! Good luck, Asta!"

- Later, in the evening

It only opens late at evening... This should be it, right? A black entrance with starless written on top with gold. Very like the ticket, but the ticket looked like it had gold glitter sprinkled on top to make it sparkle.

"Excuse me, miss. Can you tell us your name?"

"O- Oh! Of course. Asterina Liore."

Asterina Liore ↓



Long silver hair

Blue to pink gradient eyes

Wearing something casual, not a uniform

"Sorry, miss, but you're not on the guest list. We'll have to ask you to leave."

"W- Wait! I have this ticket!"

"Listen, miss. We don't have time for games like this. We must ask you to leave the premises or we'll be forced to call security and use force to make you leave. My deepest apologies, my lady. I didn't realize you were such an important guest. Please come right this way. We hope you enjoy the show. Your special privilege will be given shortly after today's performances, so please stay until the end. Your food, drinks, and everything else are on the house. Consider it an apology for my earlier rudeness."

Huh...? His attitude changed so quickly. Still in a daze, I followed him to my seat. Am I the only VIP here? A waiter comes over immediately to take my order. I order some pasta and salad, along with some sparkling water and wait for the show to start. Soon enough, the lights dim and the stage at the front lights up. One by one, men come up and show off all they can do. Some of them seem to be around 18 to 20, while some of them seem my age or even younger. But one thing all of them have in common is their talent. They're not very polished or anything, but they have infinite amounts of raw talent. It's amazing just watching them perform. I only come back to my senses after the lights flicker on and some thunderous applause ensues. I then hear things like

"Areli's singing was phenomenal as always. I'm voting for him again."

Or

"Darin was really amazing today too. Can you believe he's only 17?! What a talented young dancer!"

And

"I heard Sebastian writes and sings his own original songs. No wonder I've never heard anything like his songs before."

I finish up eating my food and wait patiently until everyone else leaves. I'm apparently supposed to stay here until a worker comes to get me. As for me... I liked them all.

"Miss Asterina, please follow me. Here is your backstage pass."

My... What now?! Is this backstage pass the "special privilege only given to VIP customers" I was told about earlier...? I'm taken backstage to meet the performers.

"We'll leave you be to personally interact and chat with the performers."

Wait, what?! Don't leave me! He forces the backstage pass in my hands, bows, and leaves me... All alone. Not knowing what to do, I hang the backstage pass on my neck. Mainly just to do something. I wind and unwind a lock of my white hair around my finger, not knowing how to react.

"Hey!"

"Oh my god!"

"Whoa! Easy there, princess. I didn't expect to literally sweep you off your feet. Sorry about that. Did I scare ya?"

"Cut the crap, Akiira. We all know it was totally intentional."

"Oh, come on, Cerulean. Let me have my fun with her. She wasn't hurt."

"Well, some of us are actually well functioning beings of society who don't make people trip on their first meeting."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever you say, Clarion."

"Umm... Sorry, but... Could you let go of me now? I think I can stand on my own now. But thank you for catching me."

"Oh, sorry! Here you go! You seemed so nervous, so I thought it might help if I called out to you. Didn't expect you to just trip and nearly fall like that, haha."

"O- Oh, umm... It's okay. It's my first time here, and I'm really shy when it comes to new people, so it probably would've helped. Your name was... Akiira, right? Assuming that's not your stage name. I think you were 5th to perform. I really liked your singing, it was great."

Akiira has long light blond hair with darker streaks, half of which is tied up. His eyes are a bright golden color.

"That's right! You have a great memory!"

"Haha, I was mesmerized and probably just stared the entire time everyone was performing, even forgetting to eat. It'd be embarrassing if I couldn't, considering I was so focused the whole time."

"Oh, so you know who everyone is?"

"Probably, yeah."

"Who's he?"

"Cerulean."

"Correct. I'm impressed."

Cerulean has light blue hair and different colored eyes. One is light blue and the other is dark blue. Like his name, a majority of his features are blue, huh?

"Do you know my name?"

"Areli. The vocalist."

"You're right."

He has white hair with grey eyes. He looks like an angel, which suits his pure voice.

"And him?"

"Shut up, Akiira."

"He's called Seth. Electric guitarist, as well as a singer."

Seth has half black half red hair and red eyes. His ears are pierced multiple times. And he also looks the scariest, glaring at me and all. But I still can't forget the way he looked on stage. The way he put his heart and soul into his performance was truly astounding and moving.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Easy. Darian. The dancer."

"I... You're correct."

Darian has dark hair and these really pretty and enchanting lavender eyes.

"And me?"

"Sebastian. A singer and songwriter."

Sebastian has dark brown hair and green eyes with glasses.

"Impressive indeed. Do you remember me, miss VIP?"

A guy who's been silent until then walks up to me. Everyone looks stunned.

"Your name is Ezekiel... Right? You can sing, dance, and rap."

"That's right."

Ezekiel has silky green hair and blue eyes.

"You haven't named him."

"His name's Clarion. He's a singer."

Clarion just gives me a nod of affirmation to say I was right. He has long dark blue hair tied in a braid and eyes the same color as his hair, with a small beauty mark under his right eye.

"8 down, 2 to go. Do you remember us?"

"Ah. The twins. Yin and Yang, right? One a singer, the other a songwriter."

"That's right~"

Yang has white hair and red eyes, while Yin has black hair and blue eyes.

"Ah, by the way... Why are you here?"

"What?!"

"Come on, don't tell me you sincerely wanted to watch us perform. What's your real motive for coming here?"

I sigh.

"Fine... I'll tell you. My dad died in a car accident. He was my only family member as my mom died of illness when I was very young and I've never seen any relatives. That was how I was left alone at 16. My dad owns a company that trains and debuts idols or other professions in the entertainment industry like actors."

"Ah. So you want us to become trainees, is that it?"

"Well... Yes, but..."

"In that case, show us what you got."

"Huh?"

"We don't accept anyone who's not willing to put in the effort. You'll be training us, so you better be good at performing as well."

"Umm... Okay."

"Fantastic. Here's your stage."

"I... I need a mic."

"Oh. Here, catch!"

"Kyaaa!"

"Akiira! Can't you see she might be terrible at catching things? I bet she was the type of girl who just tried not to get hit by the ball instead of trying to catch it in gym. The pretty little songbird can't sing if you hit her neck with that mic you threw at her, now can she? Gotcha. Here you go."

"Th- Thank you...?"

Cerulean catches the mic in mid air and hands it to me.

"Anything else, miss?"

"A... Guitar...?"

"Electric or acoustic?"

"I... Generally play acoustic, but electric is fine too..."

"Oh, wonderful. I actually play both."

Seth gives me an acoustic guitar he apparently had lying around...

"So like... Do I just begin?"

"You have some weird exercise you do before performing for your vocal cords or something?"

"N- no, it just feels kind of odd performing randomly."

"Too bad then. Guess we won't be trainees at your compa--"

"Wait, I'll do it!"

"Lovely. Then, by all means, begin whenever you feel ready to perform."

"Umm... Okay..."

I step on stage and start playing and singing an original song I wrote. I don't have sheet music or whatever, but that doesn't really matter since I have a pretty good memory and can easily memorize notes and lyrics, especially if I wrote and composed everything myself. I finish and turn around.

"So... How did I do?"

Everyone's staring in shock. The problem being I can't tell whether it's because I was so good or whether it's because I was so bad. I hope it's the former but... I have never been officially trained. I have watched others get trained and listened to others sing and all that, sure, but I myself was never taught by a professional. Well, I was allowed to play around with professional idols and they taught me a little about singing, but it was more for fun than actually teaching me. Haha... Now that I think about it, everyone at the agency was really nice to me. Sure, we're not very close now because of the termination of contracts due to my dad passing

away thing, but I had a good relationship with everyone before that. Akiira's the first one to react.

"Wow! You could become a singer yourself with that kind of talent! I don't know why you were so nervous before!"

"That was actually better than I thought that would go. You pass."

"So... You'll become trainees?"

"Yes and no. We'll act like trainees, sure. But we aren't signing some contract that binds us to your company for years on end. We can leave at any time."

"I mean... That was going to be in the contract anyway...?"

"What?!"

"I mean... Sure, most contracts have the binding for years thing you mentioned. Most commonly bound for around... 7 years when you debut. For trainees, it's more like 2 to 4 years. But I fully intend on making you guys debut, so it doesn't really matter. You can think of it as a guaranteed debut than a trainee. But anyway, that's besides the point. As I was saying, most contracts bind you for 7 years, but I was intending to draft up a new one that does not bind you in anyway and maximizes your freedom! Mainly because... I'm really new to all of this and there's no guarantee you guys will succeed. My dad was really good at this. He had a fantastic eye and only accepted trainees he was going to make debut. Every single time he made someone debut whether as a group or soloist, they skyrocketed to the top in no time. The top of the top were all people from my dad's company, Liore agency, in case you didn't guess that already from my last name."

"L- Liore? That super famous agency?"

"Yeah, that Liore. The CEO was my dad. Success was a guarantee if you were accepted. That's why... I'm drafting a brand new contract that maximizes your freedom! In fact, I'll discuss it with each of you and adjust it to your liking!"

"I... Is this normal?"

"Of course, you can still decide not to sign if that's what you want!"

"What are the benefits?"

"Well... You get free rooms. No rent, in other words. You also get free food. Anything you need will be provided as soon as you ask, and-

"Where are you even getting all the money for this?"

"My bank account and my dad's inheritance. I would normally have more because practically everyone terminated their contracts, but... I didn't make them pay. They'll be fine. They're popular and last I checked, have countless agencies lining up to take them."

"I'm sorry. They terminated their contracts but you freed them from their financial responsibilities and made sure they were okay? Why didn't you sue them?"

"Why would I do that? My father died unexpectedly, so of course they wouldn't trust me to lead them. Besides, they were all perfectly cordial with me. Some even took care of me when I was little and I view them as big brother figures. And of course I check if they're okay. Liore agency's prestige relies on them. Yeah, they're now working for different agencies, but Liore built them up from the ground."

"So... You're telling us we receive free housing and living expenses, we can leave at any time, no strings attached?"

I nodded.

"Okay... Umm... What are you going to do that makes us trainees?"

"Live at the agency. Do a bit of training if necessary. That's it."

"Okay, I see... One sec. We'll get back to you after discussing it."

Then Clarion, who seems to be the leader, hands me a VIP ticket. I look at him cluelessly, wondering what this was for. He sighs and pushes back his dark blue hair in an annoyed manner.

"Come back tomorrow. We'll give you our answer by then."

"Oh... Okay! Thank you!"

- The next day

"Miss, you're back?"

"That's right! And... Ta-da!"

"Another... One of our performers must've took quite a liking to you."

"So... Can I come in? You're not going to deny me with access like last time, right?"

"Of course not, my lady. I didn't know you had the VIP ticket last time."

"By the way... This place seems to be pretty exclusive. Guest lists and all. I didn't expect that, being in an alleyway and all."

I talk as I follow him to my seat.

"Yes, but most people are chosen to be invited here. People who have the potential to become performers or sponsor them. It's deep in an alleyway so normal people don't notice it's here."

"Ah. How did you know one of the performers gave me this?"

"Most customers only dream of becoming VIP customers. Twice in a row means you were unbelievably lucky or one of the performers gave it to you. After all, only one VIP is allowed per night."

"Really? So that's why..."

They all amaze me with their shows once more and I'm re-invited backstage.

"I don't like wasting time with useless small talk and greetings, so let's cut straight to the chase, shall we?"

"Sure, that's fine..."

"Let's keep things short. Firstly, we will sign a contract, but it's not a trainee contract. It's more of an agreement on both sides. We'll let you know when we want to sign an actual contract, trainee or debut. Secondly, we'll live at the agency, but you cannot control what we do unless you deem it absolutely necessary. In other words, you do not have the authority to train us. Of course, this can all be changed once we sign an actual contract, so it isn't like this is set in stone or anything. Anyway, lastly... We changed schools."

"What?"

"I mean... Obviously some of us don't go to school, but some of us are pretty young. To live at the agency, we needed to transfer to a nearby school. The reason you should know this is because if a problem connected to the school arises, you're going to take care of it."

"I... I'm 16!"

"I know. But you skipped 2 grades and graduated already."

"Yes, but..."

"If you don't agree, you can consider these negotiations never happened."

"No, no. No problem at all. Sure, why not?"

"Fantastic. Oh, and we'll be performing here every night. You may only stop us if you think we're unable to perform."

"Oh, no worries. I expected that."

"I see, then it seems we'll have no problems."

"Now... Let me show you the agency! I'm so excited!"

The company is going bankrupt, but I was able to at least save the building.

Liore agency ↓



Castle/palace like structure

Very pretty and impressive

"This is the agency?"

"That's correct! It's beautiful, right? I had to sell lots of things because the company was going bankrupt, but I couldn't bear to sell the agency building itself!"

"I... I thought you said you had money..."

"I do! I paid off all the debt and still have the inheritance and the money in my bank account. I sold my jewelry and stuff."

"I see...?"

"Anyway, welcome! You guys are the only people who are living here besides me, so please feel free to pick any room except mine, okay?"

"If it's alright with you, may I see your room? I'd like to get a sense of how the rooms are decorated or how they could be decorated if possible."

"Oh, of course! My room was very much made to suit my taste, but you should be able to get a general feel nonetheless. Please, let me show you my bedroom."

Her room ↓



Dark blue

Starry ceiling

Night sky themed

"Here we are! I generally only come here to sleep, so it may look a bit too dark, haha. Don't worry if you don't like it, I'll be sure to let you guys decorate your rooms exactly to your liking. It doesn't have to be this."

"How did you even set it all up?"

"Well... I've always had a fascination with stars since my name, Asterina, means star or something akin to that. So, I wanted to decorate my room like a starry sky. These lights are just LED lights and stuff. I'm sure you're not curious about the wallpaper or anything else, right?"

"Oh, umm... Yeah, that's fine."

"Anyway, you can all go and pick out your rooms. Tomorrow, the ones who go to the school are coming with me."

"I... Why?"

"Oh, that's because I know the teachers and I want to introduce you all ahead of time. You can start next week. You said it yourself. Everything related to school is my responsibility. I'm just following that."

When I point this out, they all look incredibly annoyed at me. Some of them are like "Why did we decide that?" and others just look so done with everything.

"It's not that bad! Don't be so negative about it all! It's good in a way. If you were going to be so displeased, why did you even agree to this in the first place?"

"Well, we didn't think you were being serious. Half of us thought you were joking with us yesterday and wouldn't even come back today to hear our decision. Who on earth picks trainees so easily?"

"... You know, I don't lie. Everyone who knows me well knows that. If you were to ask people to describe me in one word, it'd be honest. Besides, even if I wasn't, why would I lie about this? This is very important to me. My dad unexpectedly died in a car accident, and he was my only caretaker. He was the CEO. But now he's not here. Due to that, everyone who had a contract with the agency terminated their contracts and left because they don't trust me despite having known me for years. I was forced to sell any valuables just to pay off debt. And then I received that VIP ticket by a stroke of luck, and saw you all perform. My dad and I are very different, but one thing we have in common is our eye for talent. If I predicted someone would become popular, they would immediately hit the billboard charts within a week at most. My dad may not be here anymore, but as his only child, I need to make his company he built from the ground up succeed. That's my goal. So I don't know why I would joke around in a situation like this."

When I say that, the whole room goes silent. Haa... I sigh. Let's try to calm down.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have lashed out like that. What I'm trying to say is... I don't lie, so I'd appreciate it if you would believe my sincerity in this endeavor of mine."

"W- Wait. We're sorry. No matter how much we doubted you, we still should've known better than to mock a goal that holds so much significance for you."

"It's okay. I just... It's fine if you don't like me. It's fine if you don't want to train. It's fine if you do whatever you want at the agency. It's okay since that's what we agreed on. But if you gave me jurisdiction over school, you have to stick to it. And as long as we're doing this, I would really like it if you did well at school. That's why I'm introducing you beforehand. So, please try and work with me with school, okay?"

They nod. Finally.

- The next day

"Okay, so... I forgot to do this yesterday, so I need to know your age."

"Ah. Yeah, that's reasonable. We should have told you, that was on us. So, I'll start. I'm 18, and I was doing really well."

"Oh, nice. You're almost done, Clarion. Do you want to go to college?"

"Maybe, but I probably would put my life on stage first and education would take a backseat once highschool's done."

"Okay, that's fine. Umm... Akiira!"

"I don't go to school. 20."

"I see. Cerulean?"

"I'm 16. Same as you. My grades generally range from As to Bs. And no, I don't plan on university for the time being."

"Sure, no problem. Darian?"

"17. I pass all my classes, but I'm not all that interested. I'd rather debut quick and not go to university."

"Okay, how about you, Areli?"

Areli jumps, surprised.

"Oh, um, I'm 18, same as Rion. I took the GED, so no need for me to go to school. But I can still go if you want that."

"No, no. You already graduated, so it's fine. Ezekiel?"

"19. No, I don't go to university. I might want to, but not now."

"Okay, got it. Sebastian?"

"I'm 20. No, no plans for further education. Not for now at least."

"Right, okay. Seth?"

"...17. Do I really have to go?"

"Well... You could take the GED? But I would like you to receive a highschool education. Anything after is your choice."

"Fine, whatever."

"Okay then... Our twins, Yin and Yang."

"My brother already graduated through online courses. We're both 18."

"I see. Thank you for telling me, Yang. Right, that settles everything. I never knew you were all the same age or older than me. Anyway... Cerulean, Darian, Seth, Clarion, and Yang are the ones that are going, yes?"

Everyone nods.

"Okay, great. Let's get going. The rest of you can just relax until we're back. You'll be starting next week."

- At the school

"Wait, are you sure you can just march right in, just like that?"

"Sure I can! Don't worry, the teachers love me. Valedictorian perks, I guess."

"You were valedictorian?"

"Mm- hmm. Oh! Mr. Miller!"

A tall man with dark hair walks over. He was my history teacher.

"... Asterina?"

"Yes?"

"Asterina! My, I nearly thought I was seeing things. Hello, my dear! What brings you here?"

"You said I could come visit anytime... Is that not valid anymore?"

"Of course not! I'm very happy to see you, Asta! I just wondered if you had a reason."

"Haha, I'm joking, I'm not offended. Anyway, I heard you were homeroom teacher for seniors?"

"That's right, why do you ask?"

"I thought I'd introduce some new students to you. This is Clarion, and this is Yin. By the way, guys. This school is pretty prestigious, so there's only one class per age group. Not many students are here."

"Hello, you two."

"Hi, nice to meet you."

"Hello. It's a pleasure."

"So, Mr. Miller. Please take good care of them, okay? Think of it as a personal request from me, as one of your former students. They're new, so help them get used to class and stuff like that."

"Of course. Anything for you, Asta."

"Bye~! Thank you!"

A short pause ensues.

"Wow... You really weren't lying."

"Well, yeah. Why would I? Oh! Ms. Smith?"

"Asta, darling! Hello!"

Well... We're just meeting teachers left and right today, aren't we? Whatever. It's good.

"Ms. Smith, are you in charge of 16 year olds this year?"

"Why, yes I am."

"Great! I want to introduce you to Cerulean. He's 16, and starting next week."

"Lovely. Nice to meet you."

"Likewise, Ms. Smith..?"

"Yes, that's my name. Well, I have to get going, but it was wonderful to see you again, Asta!"

"You too! Please take good care of Cerulean for me, Ms. Smith!"

I then turn to Cerulean.

"Something to note. She's really nice, but tends to be a bit flighty and doesn't realize if something wrong is going on or not. She's sort of... Dense at times. She doesn't mean anything, so don't pay much mind."

"Oh, okay."

Last one...

"Mr. Johnson!"

"Asterina, great to see you."

"Mr. Johnson, meet Darian and Seth. They're starting next week. Both are 17."

"I see. Nice to meet you. I'll be your homeroom teacher."

"Yes, please keep an eye on them until they get settled in for me, okay?"

"Sure, Asta. You can trust me."

"Of course! I know that. Well, goodbye!"

"Have a nice rest of your day, Asterina."

I meet a few more teachers and greet them, but ultimately leave after that.

"So... How was it?"

"I'm kind of nervous now..."

"Yang? Don't be!"

"You said it's super prestigious!"

"Come on, I'll help you if you happen to have any difficulty and find it hard to keep up! I was valedictorian!"

"Fine, I guess I'll see how it goes."

"Do I have to go here?"

"It's the closest school there is."

"Whatever."

"Seth... I..."

"Ignore him, he's always hated school."

"Anyway, how did you get in this school?"

"Me? Full ride scholarship. My dad didn't pay a penny. Saved him a lot, which is a relief, now that I look at it."

"I'm surprised he had a will."

"My dad made it when he got married to my mom. He then changed it after she left, leaving everything to me, and left it untouched since. Smart move, I guess."

"Yeah, that was clever of him."

"Anyway, let's go back. Do you need me to send you guys a map of how to get to the school?"

"Send it to me, I'll make sure everyone gets here on time, including myself."

"Thank you, Clarion. It's a 10 min walk from the agency to the school."

"Yeah, I know. It didn't take us long to follow you."

"Umm... Should I draw it up for you on paper, or..."

"No, just send it to me through messa- Oh. You don't have our contact info."

"Yeah... That's the problem..."

"Okay, give me your phone. And here. I'll give you my and everyone else's contact info. You save your number in my phone. And everyone. I'll send her number in our groupchat, so you better save it. I'll check your phones later just to make sure. Ah, come to think of it... I need to add you to the chatroom. I'll do that when we get back."

I can't help but giggle.

"Is something funny?"

"No, no. It's just... I thought this from the first time we met, but you're kind of like the dad of the group. The way you take charge and tell the others what to do reminded me of that again."

Clarion rolls his eyes.

"Well, someone has to be the responsible one. By rights, it should be one of the oldest like Akiira, but since he refuses to do so, the role has fallen to me. Honestly, the one I find most trustworthy out of everyone here is Cerulean, who's the youngest of our entire group."

"What about me?"

"I'm holding off on having an opinion about you for now, miss Asterina."

"Why can't you trust the others?"

"Yang, I trust to a certain degree, it's just that he seems lost without his brother. It's like half of him is missing. They're twins, but he should rely on him less. I find it hard to believe he'd do anything without his brother unless necessary. Darian is... Free spirited. He gets distracted easily. As for Seth, don't get me started on him, we'd be here all day. Cerulean is the best out of the lot. If I had to say something, I'm more worried about him than anything as he can be shy and withdrawn when it comes to people. Especially people he doesn't know yet. He's fine with you, thankfully."

"Oh, I'm relieved."

"He talks in your presence, which is more than I can say for many people. He talks to teachers, because of obligation. It's considered impolite to ignore them, so I commend him for that."

"Can you two quit talking about me like I'm not even here? I'm right next to you."

"Why, Cerulean, I was actually only doing this because you're here. You hate people talking about you behind your back."

"... Yeah, because I prefer it if people talk to me if they're curious about me. It doesn't matter if you refuse to acknowledge me even if I'm present."

"I see. Apologies, I'll be careful next time."

Cerulean goes quiet.

"... You're a jerk, Rion."

"I said I was sorry about that. Do you want me to apologize to you again?"

"... It's not that! You apologized so quickly! Now I can't be mad at you anymore! It makes me feel foolish for getting annoyed because you made it seem so simple."

"That wasn't my intention, Cerulean—"

"I know. You didn't mean anything but to express your remorse and your assurance that you'll be careful in the future. Forget it. I accept your apology. It's okay."

"Thank you, Ceru."

"And Rion! What's wrong with me?"

"Nothing, Seth. It's just that you don't like school. You've been complaining about it ever since Asterina announced it."

"Yeah, yeah. But school's dumb."

"It's not fun, I'm sure. Or, at the very least, you'd rather do something else. But it's not dumb, Seth. It's important."

"You probably don't want me lecturing you, but he's right. Around 75% of our top ranking idols were good students."

"Yeah, yeah. As I said, I'll see how it goes."

Honestly, I felt Clarion was being a bit harsh, but no one else seemed to care. Rather, they seemed close, calling him by his nickname Rion and all that. I guess he just has a sharp tongue or his natural way of speaking tends to be blunt and the o

thers got used to it eventually. It's not like he was really cruel to any of them. As I said, he was like a dad. Strict, but caring. Their relationship dynamic is so interesting. I'm so excited to see more. But I probably shouldn't say that. It's like I think of them as characters on a TV show. Like, imagine. Welcome to another episode of Liore Agency! Meet our colorful cast of characters and follow their journey to become idols! Available every weekend! Haha, but I would probably watch it, even if it's just for research with my job.

"Miss! If you don't come along, we'll leave you behind!"

"You guys don't even know the way!"

"So you better come quick before we get lost, right?"

I burst into laughter and run up to them.

"You're finally back."

"Did you wait long?"

"You know how boring it was? All of us are pretty chill, so Rion or Ceru being here make it fun. And Yang here was waiting for his little brother to come back."

"So that's why you always get on my nerves? Because us fighting is amusing?"

"You guys are such a chagrin. I swear to god, one day you'll be the death of me."

"Oh, come on. You know you love me, Rion. You're all talk and no action."

"Akiira. Do you want me to lose the last bit of respect I have for you, simply because of the fact that you have 2 more years of experience with life than I do?"

"Okay, everyone! Let's calm down! Clarion, I'd appreciate you getting started with the groupchat thing. As you all know, you can do whatever you'd like. Just let me know if you have any plans and won't be here so I don't get too worried, okay?"

Everyone nods and I go to my room. Oh wow. Only one day and I'm already exhausted. I can't believe it's only been one day. Well, 2 days, but I barely did anything the first day, so doesn't count. By the way... Yin and Yang have a... Unique relationship, to put it lightly. Yin is the "showy" twin. Always in the spotlight. Yang is the "quiet" one. That's no problem, but Yin does nothing but lip sync and dance. Yang is the one who does all the singing backstage. Why does Yang let Yin take all the credit? Even if they're twins, there's a limit to how close they can be...

- The next day

"Good morning, everyone~!"

"How do you have so much energy at... 8 in the morning?"

"This is the time you will have to get up everyday, especially since you go to school now, Seth! Clarion seems fine!"

"That's Rion, not me."

"Rion... Can I call him that too?"

"Don't ask me, ask him!"

"Haha, sorry. Take a seat. Do you want to eat anything? I'll make it for you."

"Since you're offering, waffles."

"Waffles?"

"Yeah. Is there a problem?"

"No, I just thought it strange you don't want any toppings."

"Well, I want toppings. Just wanted to check if it was possible."

"It's fine! So, what toppings do you want?"

"Syrup, whipped cream, chocolate."

"Maple syrup?"

"What else?"

"I like sweet things, so I have things like strawberry syrup and caramel syrup. I guess you want the classic. Anyway, coming right up!"

"Good morning."

"Cerulean!"

"Can I request something too?"

"Sure!"

"I want toast with avocado."

"Okay, gotcha."

I finish up making the batter for the waffles and pour it into the mini waffle maker I bought. I put the waffle on a plate and carry it over with some syrup, whipped cream, chocolate sauce and just plain chocolate as Seth didn't specify. I put 2 slices of bread in the toaster and cut up the avocado in advance. I spread the avocado over the toast once it's done, and put it on a red plate to contrast the green. Haha, plating is so fun. It's my favorite part of making food and the like.

"Here you go, both of you."

"Thank yo- Wow."

"What is it? Is anything wrong?"

"Miss Asterina... Wow, if I'm unmistaken, is supposed to have a fairly positive connotation, right?"

"Umm... If you say so?"

Cerulean pulls out his phone, types "Wow meaning" and reads out the definition.

"Wow: To express astonishment or admiration."

"Okay, I guess it has positive connotation."

"So why would there be anything wrong? I was just surprised it looked so nice."

"Really? Haha, I'm glad~! I love plating and decorating, so I'm happy to see my effort paid off. It may not affect the taste much, but I think food looking nice would give you more of an appetite."

"You're right. I don't know how the others feel of course, but I personally think presentation is at least 50% when it comes to judging how good food is."

"That's dumb! It doesn't matter! Taste is what's most important!"

"I never said my sentiment was everyone's. I even said I don't know about the others. If you don't agree, shut up."

"Guys, don't fight! And I made sure it tastes good too, I just enjoy plating!"

The rest come down a few minutes later. I cook the rest of them breakfast.

"So, everyone! Today I'll be evaluating your talent and get to know all of you better! I'll call your names one by one, so please come to my interview room when I call!"

"... Miss. Where is this interview room?"

"Oh, right! Sorry! Here we are!"

"This looks more like a comfortable sitting room rather than an interview room."

"Well... That's because it is. I just changed it into an interview room..."

"..."

"Anyway! Let's start with uhh... Akiira!"

"Sure."

"So... Akiira... You uhh... Sing, right?"

"Yeah? You heard me sing."

"Umm... So... What would you say are your strong and weak points?"

"I'm very skilled and my voice is very versatile."

"No, no. I meant personality wise."

"I'm confident? I hear that a lot. Uhh... What else... Oh, Rion tells me I'm immature and act without thinking."

"Okay... Who would you say you get along with the most out of the group?"

"Uhhh... Pretty much everyone. I fight a bit with Rion as you've probably already noticed, but it's playful."

... I'm not quite sure if it's playful on both ends, but... Sure, let's go with that.

"Okay! If you were to be in a group, who would you choose?"

"Anyone. I just need a dancer."

"Okay... Call in the next one..."

- Ezekiel's interview

"They what?! They called you a defect?! An inferior good?! Are they fckng insane?! Oh, they will pay. Now, listen up. I don't really care what you heard. Forget it all. I will make sure everyone knows your name if it's the last thing I do. I will make you climb back on top. The top spot in music and billboard charts will be your playground. Your songs will compete with one another to get the top spot. There's only one thing you need to do. You need to actually try hard. Nothing will happen if you think you're done for and don't try."

"Asteri- Oh..."

"She's not here, she had something to attend to and left me in charge. Anyway, what is it, Ceru?"

"Can I... Stay off from school?"

"Why?"

"I feel sick..."

"Oh, really? You seemed perfectly fine yesterday. Tell me, where does it hurt?"

"I... I feel a little nauseous..."

"Have you thrown up?"

"No..."

"Is the pain intense?"

"No..."

"Then you're going. You can call me if you throw up or if you feel worse. I'll come get you and walk you home."

"Rion, is there any need to be so cold?"

Clarion gently pulls Yang by the arm and whispers in his ear.

"That's because he's faking it. If he was really sick I would've let him stay home."

"How do you know he's faking it?"

"All the pauses and how he won't look me in the eyes. Ceru's a bad liar. And he's prideful, so if he was really sick, he wouldn't have told me and try to bear it. Honestly, thank god Asta isn't here today. She'd say of course you can stay home."

- A week later

Hmm? Is Cerulean still asleep? I go and gently wake him up.

"Cerulean?"

"Mmm?"

"It's not like you to oversleep. Wake up, it's nearly time for school."

"Umm... About school..."

"Yes?"

"It's nothing. Just... Ignore what I said..."

"Cerulean? You know you can talk to me if you want, right? If anything's wrong, ju

_"

"Nothing's wrong. Leave and let me get ready."

"I... Alright then. Just let me know if you want to talk."

Why is he so aggressive? He's usually so calm and collected... I stand in front of his door, wondering what's wrong