

ASK Me This

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BAD LUCK and ASK are to share the stage once more!

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Chapter 1 - Don't ASK	2
Chapter 2 - Child's Game, Adult's Pain	6
Chapter 3 - Cute as a Button, Sharp as a Pin	10
Chapter 4 - Music Makers and World Losers	14

1 - Don't ASK

ASK ME THIS

"I'm too scared to look," choked Shuichi, the paper in his hands trembling along with him.

Hiro sighed, knowing the contents already, though he had not actually looked upon it. "Come on Shuichi, hurry it up. We know we were voted in anyway."

"How do you know that?!"

"Because we're the most popular band in all of Japan," replied a frustrated Suguru, "naturally Bad Luck would be voted as NG Production's representatives. Use some common sense for a change, Shindo-san!"

Shuichi growled menacingly at Suguru Fujisaki. He then returned his focus to the slip of white paper in front of him. Closing his eyes, he slowly flipped the paper to the other side. Hiro, Suguru, K and Sakano loomed in to take a peek.

"Is it...bad?"

"We weren't picked," glumly announced Hiro.

Letting out a great anguished howl, the vocalist's amethyst eyes bugged out as he scrambled to see who could beat the most awesome band in Japan. "Hang on...this says..."

"Idiot." Hiro knocked his friend on the head. "I was kidding."

Embarrassed by his stupidity, Shuichi laughed out loud haughtily. "Of course I knew that! Ha! Ha! Ha! Bad Luck must now prepare for Music Smile's Appeal Special!"

Everyone ignored him, continuing on as normal. It'd been anticipated Bad Luck would be victorious in the race to see which band would represent NG Productions in Music Smile's annual appeal special to raise donations for the most publicised tragedy of the year. This year they'd decided to go with fans choosing a singer or band from each record label to build hype around the event.

"This should be a good opportunity to showcase our new single," mentioned Hiro, tightening the strings on his guitar. "Or...did you want to do some classic music?"

"It shouldn't matter too much," assured an unusually calm Sakano, "Bad Luck is only required to perform two songs. With other music acts involved the pressure is in this case. A pleasant change."

Excited, Shuichi raised a determined fist in the air. "The pressure isn't off – its intensified! Through the burning in our hearts we must make the best music EVER to encourage people to open their wallets for

a worthy cause!!!”

K nodded his approval, delighted to see his vocalist taking it seriously. Besides, there was no way he'd let anyone upstage Bad Luck. And if they attempted to...K patted the magnum at his side. Just let them try. “Good boy, Shuichi.”

~@~

Within the building of the second most successful recording company in Japan, Genexis, another band was discovering their good fortune.

“All right!” Yelled Ken-chan, racing through the halls. He leapt into the lounge room where his two fellow band members were reading magazines.

“What is it, Ken-chan?” asked Taki Aizawa, not bothering to lift his head from his reading.

“We did it!”

“Did what?” demanded Ma-kun.

Ken presented them with the piece of yellow paper the company president handed him earlier. The contents made the two men gasp in shock. They weren't expecting to be chosen to represent Genexis. While Genexis was almost as prestigious as their former employer, NG Productions, ASK didn't enjoy the lavished attention they received in their care, and were treated as just another band in the mix of talented acts.

Taki's eyes were lit with a fire he long thought had been extinguished, “This is just what we've been waiting for! This may be our ticket back into the spotlight – where we belong!” He looked up at Ken-chan, a wide grin bracing his features. “Do you know who else will be there?”

With a nod, Ken whistled to himself, digging into the pockets of his jeans. “Yeah, it's here somewhere...ok, here we go.”

He handed Taki the list of performers they'd be sharing the stage with. A lot of the names surprised him, others didn't. “I knew they'd be there.”

Ma-kun lowered his eyes. “Bad Luck.”

Bad Luck, their distant rival band from their days in NG. How Taki loathed the vocalist, Shuichi Shindo. He stole ASK's rightful place as NG's – no more than that - Japan's top act. Tohma Seguchi favoured Bad Luck over ASK, and in the end cancelled their contract after Taki had Shuichi raped, and threatened Eiri Yuki. Did he regret his sins against the men? Very much so; petty jealousy had gotten him nowhere and doomed his beloved friends. He lived with that guilt everyday. However...however that was no excuse for Bad Luck's popularity surpassing their's. All they needed was a chance to prove their worth; Taki was determined to make it up to Ma-kun and Ken-chan, nothing, not no one, was going to stand in his way!

~@~

“Look Kumagorou,” giggled Ryuko, presenting her stuffed bunny with a music magazine, “this says Bad Luck are gonna sing at a biiiig cool concert. All our entries worked Kumagorou!”

Yuki grumbled to himself as he fixed dinner. She’d made him buy at least twenty teen magazines a week for the past two months so she could cast her vote, and ran to the computer literally every hour so she could also vote online. It was terribly unhealthy and insane for a seven year old. He was just happy the whole stupid thing was over.

“It’s thanks to dedicated fans like you that Bad Luck were chosen,” dramatically thanked Shuichi, laying a hand on his daughter’s shoulder, “the love of our fans make us soar to new heights every day! Without our fans – we are NOTHING but sand without a beach!”

The novelist popped a vein. “Sand without a beach...?” he moaned to himself. Shuichi couldn’t even write when he wasn’t trying to write. “Shuichi, make yourself useful.”

“But you said I wasn’t allowed to cook anything ever, ever again!”

Yuki turned around, amber eyes glaring menacingly. “I meant: SHUT UP.”

Shuichi cringed in his chair. Yuki was so scary sometimes! Sexy...but scary. “Um...oh, I nearly forgot! This Saturday we have a rehearsal scheduled. Every chosen act will be this cool building. K-san says we’ll be given a room each so we won’t interfere with each other’s practice. He even says if we want we can bring you girls along for the day.”

Ryuko suckled Kumagorou’s ear with anticipation. “You mean...Hime-chan and Sara-chan will also be there?”

Shuichi nodded happily. “Well, as long as their parents let them. But it should be A-OK!”

“Just another excuse to slack off on the job, isn’t it?” accused Yuki, checking on the rice in the cooker. “Sakano-san actually agreed to let you do this?”

Huffing, Shuichi folded his arms; “I’ll have you know he agreed to baby-sit them when we’re busy practicing!”

“Sakano-san’s very loud,” noted the little girl, “and he’s always cold, he’s always shaking, huh, Kumagorou?”

Shuichi quietly patted her head, “No sweetie, he just has the jitters.”

“Oh.”

“I can only assume K held a gun to his head and forced this act of kindness on him,” surmised Yuki.

“Yeah...” sadly replied the defeated Shuichi, “Judy has to go to America for the weekend for some

interview, so he's bringing Michael along."

"This'll be fun!" Giggled the child.

Meanwhile, Yuki could smell something burning..."Damn it!"

2 - Child's Game, Adult's Pain

Brilliant rays of sunlight reflected off the glistening glass windows of the tall building. Michael Winchester closed one eye, blinded by the light as he stretched his neck up as far as he could to comprehend the size of it.

“Cool, huh, Mikey?” gleefully asked his father, removing his dark shades. “It was once a rundown television station until it was sold and transformed into a building for hire. Now it’s hired for movie and television sets, functions and in this case, ideally used for dozens of performers and their staff to work together without distracting anyone else.”

“Yeah, cool...I guess.” The thirteen year old sighed, folding his arms. “Was it necessary for me to come though? I wanted to play DDR with Benji-kun today.”

The two Americans made their way off the busy pavement and into the foyer where K showed their passes to the reception desk, and presented his magnum to security. Michael innocently smiled at the two large men, hoping they wouldn’t find his Glock 29 Sub-Compact he was given for his eleventh birthday. While he didn’t share the gun lust his parents did, he knew well how dangerous situations could get in his father’s company and how handy a concealed weapon could be.

As they wended through the corridors, passing swarms of artists, and workers, Michael couldn’t help but smile at the men and women who parted like the Red Sea in K’s stride. Not that he blamed yet, his father did have a tendency to shoot people who got in his way. He was relieved when they reached the room assigned to Bad Luck. It was located on the fifteenth floor, one of the more expensive sweets – obviously Tohma Seguchi had made sure his star band were well treated.

K opened the door to the blasting sound of a wail that reminded him of the time his mother kicked Ark in the crotch with her stilettos for purchasing the wrong shade of lipstick.

Pulling an irritated face, K pulled out his magnum and fired a shot into the air. The wailing ceased, as five-year-old Himeka Nakano had used the opportunity to steal her father’s guitar away from Ryuko Sakuma.

“You monster!” She yelled, hugging the guitar, “You were killing it!”

Ryuko pouted, “That’s not fair! No one else was complaining!”

This was because everyone else had died on the floor from her horrible twanging of the electric guitar. Michael slapped his forehead. “Oh, I get it now. You dragged me here to baby-sit the tiny tots. Damn it Dad, you could have warned me!”

K defensively shot out his hands, “Oh no.”

“Well good, in that case I’ll take my leave and return to blowing my allowance at the arcade like a

regular kid should be doing on the weekend.”

Michael went to exit the room when his father grabbed his jacket’s hood, pulling him close, grinning like a Cheshire cat. “Oh no, you won’t be babysitting them, you’ll be babysitting Sakano-san!”

“Come again?”

~@~

As Ma-kun and Ken-chan tuned and readied their instruments, Taki flipped through the schedule for the day their manager handed him earlier before leaving to discuss business concerning the release of their latest album. ASK enjoyed the flexibility their manager allowed them, especially as their vocalist preferred to pertain power to their destiny.

“There’ll be a meeting around midday,” he casually explained, “pretty standard. Executive producers from Music Smile will talk to us in groups about the concert procedures.”

Taki rolled up the booklet; lowering his head, blowing out a sigh, he wearily rested his head on his interlocked fingers. Ma-kun grimaced, unstrapping his guitar. He approached his friend warmly, rubbing his back. “Hey, chin up, Tachi. We can’t wow the public if our vocalist isn’t into it 100%.”

“You’re worried we’ll run into Bad Luck, aren’t you?” surmised Ken-chan. “Or...are you worried about Eiri Yuki coming to finish the job?”

“Ken-chan!” spat Ma-kun.

Taki lifted his head, “Both I suppose. But...but...what I fear more is if I see Shuichi Shindo that feeling of jealous rage will seep into me again and corrupt me to the monster I once was. I can handle seeing him in magazines, on TV and listening to him on the radio – but if I saw him in the flesh again...”

“Tachi, you’re sooo melodramatic!” Ken-chan laughed, tossing an empty beer can at his head, “You’re in a band, not a day time drama. Am I right, or what, Ma-kun?”

The light blonde guitarist joined his laughter. “Without a doubt! Come on pretty boy, let’s make some music!”

“Yeah, yeah. Just leave the face alone, Ken-chan.” Taki stepped on the can that had landed by his feet.

~@~

Suguru arrived late to the rehearsal. His three-year-old daughter Sara wept, clinging to her mother Umi’s jacket. Sara was a timid girl, she was always crying about something. Shuichi giggled, it reminded him of Suguru.

Suddenly a sharp blade flew at Shuichi’s head, piercing his tender brains. He keeled over, blood pouring before him to form a red puddle. Umi turned her nose up at the display. “As Bad Luck’s lawyer I advise you to cease slandering your band mates.” The malevolent, grinning woman felt one of the larger

knocks in her thick blue braid. “Or...do we want to meet Umi-chan’s special butcher knife again?”

Lifting his bleeding head from the floor, the vocalist dumbly pulled a smile. “Ay-ay, Lawyer-san!”

“You be a good girl today,” Umi warmly told Sara, stroking her tearful girl’s bright green hair, “you take good care of Sakano-san along with your little friends.”

Sakano raised an eyebrow, “Umi-san, what do you mean?”

Ignoring the baffled man, she went to give her daughter to her father when she realized Sara was clutching tighter than she imagined a three year old could. The girl was like a lizard! She had to incorporate Suguru and Hiro’s help to pull her from her jacket. As Sara was ripped from her mother, she took with her a large piece of the jacket’s fabric. Umi groaned. The little girl then clung to her father.

“I’m off to make some calls,” announced Umi, locking her arm around Yuki’s, and taking the cigarette from his mouth with the other. “Oh, and he’s buying me a drink.”

Yuki scowled at the nerve of the woman as she took a drag of his alpha menthol, “Now when did I say that?”

“I never claimed you did,” replied Umi, “right, Ayaka-chan?”

Ayaka took Yuki’s other arm, “You’re so kind, Eiri!”

“No I’m not! Leave me alone, both of you!” As he protested, the two women pulled him out of the room to leave Bad Luck to get to work.

~@~

In the corridor, Sakano wrung his hands, sweating profusely. He spun around to face the waiting children and attempted a smile. He’d never dealt with children before, though he wondered if Shindo-kun counted...it was his responsibility, as informed by K-san, to entertain the youngsters while Bad Luck discussed the upcoming concert and technical jargon of the day’s rehearsal.

“What would you children like to do?” he calmly asked, hoping they wouldn’t spy the fear in his eyes. He’d heard children could smell fear in adults.

“Kumagorou wants to listen to Bad Luck siiiiiing!” shouted out Ryuko, “and...he would like some chocolate!”

“I want ice-cream,” replied Himeka, “and my baby brother to be eaten by a bear.”

Sara clung to Sakano’s leg, cutting off the circulation, “I want...I want...my Papa! Waaaaahhhhhh!”

Trembling, the producer pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his moist brow. “I...I...I...uh...” He gulped, unsure what to do.

Michael slapped his right hand. The temptation was rife to shoot the jittery man out of his misery; he began to understand why Sakano-san required a baby-sitter. "Let's play a game to pass the time. Since it's a big place I say hide-and-seek."

The girls cheered in agreement, except Sara who was still howling for her father. Sakano was made the seeker, since hiding would be nearly impossible with Sara refusing to relinquish her kung-fu grip.

Himeka snuck behind a bin as Sakano counted down from twenty. Michael snuck into the empty room next-door, and wished he was elsewhere, kicking the score of his pompous friend. Sakano's countdown was almost up. Ryuko ran around the corridor like a headless chicken. Frazzled, she climbed into a metal box filled with cardboard packages. "He'll never find us in here, Kumagorou," she thought to herself, winking to her bunny.

~@~

Taki was in the middle of singing the second verse when there came a knock at the door. Ma-kun and Ken-chan turned off their instruments. Taki opened the door, and was handed a package from a deliveryman who explained the parcel held their passes and further information for the concert. He thanked him, and watched him trundle his carrier into the distance. Shrugging, Taki leaned against the frame of the door, carefully opening the parcel.

As his hand moved to close the door, a small force connected with him and threw him to his feet. "What the hell - ?!"

Taki groaned, raising his head, coming face to face with two emerald eyes concealed under thick chestnut hair.

"A kid...?"

3 - Cute as a Button, Sharp as a Pin

“I lllloooooosstttt Rrrryyyuuuukkkkooooo,” stammered Sakano, cowering into a corridor corner, Sara Fujisaki still clinging for dear life to his leg.

Michael fought the urge to shoot the foolish man, “She couldn’t have gotten far. Ryu-chan probably wandered into one of the other bands’ rooms.”

Young Himeka folded her arms, displeased, “You’re very irresponsible Sakano-san.” She felt proud for knowing such a big word. “My grandpa fires people like you. Could you baby-sit my brother and lose him too?”

Sakano-san snivelled pathetically

~@~

A Bad Luck ball cap; A Bad Luck backpack; A Bad Luck t-shirt...

“I’m guessing you’re a fan of Bad Luck,” chirped Ken-chan, smiling at the silent child who stood a good distance away from the three men of ASK. Perhaps she was mute.

“I’ll call security,” declared Taki Aizawa, going for the room’s phone, “they can deal with her.”

Ken-chan’s eyes widened, racing to stop him from making the call, “But they’ll keep her locked up till they find out where she came from; She’ll be scared and alone!”

“But there’s no other way we can handle this,” Ma-kun told him, “We don’t even know the kid’s name.”

The three musicians faced the uneasy child. Ken-chan slipped off his cool shades, and bent to the girl’s level. He smiled, tilting his head slightly up in hopes of seeing her face more clearly between her locks of hair and the shadows caused by the cap. “Can you talk?”

Nervously, she wrung her sweaty hands, slowly nodding.

“Then why don’t you say hello? My name’s – “

“Ken Komatsu,” she softly finished.

Ken-chan gasped, falling over. “Wah?!”

“The keyboardist for ASK,” she finished and then continued with, “and that is Taki Aizawa, vocalist, and the other man is Mayuhiko Nobi, the guitarist for ASK. You have so far released three albums and are currently in production of your fourth. ASK is signed to Genexis, whose sales often coincide with NG

Productions, however Genexis is yet to measure up and always falls short. You were once signed to NG with a promising future, though due to undisclosed reasons by president, Tohma Seguchi, your contract was cancelled. Now you're lost in a sea of uncertainty, wondering if you'll ever make the sales you were predicted to reach."

Ma-kun and Ken-chan stared in perplexed awe at the articulation of the little girl, who moments ago hadn't peeped a word. Now she was summing up their career with clear precision! Taki however wasn't in awe; furious at the nerve of the girl, in his haste he grabbed a nearby chair and was readying to beat the brat with it. "Why you little...!"

His band mates jumped on him before he could get to the girl. "Tachi, calm down!"

The girl drew back, smiling cutely. "Um...was I wrong?"

~@~

Michael Winchester massaged his forehead. Ryuko Sakuma was nowhere to be found; Sakano-san's wails had grown louder; Himeka Nakano wouldn't shut up as she attempted to use as many adult words as possible; and worse still, Sara Fujisaki was no longer clinging to Michael's back, her awesome grip threatening to break his spine.

"Sakano-san, wouldn't it just be easier to tell everyone we lost Ryuko; what are you so afraid of?"

"Those irritating doges," grumbled an approaching cranky monotone voice, "making me pay for their fracking drinks..."

Sakano-san started up, "Yuki-san!"

Eiri choked, noticing the children, "Oh, sorry...you didn't just hear that, did you...?"

Himeka proudly smiled, "I know what a dog is!"

"OK, you did," he sighed, mentally kicking himself, "try to erase that from your memory."

"Erase what?"

"Good girl," Eiri stared at the group, someone was missing, he frowned, "Sakano-san, where's my daughter?"

Sakano gulped, twiddling his thumbs, considering all the nasty, violent things Eiri Yuki would do to him if he discovered he'd lost his only child while in a simple game of hide-and-seek. Trembling, he wiped his sweaty brow. "Wwwweeeelll...Yuuuukkiii-sssaannnn yyyooouuu seeee..."

"We're playing hide-and-seek," explained Michael in a casual manner, "Ryu-chan's the last person to find, she's really good at this game."

Eiri looked at the calm boy, then to Sakano. Something seemed up with the latter, but then again, he

always was a nervous fellow. "OK. See you later." Eiri walked passed them, accepting Michael's explanation, which wasn't exactly a lie.

Michael turned to Bad Luck's jittery producer, "You make a convincing argument, Sakano-san. OK troops, we have a tiny tot to track down. Forward – MARCH!" Sara clung tighter to his back, Michael gasped for air.

~@~

Taki sat opposite the well-informed child, who was eating a packet of crisps. Every now and then she looked up from her munching to face his deep rose eyes with her gypsy-like emerald eyes. For someone as young as her, possibly five to seven years, she had great knowledge of not only their band, but most other people in the music scene. She expressed her knowledge like a young scholar giving a lecture. Taki was certain her father or mother had to have been a music executive or important manager.

"Nope," she innocently replied, finishing the packet, sucking the flavouring from her fingers, "I like to read."

"...You like to read?"

She nodded giddily, reminding him this was a kid, not some special scholar. "I read lots of music magazines; Papa says little girls shouldn't read them, but I do! They're fun and have neat pictures – lots of Bad Luck too! Do you like reading them, mister?"

Taki blinked, leaning back, "Well...sometimes...usually if I'm in them."

"You're not in as many as Bad Luck."

Taki folded his arms, clearing his throat, "Well...it is only a matter of time..."

"Not according to Bop Peat magazine, they say your last album was bad."

Taki looked over at Ma-kun and Ken-chan, glaring, as if to say, "See, hitting the brat with that chair WAS a good idea!"

Ken-chan sat beside the girl, patting her head. "Now that we're all friends, how about you tell us your name?"

The girl pulled a face, staring away, "Papa says not to give my name to strangers."

"But we're not strangers now," Ma-kun kindly offered.

"Yes you are, I'm not falling for that."

All three men frowned at her; even Ken-chan was ticked by her impertinence. "OK then...what can we call you?"

The young Bad Luck fan looked left, and then right as she hummed to herself, trying to think of a name. “My parents call me Ojou-chan sometimes.”

“Ojou-chan it is!” laughed Ken-chan.

Taki sourly folded his arms, she didn’t seem like any lady to him. Ladies usually knew how to show respect to their elders. “Now...Ojou-chan, can you tell us where you came from so we can take you back to your parents?”

Ojou-chan smiled widely, “Oh, can you take me to Bad Luck?”

“I’m not playing here,” Taki scowled, “where did you come from?”

“Bad Luck...”

“OK then, if you’re going to be that way you can sit there while we rehearse and when you’re ready to behave you tell us where you came from – or I’m calling security.”

Ryuko, or Ojou-chan as they referred to her as, sank low in her seat. “But...what about Bad Luck?”

They weren’t listening, not even Ken-chan. They were too busy preparing their equipment for another round of practice.

4 - Music Makers and World Losers

William Congreve once wrote, "We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of the dream. Wandering by lone sea breakers, and sitting by desolate streams. World losers and world forsakers, for whom the pale moon gleams. Yet we are movers and the shakers of the world forever it seems."

As a studious teenaged boy it was Taki's favourite quote. It brought him comfort at his loneliest hours. As a keen studier, and admittedly a "nerd" he found it hard to keep friends, in fact as a loner he was subjected to teasing, often painful beatings, by packs of testosterone driven bullies. He assumed this was how life was meant to be, till he met Mayuhiko Nobi. If Taki Aizawa was the geekiest student at their school, then Mayuhiko Nobi was the most notably the coolest. Sure he'd seen him "around", but until they were stuck cleaning their classroom together he'd never actually spoken to him.

Mayuhiko detested his name; it wasn't sharp and made the wrong statement. So everyone called him Ma-kun.

Ma-kun was never involved in any harassment towards Taki, however the fear was prevalent that he'd try something. He practically cowered in the corner of the room, slowly wiping the last window, just praying he'd go away.

"You know, if you keep that up you're going to wipe a hole through the window."

Taki blinked, peering over his shoulder. His heart leapt into his mouth from cold fear as the platinum blonde older boy stood right behind him. "Uh...uh..."

He smiled, trying not to laugh as the scared nerd. "Now, not replying is very impolite, Tachi." Ma-kun lifted a hand to Taki's face. Taki swerved his head back, expecting to be hit. Instead, his glasses were lifted from his face.

He leaned closer, surveying Taki's looks. "Apart from those bruises, you're not a bad looker at all. With some work I bet you'd drive the ladies wild."

"What...are you talking about?" Quietly asked Taki, unsure of the character of this Ma-kun guy. He was being nice; it must've been some sort of sick set up. "Please, leave me alone."

Ma-kun shrugged, slipping Taki Aizawa's glasses onto the bridge of the owner's nose. "And you wonder why you don't have any friends?" Bored, the boy turned around and started back to the far desks.

"I don't have friends because of people like you!" Taki spat out, inching back immediately, wishing he'd just gone back to his cleaning.

Ma-kun turned back, lifting his eyebrow, "Is that so?"

He had nothing to lose, either way he knew he was going to get beaten again; If not by Mayuhiko Nobi, then by some other goon like him. "You think you're so cool, with your fast cars, slut women and trashy parties. Just because you travel in large packs and harass innocent teachers you think you have every right to make the lives of anyone different hell! You people have no soul, no individuality, no integrity, no....ggrrr!" Furious, frustrated, Taki slammed a fist to the window. He was just so tired of it all.

"That poor kid," Ma-kun thought to himself.

Taki fell to his knees, sobbing like a primary school child. His hands cradled his head as he shed tear after tear. Why couldn't he fit in? Why did only teachers like him? Why was singled out to be beaten and made fun of? He never did anything to anyone!

Ma-kun lit up a cigarette; he could tell Tachi really needed this release, as pathetic a display as it was. He watched the poor kid suffer every day by the same people he called friends. Good people who do stand by doing nothing are generally the worst, as he reminded himself. Tachi had a backbone, but lacked the confidence to fully acknowledge it. The key to attracting the right attention is confidence, simple as that.

Puffing smoke from grinning lips Ma-kun couldn't help but whisper, "project."

Finishing his cigarette, he made his over to Taki, who was now a lifeless doll. Ruffling his dark locks, he helped him to his feet.

"You wanna hang at my place after school?" Ma-kun casually offered, "I have the latest Nittle Grasper album. They're a pretty cool band, ever listen to them?"

Taki's eyes wandered up to meet his. He nodded. "Is this some sort of trick?"

Ma-kun heartily laughed, slapping his back, "Tachi-chan, you're such a paranoid guy! Ha-ha!"

From that day on the two were inseparable friends. Through Ma-kun's unwavering friendship, and protection, Taki gained the confidence and people skills he so desperately yearned for. Fitting in became his priority. He vowed to never allow another person to bully him again.

"We are movers and the shakers of the world forever it seems."

"Huh?" Taki's thoughts broke, interrupted by the voice of Ojou-chan, their irritating visitor.

"I heard you say it, sir," she replied, biting hungrily into a sandwich Ken-chan had picked up for her. The girl sure did love to eat. "We are the music makers, and we are the dreamers of the dream. Wandering by lone sea breakers, and sitting by desolate streams. World losers and world forsakers, for whom the pale moon gleams. Yet we are movers and the shakers of the world forever it seems."

"Oh...it's by William Congreve, it's nothing."

"What does it mean?" She asked, taking another bite, watching and waiting. It turned out while she did have some extraordinary smarts, she was mostly a parrot, echoing things her Papa had said, and

reciting parts of articles she'd read.

Taki didn't feel like giving her a literacy lecture so he told her to get her Papa to explain it to her, he seemed like an all-knowing guy. She never shut up about the guy.

Ojou-chan finished her sandwich. She was still hungry. "Mr. Aizawa..."

"You've already eaten a 6 packets of chips, drank 4 litres of coke, ate an apple pie, scoffed a bad of marshmallows and just had a sandwich, I think you've had ENOUGH. Don't your parents feed you?!"

Ojou-chan cocked her head, "My Daddy eats lots and I heard my Father ate lots too, so I eat lots like them. Is that bad?"

Taki, Ma-kun and Ken-chan gave each other confused looks. Did this mean she had...three fathers?

Ma-kun despairingly shook his head, how unfortunate for the girl. Her mother must either be some sort of tramp, or have the worst luck with marriages.

"I don't have a Mama anymore," she simply told them, "hey, when can you take me to Bad Luck?"

Their attention instantly seeped away from the child. Ryuko huffed, sitting back on a chair angrily. Her eyes met with a bag of popcorn on the opposite seat. "Yummy, caramel covered!"

~@~

"Right, left, right left, right, left!" Sang Himeka, leading the small searching and rescue team.

Michael sighed, "It's left, right, not right left."

"Oh, whatever," she jeered, continuing on with her marching song.

Sakano-san and Michael were glad to see little Sara walking on her own, especially as they weren't sure their bodies could survive much more of her torment. Still...they were subjected to her crying shifts, begging for her parents. If they weren't careful, security may think she's some abducted child!

"I suppose this comes from Fujisaki-kun and Umi-san being too overprotective of Sara-chan," Sakano-san thought aloud, reaching the ear of Michael Winchester.

Michael looked over to him, "I wonder what Mr. And Mrs Nakano did to create that little monster, Himeka."

Himeka abruptly halted, pivoting to look up at the insubordinate member of the team, "Calling your senior officer a name is naughty and punishable! It said on TV!"

"Oh, boo hoo. What's a little brat like you gonna do anyway?" Laughed Michael. A swift kick came to his right shin, man it was painful! Angered, he descended on the dark auburn haired girl, "You little shoot!"

Himeka shrieked, racing away. Michael gave chase. Sakano-san and Sara desperately followed, begging them to stop.

Himeka ducked and swerved in-between music stars and staff idly standing in the corridors. They were soon pummelled by a young America with blazing, vengeful eyes; a panic-stricken businessman in glasses; and a young girl screaming her lungs out, frantically reaching her tiny arms out to grab the businessman's jacket.

The five year old made her way amid the chaos of that floor's lobby, satisfied Michael Winchester wouldn't dare hurt her with so many witnesses.

She was wrong.

Michael brought his chase to a close, standing in view of Miss Nakano, who defiantly poked a tongue at him. Smirking, he reached into his jacket; Himeka's deep blue eyes widened. Without a care for spectators, he brandished his Glock 29 Sub-Compact, aiming it at arm's length at the young girl.

Everyone stopped and stared. Silence fell upon the lobby as they waited to see what the foreign boy would do. Security ran into the room, fresh from their lunchbreak to find the distressing scene.

"Don't try anything rash, kid!" called one, reaching for his gun.

Himeka gulped, hoping one of them would take out the insane Winchester.

Michael politely smiled to the audience, "It's Ok, my mother's Judy Winchester."

"Judy Winchester?!" The crowd giggled with glee. Moving in, the coy security guards asked the boy for his mother's autograph; Himeka sighed, grown-ups were so stupid.

Putting his gun away he stood and took questions and addresses from the same people who were cautious of him seconds ago. It paid to be a Hollywood kid - you couldn't do any wrong!

~@~

Taki flipped through a random music idol magazine he'd picked up earlier that day. The main article was on Music Smile's concert and the stars that would be performing. ASK had a fair amount of coverage, however it was bittersweet, for he knew this decent coverage would not be, if not for their being signed to Japan's second most prosperous label.

Did the media, nay, Japan really not care about ASK?

"Why bother?" He would sit and wonder. They weren't the up and comers they once were, and record sales, while not bad, were also not all that great.

His eyes lay upon the four-page spread Bad Luck received. After several years in the spotlight their popularity had no wavered. No. They attained a goal that every idol aspires to – they were Godlike.

Never before Nittle Grasper had a band impacted the hearts and imaginations like those three men. Their pull was unquestionable.

But they never appeared untouchable. They were always noted as down-to-earth, funny and human. Though their schedules were hectic, lives crazy; they were often candid in interviews about how they stayed sane thanks to their families. These weren't hardcore partygoers, shagging whatever slut groupie came along, trashing hotels and doing dugs – they were honest family men who had a network of family and friends supporting them.

And damn did they make quality music!

“Bah, they're only popular because Ryuichi Sakuma's dead!” sneered Taki, tossing the magazine to the ground.

Ojou-chan giddily pounced on the half-open magazine, “Oooh, Bad Luck!”

Taki's pull was always so shallow, based on a persona created by an insecure geek. He knew it, oh god how he knew that fact. He'd forsaken his studies to pursue popularity. Taki Aizawa lost his soul long ago. His life revolved around that fear of persecution, he would never be bullied again he repeatedly told himself.

Get them before they get you!

Just as he felt on top of the world, safe and secure, that little pink haired punk just had to waltz in out of nowhere! What right did he have to take away what he'd worked so hard to achieve, what his two only real friends had worked so hard to achieve? He wouldn't lose that world, shallow, but safe, to an idiot who didn't know what suffering and sacrifice was!

“Mr. Aizawa?”

Taki caught his breath. His shirt clung effortlessly to cold, moist skin. “What...what is it?”

“You make cool music,” Ojou-chan told him, flipping through the magazine, admiring the pretty, glossy pictures. She looked up at him, smiling.

Taki lowered his eyes, “Thanks, kid...”

Ryuko walked away, setting herself down on the edge of the stage to read a comic with Ken-chan.

We may forsake the world, but we are the ones who create it. That's right, Taki was a loser, but, as he stared at Ken-chan and Ma-kun joking together, he remembered, he was also a mover and a shaker. ASK would finally take their place in the spotlight.