

# Spring Symphony



## Spring Symphony

Coffee's a regular girl. She gets good marks at school, spends as much time looking at pretty clothes as we all did at her age... And she has a ridiculously hard time talking to people. So, when Daisy and Clover, two comparatively loud and free-spirited girls practically crash-land into her life, and she's quickly inducted into the newly formed "Spring Symphony", a community for people who are into all types of alternative fashion, she's barely given a moment to catch her breath. When she is, though, she quickly begins to question facets of herself that she had never thought about beforehand, and is swept up in a romance that's all at once terrifying *and* wonderfully freeing.

While *Spring Symphony* is a generally lighthearted story, it contains a few instances of swearing, and characters are occasionally verbally harassed for their ways of identifying and dressing. Viewer discretion is advised.

## Glossary

Spring Symphony contains a few references to Japanese fashion and pop culture, so if you're not familiar with it, this story might be a bit confusing. Don't worry, though! Here's a list of all of that stuff and what it means.

Angelic Pretty (Often shortened to "A.P.")

Hands-down the most popular lolita fashion brand.

Baby, The Stars Shine Bright (Often shortened to "Baby," or "BTSSB")

Another popular lolita brand. It's well-known for featuring heavily in the 2004 comedy *Kamikaze Girls*, which happens to be my favourite movie.

JSK

Stands for "jumper skirt dress". It's a well-known term in the EGL (elegant gothic lolita) community, though I went a long time not knowing what it meant.

Sonic Coaster Pop (Often shortened to "SOCOPO")

One of my favourite Shibuya-kei projects. SOCOPO had a light, synth-y sound and an unwavering optimism for the future.

FRUiTS

A super popular underground fashion magazine in Japan, beginning in June of 1997 and ceasing publication in February of 2017. Having been around for so long, it's equally useful as a way of pinpointing trends in J-fashion as it is just... Really fun to flip through!

MILK

Known as one of if not the first lolita fashion brands, MILK started in the 1970's and stayed strong all throughout the 90's when lolita fashion was getting more and more popular in Japan.

Pusheen

If you're reading this book, then you probably know who this is.

Sanrio

Again, you probably know what Sanrio is. The most popular "character company" by a long shot.

Serani Poji

Serani Poji was first the name of a fictional singer in the Sega Dreamcast game *Roommania #203*, and their music was featured in the game's soundtrack, but then they split off to make more music, leaving the game to be forgotten.

CAPSULE

A very popular Japanese electronica band who have been making music for quite a while! I've only listened to their older albums, but they're really inventive.

Melting Holidays

Melting Holidays, a rather obscure retro-pop band from the early-to-mid 00's, are my second-favourite band, and they have a cutesy sound with lots of fun samples.

### Pitcher56

A very chill Shibuya-kei band. Listening to them reminds me of calm Summer days by the beach!

### EeL

Yet another Shibuya-Kei band. I don't know all that much about them, but the songs I've heard from them were cool!

### Yuri manga

Japanese lesbian romance comics.

### Chakra

A weird new-wave band from the 80's, most well known for having Mishio Ogawa as its vocalist. They have a really fun sound, and did some pretty experimental stuff with their music.

### Jun Togawa/YAPOOS

Jun Togawa is a very popular Japanese singer who has also been making music for a very long time, known for working strange and inventive concepts into her songs. You've definitely heard "Suki Suki Daisuki", and a lot of her music has similarly twisted lyrics. Her work with YAPOOS is similar, though has far darker lyrics.

### Kidorikko

My favourite band! Kidorikko had a bright and bouncy synth sound and childish lyrics, but their songs are constantly weighed down by a feeling that's just a little off. A criminally underrated band, I truly suggest you check them out.

### Super Tempo

The third instalment in the really obscure Tempo series, Super Tempo was released for the Sega Saturn only in Japan, and is a music-themed (but not rhythm-based) 2D platformer about a very cute grasshopper boy called Tempo.

### Spoochy

Yet another really obscure band. Not much is known about them, except that they may have shared a vocalist with MacDonald Duck Eclair.

## DAY 1: ANGELS



It's a warm day during spring. The scent of pollen floats in through classroom windows, and the soft whirr of air conditioning is barely audible over the sound of friendly chatter between students.

Two girls are sitting together, their desks having been pushed together. One girl, Clover, has dark brown hair, and the other one, Daisy, has blonde hair. They both have lunch boxes full of colourful fruit and vegetables, rice balls, and a few small, triangular cucumber sandwiches.

"Thanks for teaching me how to make my lunch just like yours!" Daisy says, "It's *super* yummy, and way more healthy!"

"No problem!" Clover says.

"Would you like to go into town this afternoon?" Daisy asks. "I've got a bit of money to spend after visiting my grandparents! I can probably get you something."

"That would be nice, but I also have some extra money to spend." Clover says, "What stores were you thinking about visiting?"

"I want a new dress!" Daisy says, "I think there's a new store on the main street that sells nice dresses."

"What about sweets?" Clover asks.

"I think I'll try to cut back on sweets for now. I've spent a bit too much money on them recently..." Daisy says.

After school, Clover and Daisy make their way into town. Clover's wearing a light green cardigan and a yellow, embroidered skirt, and Daisy is wearing a blue-and-white striped dress.

"Oh, it's that one, right?" Clover says, pointing at a store with red-brick walls and white, lacy curtains in the windows. Daisy nods.

A chime sounds as the girls enter the store. It's a bit too warm, with a small fireplace in one corner, but neither of them mind too much. There are pastel-coloured dresses covered in lace and ribbons hung up on the white-painted walls.

Daisy's eyes light up as she rushes over to a rack of dresses.

"This place is great!" She says, "It's all second-hand *'A.P.'* and *'Baby,'*! It's marked down a ridiculous amount, too! Ahh!"

"You sure do know a lot about this stuff!" Clover says.

"Yeah, sometimes I just look up pictures of pretty dresses on the internet because it makes me happy to look at them." Daisy laughs, holding up a light green dress. "But I also spend a lot of time researching."

"Come to think of it, I wish you were as dedicated to your homework as you are to these dresses." Clover says.

Daisy laughs.

"We both know that's never going to happen!"

Afterwards, the two walk down the street, with Daisy holding a large, bright-pink bag.

"What did you get, again?" Clover asks.

"I got a full dress, a JSK, and my first parasol!" Daisy exclaims. She reaches into her bag, pulling out her new parasol and opening it up. She twirls it around, before resting it on her shoulder.

"I'm glad *I* got a parasol, too." Clover says, "But I think they're addictive, because I really want another one."

"Same!" Daisy says.

"Anyway, do you want to get some afternoon tea?" Clover asks. Daisy nods eagerly.

They enter a small bakery and cafe, "Apple Pie Cafe", and purchase some cupcakes and macarons. They choose a spot outside; it has a view of a large statue of a rather pretty lady. The girls sit at a white-painted iron table with matching chairs.

"I've never been here before, but it's so cute! I'll definitely come here again." Daisy says.

"I've been considering getting a part-time job here." Clover says, taking a sip of her tea, "Come to think of it, though, I've never been too great at serving people."

"Don't worry about it! If you just smile and give them the right stuff, the customers will adore you!" Daisy says, "Take it from me; you smile a lot around me, and *I* adore you, Clover!"

"Uh... Thank you?" Clover says.

As the two talk, a girl sits at a table near them. She has short, brown hair and dark eyes, and she's wearing a black jacket and a white t-shirt with a graphic of a cute cartoon character.

"Do you know who she is?" Daisy asks quietly.

"She's in some of my classes. I don't remember her name, though." Clover whispers.

"She's pretty." Daisy whispers. Clover nods.

The girl notices them looking at her, and waves nervously at them.

"Hey there!" Daisy says, waving back. "What's your name?"

"C- Coffee." The girl says.

"Well, hi Coffee!" Daisy says.

Coffee nods, going back to eating her chocolate muffin.

"Can we visit the sweets store anyway?" Clover asks, "I want to pick up some sweets for my little cousin. He's been in hospital a lot recently, so I think he'd appreciate a little treat."

"Sure!" Daisy says, "You're such a nice person, Clover."

"Ah, well, thank you. I try my hardest." Clover says.

As Clover and Daisy look around the sweets store, Daisy asks,

"Can I come over to your house during the holidays?"

"You can come over whenever you please!" Clover says, "Well, just make sure to call me beforehand."

"Ah, I forgot." Daisy laughs.

Clover pays for the sweets she's picked out, placing them in her pink school bag.

"Have to remember to take these out of here before tomorrow!" She says.

They exit the store, listening to angel-themed windchimes creating magical melodies in the wind.

"What are you planning to do on the weekend?" Daisy asks.

"Well, I want to go to the movies to watch *Wonder Android Q*, but I don't think my parents will let me." Clover explains, "Maybe they think I have a *boyfriend* that I'm secretly going on dates with!"

She laughs.

"Do you *want* a boyfriend?" Daisy asks.

"No! They're way too different to us." Clover says.

"You don't feel weird when you talk to boys, or have a strange feeling when they're sitting next to you?" Daisy says.

"No...?" Clover says, "Is that normal? Do *you*?"

"I don't. It's just what the girls in my English class say." Daisy explains, "They always write poems about boys that they like, and giggle as they talk about their crushes. What's the point?"

"Who knows. Maybe they just don't have anything else to be happy about!" Clover laughs.

## DAY 2: BLUEBERRY



Two days later, on Sunday, the girls walk down the street together again.

"I'm so glad they let me see *Wonder Android Q* yesterday!" Clover says, "It was really good, but the theatre was almost empty. Hey, it made me feel comfortable enough to laugh out loud at the funny parts."

"Do you think they'll produce a DVD of it?" Daisy asks.

"Yeah, definitely! The people who made it have released DVDs of almost all of their films, so I'll have to get it whenever it's available." Clover explains.

"I see." Daisy nods.

Daisy and Clover spot Coffee standing outside of a sushi restaurant. She's wearing a black hoodie, black tights, and big, black boots. She's pacing back and forth, fidgeting.

"Hey there!" Daisy says, running over to Coffee.

"Hello..." Coffee says quietly. She looks down at the ground, her hair falling in front of her face.

"Oh! My auntie runs this restaurant!" Daisy says, looking up at the red and white sign overhead.

"Would you like to have lunch with us, Coffee?" Clover asks.

Coffee nods, a small smile creeping across her face.

The three of them serve themselves, and sit at a table by the window.

"So, why are you in town today?" Clover asks Coffee, pulling apart her chopsticks.

"Running errands," Coffee says, "But I... I like wandering around and window shopping."

"Have you visited Apple Pie Cafe?" Daisy asks, rocking from side to side on her chair.

"Not yet, though it looks nice." Coffee says.

"Which do you prefer: *Angelic Pretty* or *Baby, The Stars Shine Bright*?"

"*Baby, The Stars Shine Bright*, of course."



“Who’s your favourite band?”

“Sonic Coaster Pop.”

“Seen any good movies recently?”

“Well, I saved up my money, and went to see *Wonder Android Q* yesterday.” Coffee says, “I thought it was pretty cool.”

“Wait, which time slot?” Clover asks.

“Three o’clock.” Coffee says, “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, wow! We were in the same theatre at the same time!” Clover exclaims.

“Hmm... The theatre was really empty. Were you sitting at the back?” Coffee asks, “I was at the front.”

“Yeah, yeah! I think I saw you.” Clover says. “Sorry I was laughing so much! You didn’t mind, right?”

“Oh, man... I wish I had gone.” Daisy says. She takes a sip from her bottle of ramune.

“You needed to do your homework! That’s important!” Clover insists. “I’ll buy you the DVD when it comes out, and then we can all watch it together, okay?”

“Could I, too...?” Coffee asks.

“Of course!” Clover says.

The three of them visit an accessories store and end up with multiple bags full of glittery hair clips, ribbons, lace wrist cuffs, and cute phone charms. The second they step out of the store, they all laugh.

“Hey, at least they aren’t expensive!” Clover says.

“My phone’s going to be super heavy when I attach all of these charms!” Daisy giggles.

“It’s the price you have to pay.” Clover grins.

“Thank you for buying these for me...” Coffee says, holding up a pair of pink hair bows and smiling.

“No problem! I would have been happy to buy you something else, though.” Clover says.

“No, I’m happy with just these.” Coffee says. “I... I don’t own a lot of clothes that I actually like. My parents are adamant about me not standing out too much. It’s something to do with their reputation. So... I can’t wear cute things.”

“Oh, that’s awful!” Daisy exclaims, wrapping her arms around Coffee.

Coffee blushes.

“But thank you for letting me get these bows. I’ll have to keep them hidden somewhere.” Coffee explains.

“No problem!” Clover says, giving her a thumbs-up.

Clover and Daisy exchange numbers with Coffee before heading home.

DAY 3: CARAMEL



It's the next day. Clover is getting ready to head out, and decides to call Coffee.

"Hey, Coffee!" Clover says while on the phone with her.

"Good morning." Coffee replies. "Are you getting ready for school?"

"Yeah. I'm nearly ready, though, and I tend to have a lot of free time before I have to leave." Clover explains.

"I see. Though, why are you calling me?" Coffee asks.

"I noticed that you actually recognised what *Angelic Pretty* and *Baby, The Stars Shine Bright* were yesterday." Clover says.

"And...?"

"I figured us three could go on a fashion walk this afternoon!" Clover suggests.

"But I told you that I didn't own anything cute..." Coffee says.

"I know," Clover says, "But Daisy would definitely be alright with letting you borrow some of her stuff. She's got dresses in all sorts of sizes because she buys everything second-hand. And very hastily."

"Ah, I see." Coffee says, "But what if someone recognises me and tells my parents?"

"Relax, we won't be out for too long." Clover explains, "I'll sort something out with Daisy and keep you updated."

"Okay." Coffee says, "Good-bye, then?"

"Yep. See ya!"

In the afternoon, as Daisy and Clover pack up their things at school, Clover discusses the plan with her.

"Yeah, that sounds alright!" Daisy says, "I'm always down for an impromptu fashion walk."

"I thought so." Clover says, putting her hands on her hips, "That's why I've allowed a full hour for us to get ready."

“Ah, Clover, always thinking ahead!” Daisy says, “Can we stop at a cafe or something afterwards? I love stopping at cafes in my outfits because it’s fun to see how people react!”

“Well, Coffee’s worried about someone recognising her, so we’ll have to be quick.” Clover explains, “Maybe we could get some shortcake to go?”

“I have a friend who works at Dear Deer Bakery, so she might give us a discount!” Daisy says hopefully, “And that place has paper plates, so it could definitely work.”

“Okay, sure.” Clover says.

They meet up with Coffee and all walk over to Daisy’s house, meeting in her room.

Daisy’s room is cramped but comfortable, and *pure* kitsch. Colourful vintage toys, figurines and vintage dolls sit on shelves, and an overwhelming amount of plushies cover her entire bed, which is separated from the rest of the room with a long, orange-and-red beaded curtain. Her large, walk-in closet is full to bursting with frilly pink dresses, shiny, pristine platform shoes, bags, and much, *much* more. Sheer white curtains with lacy flower details are tied with red and pink ribbons, and Daisy has enough sparkly windchimes hanging above her window to form an entire orchestra. She has a pink CRT television on a small table, with a combined VHS-DVD player, and a few retro video game consoles. Daisy has a large collection of “girly” movies—Barbie, Monster High, Disney Princesses—and a few live-action films with equally glittery, pink and garish covers.

Coffee slowly walks around the room in awe, as Daisy gladly shows her around.

“You have such a lovely room...” Coffee says.

“I’ve been collecting all this cute stuff for years,” Daisy says, “I have, like, *five* different second-hand stores I visit once a month. Would you like to visit some of them with me sometime?”

“Oh, absolutely.” Coffee says.

“I’ll have to come with you guys!” Clover says.

They sit down on the floor again.

“Well, um, do you know what style you want to try out,” Daisy asks, “Or would you like to look through some magazines? I have some old issues of FRUiTS that I got for really cheap!”

“Uh... Well...” Coffee stutters.

“How about you try on a bunch of stuff, and you can see how you feel about it.” Clover suggests.

“Okay.” Coffee says.

They have her try on a pink-and-blue *Angelic Pretty* dress.

“Aww!” Daisy says, circling her.

“I’m not sure this is my style...” Coffee says, doing an awkward curtsy.

“Maybe you could try on some more alternative pieces?” Clover says, “Come to think of it, I lent a few pieces of mine to Daisy a while ago. Do you know where those went?”

“Probably in my special drawer with my *MILK* pieces.” Daisy says, “Your stuff’s *expensive!*”

Clover checks this drawer, and pulls out a long, layered skirt made of a lot of different fabrics, and a yellow tank top with a cartoon graphic on the front.

“Here!” Clover hands the pieces to Coffee, “The skirt’s pretty heavy, but the top’s pretty thin, so tell me if you want a jacket or anything.”

Coffee tries the outfit on.

“Sorry, but this is kind of uncomfortable...” Coffee says, pulling at the tight tank top.

“No problem! If you’re not going to wear it, then *I* might as well.” Clover says.

"Oh! Come to think of it, I have a super cute *Baby*, dress that'll look great on you, Coffee!" Daisy says, rummaging through her closet once more.

Coffee tries on Daisy's black-and-white *Baby, The Stars Shine Bright* dress.

"I... Actually quite like this." Coffee says.

"Yeah, it looks great on you!" Daisy says.

"It's cute, but not *too* cute." Clover says, "It's nice."

Coffee smiles.

"Clover and I will get changed, take a few photos, then we'll head out, okay?" Daisy says.

"Oh, you're okay with going out like this, right?" Clover asks Coffee. Coffee nods.

"Yeah!"

Ten minutes later, the girls are dressed.

"Would you like me to style your hair, Coffee?" Daisy asks, her hair in two short pigtails.

"No, I'm alright." Coffee says.

"Hey Daisy, do you know if there are any photo-booths in town?" Clover asks, "Since you apparently know everything there is to know about this area."

"Yeah, there's one at the arcade!" Daisy says, "There are some super cute filters and stickers to choose from, too."

"Awesome. Can we save the photo-taking for that, then?" Clover asks.

"Okay!" Daisy says, "That alright with you, Coffee?"

"Oh, yeah." Coffee says, "I've been to the arcade around here. The claw machines are a-actually pretty easy to get stuff from."

"Wow!" Clover exclaims. "But do they have cute plushies?"

"Definitely. One of them has *just* Pusheen plushies." Coffee says.

"Well, we'll have to take a detour!" Daisy says.

"Like you need *more* plushies." Clover laughs.

They head outside. Clover's wearing the layered skirt and the tank top, with an additional red gingham hoodie. It has star-shaped charms on the zippers and the ends of the pull strings. Daisy's wearing an *AP* dress with pastel-coloured illustrations of carousels near the bottom of the skirt. She's wearing a lacy headband, and carrying a heart-shaped bag. She's holding her new parasol and twirling it around.

"You two look really nice." Coffee says.

"Why thank you!" Daisy says, "We do this all the time, and a lot of people around here either *really* don't like our outfits, or they accuse us of wearing them for strange reasons."

"It's gross, and really rude," Clover explains, "But you gotta learn to block that stuff out, especially because there are people out there who *do* appreciate it."

"I see..." Coffee mutters.

"For example, there's this lovely old lady on another street." Daisy says, "She's always sitting out on her porch drinking tea, and she compliments us every time we walk past! I'm planning on baking her a cake as thanks."

"Oh, that's lovely." Coffee says.

"Yeah!" Daisy says. "So, Clover, where are we off to first?"

"Dear Deer Bakery, I guess." Clover says, "Then afterwards we can take our photos and play at the arcade. That sound good?"

"Mhm!" Coffee adjusts her dress a bit, "I'm really excited."

"We actually used to have some other friends who were into J-fashion," Clover says, "But we all split up when we had to start high school."

"So you've been doing this sort of thing for a while?"

"Yep! It's a lifestyle!" Daisy says.

"As I was saying, it's kinda nice to have an extra person around," Clover explains, "Especially since we were such a big group a few years ago. Wonder if those people are still doing stuff like fashion walks..."

"I hope so." Daisy says.

The girls pass a bookstore, but Daisy goes back to look in the windows.

"Think they've got manga there?" She asks.

"Might as well have a look!" Clover says.

They enter the store, and right by the door is a stand, holding comics, graphic novels... And manga!

"Must all be second-hand or something," Daisy says, examining every title closely, "There's a lot of 90's stuff in here."

"Interesting." Coffee says.

"I'm more interested in the magazines." Clover says, going over to a separate stand, "You have to look around a lot to find the good stuff."

She triumphantly holds up an issue of a magazine. On the cover is a photo of a girl wearing a bright-red dress and a pair of light-blue tights, with black-and-white sneakers.

"This is my favourite magazine; it's full of J-fashion photos, music reviews, and guides for buying clothing." Clover explains, "It's also dirt-cheap, so I have a lot of them at home."

She hands the magazine to Coffee, and she looks through it in awe.

"All of these models look so confident wearing the clothes they love..." Coffee mutters.

"Happiness is of utmost priority with J-fashion." Clover says, "If you're not having a ton of fun, then there's no reason to wear it, right?"

"That's... Very true." Coffee says.

"Dear Deer Bakery, here we come!" Daisy says.

The girls go inside the bakery. It's warm, and smells like fresh bread and brown sugar. There are a lot of deer-themed figurines and illustrations, and up above, there's a drawing of the bakery's "mascot" of sorts: Dear Deer. She's a fawn, with long, dark eyelashes, white spots on her head, and a white bow around her neck. She's smiling.

"This place is perfect for us," Daisy says, "Unfortunately, it's pretty crowded inside and out, so how about we sit in the Glorious-Mary Garden and eat?"

"That sounds good." Clover says.

"Good afternoon, girls!" The woman at the counter greets them. She has blonde hair tied in a ponytail with a ribbon, and she's wearing a lacy, pink apron with the same drawing of Dear Deer on it.

"Hi!" Daisy says, waving to her with both hands.

She picks up three paper plates, handing one to Clover and another to Coffee.

"Strawberry shortcake?" She says. Both Clover and Coffee nod.

Daisy places a slice of shortcake on everyone's paper plates and pays for them.

"It might have been sitting in the cabinet all day, but the icing looks pretty nice, so I don't think that's the case." Clover says.

"That's good!" Daisy says, "Okay, off to the garden!"

The Glorious-Mary Garden is within a park, and it's right next to a duck pond. Well-kept shrubbery and flower planters form rings around a circular area in the middle, where there are metal benches and tables that have been painted pink.

Daisy sits down on one of the pink benches, and Clover and Coffee follow, each beginning to eat their slice of shortcake.

"You should see this place at night, Coffee." Daisy says, "Once it gets dark, a bunch of hidden rainbow lights turn on! It's super pretty."

"I'm not sure I'd be allowed out so late," Coffee says, "But it sounds nice."

"We have to bring you to all of our favourite spots in town." Clover says, "Obviously not today, though."

"Have you visited the tiny music store, 'Mini Tunes'?" Daisy asks.

"I haven't heard of such a place." Coffee says, shaking her head.

"It's sandwiched between two *really* boring stores, but it's all fairytale themed and super adorable." Clover explains.

"Plus, they've got some really rare stuff there!" Daisy adds.

"I might have to check that out, then." Coffee says.

The girls visit their last stop: the arcade. It's colourful, loud, and very bright, but it's late in the day, so it's pretty empty.

"Oh yeah, this place is pretty nice!" Daisy says, giving nearly every machine a long and meaningful look.

"There's the photo-booth, over there." Clover says, pointing at the large, pink box. The plastic it's made of is slightly glittery.

They squeeze inside, sitting on the cushioned bench. Daisy leans over and feeds it a few coins.

"Is your purse from another dimension or something?" Clover laughs.

"Nah, I just have a job." Daisy says, "And nice grandparents."

They pose for their photos, doing peace-signs, making heart-shapes with their hands, and blowing kisses.

"Yay! My favourite part!" Daisy exclaims, grabbing the large stylus, which is pink with a yellow star shape at the end, and is connected to the photo-booth with a thick, blue string.

Daisy dots images of flowers, hearts and stars all over their photos, Clover spells everyone's names out in a glittery, cursive font, and Coffee changes the backgrounds to pastel gingham patterns.

"*CUTE!!*" Daisy exclaims when their photos are printed out. There are three strips of photos, one for each of the girls. Clover laughs as she looks through the photos, and Coffee smiles and holds her photos up to her chest as though they're very precious to her.

"I have a whole album of photo-booth photos in my room." Daisy says, pressing her face against the plastic window of a Sanrio-themed claw machine.

"There are lots of photos of our old friends in there, right?" Clover asks. Daisy nods. "Also, don't touch the claw machine with your face, you'll get sick."

Daisy stands up straight again, and on her next try, she manages to pick up a fairly large My Melody plush.

"No way! This thing *is* great!" She exclaims, picking up her plush and cuddling it.

"Hold on, let me try." Clover says, gently pushing her out of the way.

After a few tries, Clover picks up a BonBonRibbon plush.

"How cute!" She says, admiring all of the plush's details.

"How about you give it a go, Coffee?" Daisy says. Coffee nods.

Miraculously, on her first try, Coffee gets a Kuromi plush.

"Wow, you're great!" Daisy says, patting Coffee on the shoulder.

"Must be my lucky day." Coffee mutters.

As the sun is falling lower and lower in the sky, the three girls walk back to Daisy's house, holding their plushies.

"This afternoon was really fun," Coffee says, "But I'll be getting back home a bit later than I thought I would."

"Don't worry too much. We'll make sure you look like you've never even *touched* any of my dresses." Daisy promises.

"Alright, thank you." Coffee says.

"We've never really met anyone who loves J-fashion but wasn't allowed to wear it," Clover says,

"So it's been interesting talking to you, Coffee."

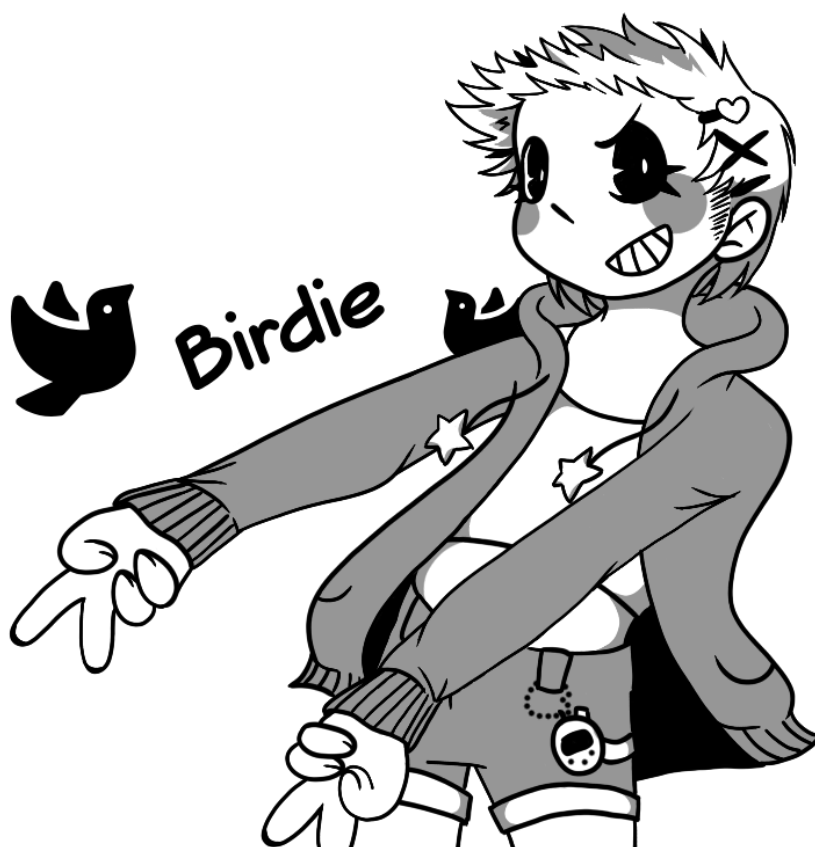
"Well, I've never really been friends with people who are as carefree as you two," Coffee says, "So it's also been interesting for *me* to hang out with *you* this afternoon."

"Carefree, huh?" Daisy says, "I guess that's true, but to wear J-fashion you *have* to be confident in yourself and the clothes you wear!"

"Yeah..." Coffee says quietly.

After getting changed back into more casual clothes, everyone heads home.

#### DAY 4: DAYDREAM



The next day, Coffee comes to Clover and Daisy's classroom and meets with them at lunchtime.

"Oh, hey!" Daisy says, moving over to make room for Coffee to sit down.

"Good afternoon." Coffee says.

"Did you get in any trouble with your parents?" Clover asks her.

"They were a bit worried because I came home a bit late," Coffee says, "But they weren't angry or anything."

"That's good!" Daisy says.

"Yeah, I guess we *did* do a lot of stuff yesterday." Clover says, "Sorry about that, I'll try to plan a bit better."

"Thank you. I don't like to make my parents worry." Coffee says, but nervously adds, "B-But it's fine, r-really."

"Our parents don't really mind when we stay out late," Daisy says, "Since Clover and I have been friends for a long time, y'know? Our friend group used to keep walking around town until ten o'clock at night when we were in middle school, but we got really bad marks at school since we were always tired... And then our parents found out."

"Oh, that's *really* not good." Coffee says.

"It was kinda fun, though. We did karaoke until our voices were hoarse, and we snuck into places after closing and played music really loud." Clover explains.

"Yeah, it was cool, but not really worth it." Daisy says, shrugging.

"Anyway, are you up for hanging out this afternoon?" Clover asks, "We just want to show you some more of our favourite spots."



“And you don’t need to wear any of my dresses,” Daisy says, “I’m hardcore, so I wear them every second that I’m not in my uniform, but I can understand if you’re not super comfortable in them.”

“*Hardcore*, huh?” Clover adds.

“I think I’ll just wear my regular clothes today.” Coffee says, “I feel like I’d be pushing my luck a bit otherwise. But your dresses *are* really wonderful...”

“Oh, right!” Daisy says, “I get it. Totally cool by us.”

After school, Coffee has an extra 20 minutes to spend before having to leave, so she changes into a plain, brown t-shirt and a pair of houndstooth trousers; they’re the closest in style to the type of things that Clover wears, but she feels sad when she looks in the mirror and realises that her outfit looks far too boring—now that she’s had a taste of fashion fun, not much else can fill the gap.

Coffee then remembers her hair bows, retrieving them from her secret polka-dot shoebox under her bed. Her parents are still home, so she decides that she’ll have to put them on once she meets up with Clover and Daisy.

“Coffee, dear!” Her mother calls from the kitchen.

Coffee stuffs her bows into her purse and goes out to see what’s up.

“Yes?” She says.

“Are you going to be doing homework with your friends this afternoon?” Her mother asks.

“Um, yes...”

“Then would you be able to pick up some bread from Dear Deer?” Coffee’s mother asks.

Coffee nods, and her mother hands her a few coins.

“Thank you.” Coffee’s mother says, patting her on the shoulder.

“It’s no problem.” Coffee says.

She heads back into her room, touches up her hair, and grabs her purse. She looks in the mirror again and sighs.

“J-fashion is about being happy and confident.” She whispers.

It doesn’t make her feel any better.

If anything, it makes her feel *worse*.

She takes her photo-booth photos out of her purse and looks through them. Then she looks through the issue of the magazine that she had bought. Then she pats her Kuromi plush on the head. It all makes her feel a *bit* better.

Then she receives a message on her flip-phone.

“u ready???” The message from Daisy reads.

“yes!” Coffee replies.

She snaps her phone shut and heads out.

Daisy is dressed in one of her frilly outfits. Clover is dressed in clashing patterns and lots of layers.

“Hey Coffee!” Daisy says, giving her a hug.

“Hello. Where are we going this afternoon?” Coffee asks.

“The only place we’re planning to go to is Mini Tunes,” Clover says, “So I guess we’ll just wander around town until then. Mini Tunes is actually near the edge of town, so we’ll make our way over and take a lot of detours.”

“Could we visit Dear Deer Bakery again?” Coffee asks, “I need to pick some bread up for my mother.”

“No problem!” Daisy says.

After visiting Dear Deer Bakery again, the trio make their way across town.

“Coffee, do you own a CD player?” Daisy asks.

“Why yes, I do.”

“Well you’re in luck!” Daisy says, “Mini Tunes sells all sorts of cute CDs.”

“I heard that they’ll have Merry Go Round Jailhouse for sale sometime soon,” Clover says, “I love how different it seems to their older stuff, and I’m very excited to listen to it.”

“We should *all* get copies!” Daisy suggests, “It’s got a super cute cover, and I loved all of the previews I’ve heard online so far.”

“Same here.” Clover says.

“Oh! Coffee, Merry Go Round Jailhouse is by a group called Serani Poji.” Daisy explains, “Their music is really cute, but they haven’t released any music in six years!”

“I understand why you would be excited, then.” Coffee says.

“Yeah! I can lend you a couple of their CDs, if you want!” Daisy says, “I have Bomber Minmi and Ochamekan, and they’re both really good.”

“Ah, I’m not sure whether I’d be allowed to play them at home...” Coffee says, “Oh! But I have headphones, so I think I’ll be fine.”

“Cool!” Daisy says.

“Here it is...” Daisy says.

The girls stand before the entrance to Mini Tunes. It’s comically small, squished into what would normally be a regular alleyway. The front is shaped like a cartoon house, with a bright red, triangular roof, white walls and a yellow door, with small square windows on both sides. There are paintings of colourful butterflies and birds on the walls, and glowing, mushroom-shaped lawn ornaments sitting on either side of the door. It’s cosy.

They go inside, and while the interior is fittingly claustrophobic—the girls are almost forced to walk in single-file—it’s warm, well-lit, and otherwise inviting. A white-painted front desk with a pink gingham tablecloth stands in front of another yellow door, and colourful glass decorations hang from the ceiling. There’s a bell sitting on the desk.

“Don’t worry,” Daisy says, seeing how uncomfortable Coffee looks, “The *actual* store is much bigger.”

Daisy rings the bell, and almost instantly, a person comes through the yellow door.

They have short, bright yellow hair, and it’s difficult to tell whether this person just woke up and drenched themselves in hair-spray, or whether they have a very unique way of styling their hair.

They’re wearing a yellow tank top, bright pink jacket and denim shorts, as well as mismatched green and pink knee-high-socks, and retro yellow leg-warmers. They’re also covered from head to toe with accessories; plastic children’s jewellery, virtual pet toys that hang from their belt-loops, colourful rings with charms of teddy bears and giraffes, and hair clips of rabbits, flowers, and kanji characters that mean things like “love” or “dream”.

“Hey, Birdie!” Daisy says, grinning at them.

“Yo, Daisy!” Birdie says, “I see you’ve got a new friend!”

“Why of course!” Daisy says, “This is Coffee.”

Birdie gives Coffee a little wave.

"You guys excited for Merry Go Round Jailhouse?" Birdie asks, opening the yellow door to the back room.

"Absolutely." Clover says.

"It's coming in two months after its release, which isn't great," Birdie explains, shrugging, "But it could be worse."

The back room is just as whimsical, decorated with little fairy statues and pots of flowers, and the shelves are full to bursting with CDs, all with cutesy covers and by bands with strange, unfamiliar names. There are star-shaped lights on the ceiling, and the floor is covered with fake grass and large figures of snails and beetles. Of course, this room is quite a bit larger than the one before.

"Got any requests while you browse?" Birdie asks, walking over to a table in the corner, which holds a pink-and-white CD player.

"Coffee?" Daisy asks.

"Wait, what?" Coffee asks, completely absorbed in taking in all of the details of her surroundings.

"What would you like to listen to?" Clover asks.

"Um... Well..." Coffee stutters, "Why are you asking *me*?"

"We get to request music here all the time." Clover says, "It's your turn."

"Okay..." Coffee says, "D-Do you have Super Miracle Circuit?"

"By Sonic Coaster Pop?" Birdie confirms, "Of course!"

The CD begins to play.

"Ooh, this is cute!" Daisy says, bouncing up and down to the beat. Clover nods.

"I've wanted the CD of this album forever." Coffee says quietly, "I've only ever listened to it online."

"Huh! How about we get it for you, then?" Daisy offers.

"W-What?" Coffee exclaims. "Is it not expensive?"

"No?" Daisy says, "Birdie's way more fair about this stuff than those *resellers* online."

Daisy says "resellers" as though it's an incredibly offensive insult. Perhaps it is to her.

"How on earth is there so much music here, then?" Coffee asks, "How is it not all gone?"

"Didn't you wonder why there was an entrance room before this one?" Clover asks. "Birdie only lets in people that they trust... The majority of those being other people who are into J-fashion."

"Plus, it's really difficult to find Mini Tunes in the first place." Daisy adds, "That's by design!"

"Ah, I see." Coffee says, blushing.

"Anyway, let's find that CD!" Daisy says, just a bit too loudly.

"You want Super Miracle Circuit?" Birdie asks from the other side of the room, "It's over near the CAPSULE shelf, since they sound kinda similar."

"Thanks." Clover says.

They go over to this area, and Coffee pulls the case out from the shelf.

"Cute cover!" Daisy says, "It really does remind me of CAPSULE."

"Yeah, sort of... Phony Phonic?" Clover says.

"Hmm... Thirty dollars..." Daisy says, looking at the price sticker.

"Oh, that's all?" Coffee asks. "Well, then I can buy it with my own money."

"Are you sure?" Daisy asks.

"Yes." Coffee says, "Oh, but, uh... Can we look around a bit more?"

"Yeah, of course!" Daisy says.

The group look through albums by Serani Poji—because each one seems to be for sale—they look at the many CAPSULE albums, and stuff by Melting Holidays and Pitcher56, and they even

peek at some of the miscellaneous CDs, which all seem to be bizarre new wave from the 80's, for whatever reason.

"I think it's cool that Birdie sorts stuff by very specific sounds, or how they feel about it, rather than just genre," Clover says, "Then they give those categories original names."

"Yeah, you gotta love 'Super Future Pixel Panic', or 'Bittersweet Mango Slushie Sunset'!" Daisy says, reading the titles above each section.

"I think it would be really fun to work here," Clover says, "Saying stuff like, 'Hey, Birdie! I think EeL's *Little Prince* belongs in Lonely Summer Hopscotch!' would be very enjoyable."

"Alas, I am the manager *and* the sole employee here!" Birdie chimes in.

The girls laugh.

"Oh! You guys wanna see our cassette-tape stock while you're here?" Birdie asks.

"Sure!" Daisy says, "Can't believe we haven't before..."

Coffee, Clover and Daisy walk over to the table Birdie is standing at. Birdie pulls a drawer out from the shelves behind them.

"This stuff's not available for purchase *or* rent." They say, "They're mostly from old live shows—and I mean *old*—and I managed to get them second-hand online. They're only available for listening in-store."

The girls look through the large collection of tapes.

"This is some rare stuff..." Coffee says.

"Oh, of course! But don't worry, I'm working on digitising these and archiving them online."

Birdie says.

"That's incredible!" Daisy says.

Coffee purchases her CD.

"Thanks!" Birdie says, collecting up Coffee's money and dumping it into a drawer behind them.

"Yes, um... Thank *you*." Coffee says, positively glowing as she looks down at the CD case in her hands.

"Say, Birdie," Clover says, "What days are you free on?"

"Mondays 'n Fridays! But we're also closed on our many public holidays because I'll take as many breaks as I can get." Birdie says, laughing, "Why?"

"Would you want to go on a fashion walk with us on Friday?" Clover asks.

"Yeah, sure!" Birdie says.

DAY 5: ENJOY



It's Thursday, and the sky is dark and angry. Large raindrops beat on the roof of the classroom like a giant drum, creating strange rhythms for all to hear. The classroom contrarily is uncomfortably warm and humid.

"Aw, man!" Daisy exclaims as she eats her lunch, "I guess there *are* some bad things about spring, huh?"

"I don't mind when it rains at school," Clover says, idly fanning herself with one of her schoolbooks, "I just hope it clears up tomorrow."

"Oh. Right." Coffee says.

"I own a bunch of cute umbrellas," Daisy says, "So if push comes to shove, I can totally lend some to you guys tomorrow."

"Thanks." Clover says.

"Oh! Have you listened to your CD yet, Coffee?" Asks Daisy.

"Yes, three times over." Coffee says, smiling.

"Wow! Maybe *you're* the hardcore one here!" Daisy says, laughing.

"Well, you know where Mini Tunes is if you want any more CDs." Clover says.

"That's true," Coffee says, "But I'm not sure I'd be able to go there on my own just yet."

"I understand." Clover says.

A short, cheerful melody played on a MIDI xylophone can be heard from deep within Daisy's school bag. She rummages around for a while, before triumphantly holding her flip-phone high in the air. Daisy checks her messages.

"Birdie's asking if their girlfriend can come with us, too." Daisy explains.

"Of course she can!" Clover says.

Daisy messages them back.

"Message sent!" Daisy says.

"Um, what's her name?" Coffee asks.

"Birdie's girlfriend?" Clover says, "She's called Mint."

"Alright." Coffee says.

"She sent me a photo of a super cute cushion she bought the other day," Daisy says, grabbing her phone again. She shows Coffee and Clover a photo of Mint's heart-shaped cushion, sitting on the seat of a wheelchair.

"Does she—" Coffee mutters.

"Oh! Right." Daisy says, "Mint has a wheelchair."

"She can... *Sort of* walk around," Clover explains, "But the wheelchair's more comfortable."

"I see..." Coffee says.

"But Mint's really cool!" Daisy says, "She loves photography, and she's thinking about starting her own independent fashion magazine, because she's recently finished her studies."

"We're both really excited about it." Clover says, smiling.

"And *I* will be on the cover of the first issue!" Daisy adds, smiling.

"She said she'd *think* about it!" Clover says.

"Yeah, well, she did her smug smile when she said that," Daisy explains, "So what she probably meant was 'your reservations have been made'."

Clover shakes her head, "Absolutely not!"

## DAY 6: FAIRYTALE

A day later, the rain still hasn't stopped, but it's switched from a heavy and frantic storm to a light drizzle, and the sun peeks out from behind the grey clouds. It's the afternoon, and the girls have decided to meet up with Birdie and Mint at Dear Deer Bakery.

Clover, Coffee and Daisy are all holding umbrellas; Clover carries an umbrella with a citrus pattern, Coffee holds a brown and white polka-dot umbrella, and Daisy twirls around her lacy pink parasol.

"Does that thing even shield you from the rain?" Clover asks Daisy.

"Not one bit!" Daisy laughs, her hair and shoulders looking noticeably soggy, "Style over function, y'know?"

"What if you catch a cold?" Coffee asks.

"Well, then I don't have to go to school!" Daisy laughs. Both Clover and Coffee shake their heads. The streets are a bit more empty than they usually are, and while they're all wearing warmer clothes, they're still pretty cold.

"It's a bit lonely, isn't it?" Clover says, looking over at the soaked street on her right.

"I bet Dear Deer is still packed." Daisy says.

And it certainly is.

Inside Dear Deer Bakery it's stuffy and humid, and it seems like just a few too many people are crammed into booths, laughing and munching on pastries and slices of cake. Daisy spots Birdie and Mint sitting in a booth in a corner, next to a large window.

"Hey!" She says, making her way over.

After speaking to Birdie and Mint for a while, Daisy comes back over, the two following her.

"Okay, we're all here!" She says.

Birdie's wearing a short black skirt, pink-and-orange gradient tights, and an orange, polka-dot hoodie.

Mint has straight, shoulder-length, blonde hair, held back with a thick, striped headband, and she has a few small, wooden beads threaded onto strands of hair. She's wearing an oversized, button-up shirt (currently not buttoned up) with a yellow-and-brown, vaguely tribal fish pattern all over, and underneath she's wearing a black-and-white striped t-shirt. Mint's also wearing a comfortable-looking pair of denim shorts that go down to her knees, long, yellow-and-brown chequered socks, and dark-brown sandals. She's sitting in her wheelchair, which has dark blue seats and handles.

"Coffee, this is Mint!" Daisy says, smiling and gesturing to Mint.

Mint waves at Coffee, and Coffee waves back.

"You guys doing fine?" Birdie asks.

"Yeah, but we're all pretty sure that Daisy's going to catch a cold." Clover says.

Mint laughs, "Okay, how about we all head over to Mini Tunes once we're done? I'll make hot chocolate for everyone."

"Oh, yes *please!*" Daisy says.

Mint leans over, quietly saying to Clover and Coffee, "I don't think you need to worry about her."

"Where to first, though?" Birdie asks.

"Well, the places we can go in this weather are pretty limited." Clover says, "And the arcade's probably packed, so we'll go there a bit later in the day."

“Why the arcade?” Mint asks.

“We found a photo-booth there!” Daisy explains, “And it’s super cute! You can put *heaps* of stickers and backgrounds on all of your photos!”

“Sounds fun.” Mint says.

“Th-There’s also a lot of claw machines...” Coffee adds.

“Oh, right! The claw machines.” Clover says, “You guys won’t be disappointed by them.”

“Really?” Mint says.

“Really!” Daisy says, smiling.

Birdie looks around uncomfortably, “Hey, can we get going sometime soon? I feel like I’m gonna melt if I stay here any longer.”

“Right, right.” Clover says, “Let’s head out!”

The group, a bit larger now, heads down the footpath at a leisurely pace, with Birdie staying behind to share an umbrella with Mint. The rain is very light, and the sun shines more brightly now.

“This is nice.” Mint says.

“Don’t expect anything less from one of our fashion walks!” Daisy says cheerfully.

“I-I heard that there’s going to be an aquarium opening up on the edge of town.” Coffee says, “It’ll probably be quite small, but when it opens, c-could we check it out together?”

“Well, aquariums *can* be pretty expensive to visit,” Clover says, “But it’s not like that’s an issue for us at the moment.”

She nudges Daisy.

“Oh. Right. Interdimensional purse.” Daisy says.

“Ooh! If we’re really starting up fashion walks again,” Mint offers, “Could I design some fliers or zines for it?”

“That takes a bunch of preparation, though!” Birdie says, “We’d need a place to meet up—”

“Mini Tunes.” Says Mint, “We’ve got a spare room in the back that I could tidy up.”

“—Places to put the fliers and zines—”

“My auntie would let me put some in her sushi restaurant,” Daisy says, “Oh, and I have a friend that works at Dear Deer Bakery!”

“—And a name for our group—”

Everyone looks around, but nobody seems to think of anything.

“Right. Everyone!” Birdie says, “We’ll go round the circle, and everyone’s going to say whatever word they think of first.”

“Hm... Symphony.”

“Parasol! Yay!”

“Uh, well... S-Spring...?”

“Sunflowers.”

“Um, shoes.”

Everyone thinks for a moment.

“Symphony shoes...?”

“Sunflower parasol!”

“Spring... Symphony?” Coffee says.

“That... That actually doesn’t sound too bad.” Mint says.

“Sure. Yeah!” Birdie says, “Spring Symphony.”



"It's nice, but it sounds more like a band name." Clover says.  
"Do any of us play instruments?" Daisy asks.  
"I have a friend who owns a theremin?" Mint laughs.  
"Nah, don't worry about it." Birdie says, "Spring Symphony's nice!"

The 'Spring Symphony' heads towards a plain photo-and-print store on the corner.  
"Wait, why are we here?" Daisy asks as they all head indoors.  
It's very quiet and empty, and the only people there are the cashier, who seems to be spending her free time wisely, (reading a volume of something that seems a bit too obviously like Yuri manga) and a mother and her child, who are photocopying some 'missing cat' posters.  
"I wanted to check out whether they had a photocopier, and what the price was like." Mint says. She goes just a bit closer to the photocopier.  
"Okay, that's not too bad." She says.  
"Oh! Hey, if we're going to convert that back room into our 'secret headquarters,'" Birdie says, walking over to the doorway, "We might as well look for some furniture and decorations for it, right?"  
"You're right!" Coffee says, a bit too loudly. She blushes, quietly saying, "Um, where do you suggest we look?"  
"Oh, all over!" Birdie says excitedly, putting their hand on her shoulder, "There are a few furniture stores I frequent, but I've also found great stuff at op-shops."  
Birdie walks over to the rest of the group again.  
"Hey, Mint," They say, "Can me and Coffee check out some furniture shops? Oh, you guys don't have to come with us if you don't want to."  
"I think that's fine." Mint says, "What do you guys think?"  
Clover and Daisy nod.  
"Just don't leave your phone on silent again!" Mint says.  
"I know, I know..." Birdie says, doing a dramatic sigh. They pull their flip-phone out of their pocket and turn the volume up all the way.  
"Stop being silly!" Mint says, smiling, "Now, if I send you a text, you'll get scared!"  
Birdie rushes out the sliding doors, yelling, "I love you!" before the doors close again. Coffee follows them out.  
"Love you too!" Mint yells.

Birdie and Coffee walk along the footpath, umbrellas down, as the sun is shining with no hint that it was ever raining.  
"So, how big is this spare room?" Coffee asks.  
"Smaller than a cheap room at a hostel, I'll say." Birdie says.  
"I-I've never visited a hostel before..." Coffee mutters.  
"It's, uh... It's..." Birdie stammers, "As small as... Your standard gas station bathroom?"  
Coffee blinks at them.  
"*Seriously?*" Birdie exclaims, "Okay, um..."  
Birdie sighs.  
"You *really* have to get out more, girl!" They say, "What do you *do* every day?"  
"Homework..." Coffee says, "And when I'm finished, I listen to music and draw pretty girls..."  
Coffee smiles.

"...And recently, I've been going on walks with Spring Symphony, so I've been very happy about that!"

Birdie smiles sadly at Coffee, saying, "You must be really excited to visit that aquarium, huh?"

Coffee nods slowly.

"Well, uh... Why do you like drawing girls?" Birdie asks awkwardly.

"I, uh, I think... I think they're pretty, and cool, and interesting, and... Well..." Coffee trails off.

"I can definitely agree with you on that!" Birdie laughs.

Coffee does, too, but then shakes her head very quickly, saying,

"I-I don't mean it like that." She insists, "I... I don't know whether I'm like that or not."

"Really?" Birdie says, smirking.

"Ah, here's the place." Birdie says, stopping in front of a store called 'Lovely Furniture'. The exterior is dull and run-down, but the interior is still rather well-kept, with worn, but still shiny, wooden floors, and walls with minimal chips in their white paint, acting as the temporary home for many event fliers from long ago. There's a distinct smell to the place that's difficult to pin down.

"Afternoon, girls!" An old lady at the counter greets them.

"Sorry. Not a girl." Birdie says, gesturing to herself, prompting a suspicious glance from the lady. She says nothing, though.

Birdie and Coffee look around at couches made of ugly-patterned fabric, bland paintings of local scenery, and peculiar figurines. For everything strange, however, there seems to be something nice.

"I really love this chair." Birdie says, sitting down in an orange-and-brown striped chair that's a little bit past its prime.

"How much is it?" Coffee asks.

"Judging from how it looks..." Birdie says, "Definitely not its original retail price."

The two laugh.

"Oh, hold on..." Coffee says, drawn to a plastic clock on the wall. It's bright orange-and-red, and in a very abstract shape.

"You're a genius!" Birdie says, lifting it off of the wall, "This'll go with it perfectly!"

"And... Hm..." Coffee mutters, scanning a table covered in antique porcelain figurines.

She picks one up. It's of an angel, with large, feathery wings, wearing an apricot-coloured dress, and places it aside on the corner of the table. She then grabs a pair of glossy, brown fawns, both sitting down, and placing them either side of the angel.

"Yeah, yeah!" Birdie exclaims, "If we got, hm... *That* wall shelf..."

They point to a shelf made of dark-brown wood, made to be positioned in a corner.

"...And we had, like, a tiny desk lamp behind them," They say, "Because, of course, the little room is pretty dark..."

Coffee and Birdie continue their interior-decorating escapade until they have a small collection of furniture and decorations taking up a corner of the store.

"Wait." Birdie says suddenly, their face contorting into a grimace.

"None of us have cars."

The two stand still, in shock, for a moment.

"I... I'll get my mother to move all of this!" Coffee offers.

"No, no! That's a *terrible* idea!" Birdie says, "You told her that you're doing homework with Clover and Daisy, hey?"

Coffee nods frantically.

"So she *really* won't like it if she finds out that you've been shopping for furniture with someone like me!" Birdie says.

"It's only furniture, she won't mind..." Coffee insists, "And... And she won't think you're weird, or anything like that!"

"Daisy told me that she would freak out if you wore *ribbons* in your hair," Birdie says, "So we're going to have to think of something else if you want to stay a part of Spring Symphony, okay?"

Birdie takes their phone out again.

"Come to think of it, I might have a friend who's off work today." Birdie says.

After a few minutes, Birdie's friend shows up in a small, white pickup truck. He steps out of it, dark hair shimmering in the sunlight, the sleeves of his gothic blouse swaying with every motion.

He *would* be incredibly intimidating to someone like Coffee.

That is, if he didn't speak.

"Making me come out here when I've got a cold!" He laughs, sniffing, "Shame on you!"

His voice is so raspy that it makes *Coffee's* throat hurt, despite her being perfectly well.

"Sorry, man!" Birdie says, "Me 'n Coffee were in trouble! By the way, Coffee, this is Neptune."

Coffee waves to Neptune, and he waves back.

"Have you paid for everything?" He asks.

Birdie nods. They show him the collection of furniture.

"Hey, it's less than last time." Neptune says, "Oh, and that's a really nice chair."

"I know, right?" Birdie says, "Gonna need some help with moving it, though."

Birdie grins, turning to Coffee.

"You feeling pretty strong today?" They ask.

"I'm feeling as though I did not sign up for this at all," Coffee mutters, "But after becoming a part of Spring Symphony, I've never felt stronger."

Once everything is loaded onto the back of Neptune's truck, Birdie tells him what to do with it all.

"Not sure how you'll manage to get the coffee table through the entranceway," Neptune says,

"But knowing you, you'll probably manage just fine."

"You gotta turn everything on its side! Everyone knows *that's* how you move *every* piece of furniture," Birdie says, "And hurry up! That sky's getting pretty grey again."

"Wait, one last thing," Neptune says, "'Spring Symphony' sounds pretty cool."

"We officially formed just a few hours ago," Birdie says, "Priding ourselves as the most inclusive, and probably only, J-fashion community in this town!"

"Um, yes," Coffee says, "A-All of this furniture is for our new headquarters."

"Oh, that's rad!" Neptune says, "May I join?"

"Totally, man!" Birdie says, "We take photo-booth photos every second Friday, we make our own music, we're currently working on a *huge* mural for our town... Oh, and being a part of Spring Symphony pretty much *guarantees* you a spot in my girlfriend's upcoming fashion photography magazine."

Birdie winks at Coffee.

“None of that sounds true *whatsoever*,” Neptune says, “But I haven’t been a part of anything like this in years, so I’m down anyway.”

“I really thought he’d buy it!” Birdie whispers loudly to Coffee. Coffee just shakes her head.

“Well, I guess I have to do some delivering now,” Neptune says, “Y’know. *On my day off*. Then I gotta get some rest.”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Birdie says, “And speaking of ‘sounding good’, you, my friend, certainly do not.”

Neptune hops in his truck, waving good-bye.

“How about we meet up with everyone else now?” Birdie suggests. Coffee nods.

The group reassembles outside the arcade, umbrellas back up. It’s difficult to tell what time it is, as the sky is very dark again.

“It feels like the weather has been on our side today.” Clover says, “I mean, doing a fashion walk in the rain seems miserable, but at least we had a bit of clear weather in the middle of it.”

“Yeah, what were you guys up to during that time?” Birdie asks.

“We were talking more about Mint’s zine!” Daisy says.

“Deciding on where and when to distribute it,” Mint says, “What type of theme it should have, you know.”

“Cool, cool,” Birdie says, “You’re all gonna love the stuff we picked out for our headquarters. Right, Coffee?”

Coffee nods quickly.

“Oh, that’s not a good sign.” Mint says, smiling and shaking her head.

After nabbing some adorable plushies from a few different claw machines, Spring Symphony squeezes into the photo-booth, Birdie helping Mint up onto the seat.

“Cosy.” Mint says.

The group take their pictures, taking turns layering digital stickers onto them with the big stylus. A cheerful tune plays quietly through the tinny speakers, as they take plenty of time.

“Here you go!” Daisy says, handing everyone their photos once they’re printed out.

“Super cute.” Birdie says.

“I know, right?” Daisy says excitedly.

“Hey, what if we took photo-booth photos with every new member of Spring Symphony?” Clover suggests, “So we have, like, a comprehensive history of it.”

“I doubt that it’d get *that* big,” Birdie says, “But it sounds fun.”

“Yeah! Let’s do that!” Daisy says.

## DAY 7: GENTLE

“That hot chocolate that Mint made yesterday was *too* good!” Daisy says, lying on her bed, on the phone with Clover, “I hope she’ll make us more today!”

“Daisy, if you have it every day, then it’ll just get boring,” Clover says, “Just like what happened to me with Pitcher56.”

“That’s because you’re not hardcore!” Daisy insists, “You’ve gotta dedicate your life to everything that you love, otherwise you’ll just forget about it all!”

“That doesn’t make any sense.” Clover says, “Okay, just... Get ready. We need to head over to Mini Tunes in ten minutes.”

“*Ten minutes?!*” Daisy exclaims, “I need *so* much more time!”

“How about *not* wearing an elaborate outfit today?” Clover suggests, “We’re just going to be moving furniture—”

“*Absolutely not!*” Daisy yells into her flip-phone’s tiny microphone, snapping it shut.

“Ten minutes, ten minutes...!” She mutters nervously, racing around her cluttered bedroom.

She pulls a white blouse from her closet, and a green gingham dress to put over top. She changes into them quickly, then moves to brush her hair, tying it into low pigtails with colourful hair ties. Just as she’s about to grab her shoes, which are also green in colour, she trips over a magazine on the floor, landing flat on her face.

“No, no!” She exclaims, standing up again, and picking her shoes up.

Daisy grabs her purse, which is yellow, with a green, clover-shaped patch on the front, and makes her way over to Mini Tunes.

Birdie, Clover, Coffee and Daisy are all squeezed into the entrance room of Mini Tunes, along with the furniture and decorations from Lovely Furniture. Mint is in the main room.

“Told my regulars that we’d open a bit later today,” Birdie explains, “So we’re inherently under a time limit here, but, like, a pretty generous one.”

“*You have regulars?*” Clover mutters to herself.

Birdie shifts around to get closer to the messy pile of decor near the door to the main room.

“Okay, we’ll need someone to move the delicate stuff, like the figurines,” Birdie says, “And I think that’s a perfect job for our lovely friend Coffee.”

“Oh, um... Yes.” Coffee says, immediately picking up the angel figurine, “And thank you.”

“I think Clover can help us with moving things like shelves and wall decorations,” Birdie says, “So you’ll be able to help us with the chairs, and the little fluffy rug I found, right Daisy?”

“Totally!” Daisy says, nodding eagerly.

“We’ll all move the furniture into the main room,” Birdie explains, “And then we’ll clear out the back room, *then* move the furniture into it.”

Once the furniture is moved into the main room of Mini Tunes, everyone pitches in to move dusty cardboard boxes, spare racks for CDs, and novelty headphones out of the rather dingy back room.

“Once I get a little fan in there, and get those lamps switched on,” Birdie reassures the group, “It’ll be just fine.”

“Where are you going to put all of the stuff that was in here before?” Daisy asks.

"Oh, y'know." Birdie says, smiling.

"Um, w-would I be able to buy some of those headphones from you?" Coffee asks quietly.

"You can take them for free!" Birdie says, "But be warned, they are *novelty* headphones, so the sound quality isn't spectacular."

"I... I don't mind." Coffee says, "I just think they're really cute."

Coffee searches through a box of these headphones, taking out a pair that are bright-red and strawberry-themed.

"Are you sure they're free of charge?" Coffee asks.

Birdie nods, saying, "I think we were supposed to sell them as a collaboration with another store nearby, but that was in, what, 2007?"

Birdie looks over at Mint for approval, and Mint nods.

"We just never got around, and they closed up shop just last year," Birdie explains, "So we can't exactly give them back to them."

"Oh, and it would feel wrong to sell them *now*, right?" Clover says, "Sort of like... Selling the belongings of a deceased person?"

"I guess so?" Birdie laughs.

Once all of the furniture has been moved into the back room, now Spring Symphony's headquarters, Mint makes hot chocolate for everyone (after a lot of pleading from Daisy) and they all congregate in this room.

There are three mismatched armchairs, as well as a few colourful cushions on the floor for sitting on. In one corner is the wall shelf, with the angel, the fawns, and the small light, and in the opposite corner stands a wonderfully ugly, distinctly 70's lamp. The plastic clock sits next to a long wall-scroll of an unidentified anime girl, and these are positioned just right of a small CRT television, propped up on a glass-fronted cabinet. The room is basic, but chaotic and cosy.

"We'll need a stereo system in here for when we do karaoke," Birdie says, "But it's pretty nice!"

"Oh, yes!" Clover exclaims, "We love karaoke!"

"We used to do it *so* often back in middle school!" Daisy says, clapping her hands in delight,

"Coffee, would you want to do karaoke with us?"

"A-Ah, um..." Coffee stutters, "M-Maybe...?"

"Awesome!" Daisy says, "Oh, and since we're not at a karaoke place, we can sing whatever songs we want, so as long as they're on CD, you can sing *your* favourite songs, even if they're not super popular!"

"And I definitely have a nice microphone somewhere..." Birdie says.

"Birdie, if *you're* going to be singing," Mint says, "We're definitely going to have to invest in soundproofing for this room, too."

"But that stuff's expensive! And we're broke!" Birdie exclaims, "Besides, Daisy's worse."

"Maybe we could just do the singing during the day?" Clover jokingly suggests, "When everyone's away from home? Then we wouldn't be disturbing anyone."

"Oh, Clover, you're forgetting that this street is made up of nothing but other stores," Mint explains, "So that's not a great idea either."

"I've got it!" Daisy exclaims, "We open it up for cool J-fashion people, and we have, like, fortnightly karaoke nights!"

"With or without entry fees?" Birdie asks, "Because if I'm going to be closing down Mini Tunes, then it'd better be something that makes us the same amount of money."

"I think that would be fine, just as long as it's, like, five dollars." Clover says.

"We could throw in a copy of my zine to smooth things over, too." Mint suggests, "When it's out, that is."

"A-And it could be a good way to meet other members of the scene," Coffee explains, "And we could make some new friends!"

"Alright! Sounds like a plan!" Birdie says, "What day of the week should it be on?"

"Maybe... Sundays?" Clover suggests, "When a bunch of stores are closed, and people who like J-fashion would be able to wear what they want without having to go to work?"

"But for people out of town, it would be a hassle to have to drive over for just a few hours of singing!" Daisy explains.

"W-We wanted to pride ourselves on being open and inclusive, right Birdie?" Coffee says.

"Oh. Yeah!" Birdie says, "Well, I guess we could just start with Sundays, and figure something else out if that doesn't work."

"Speaking of..." Mint says, "Are we wanting to do this *tomorrow*?"

"Oh, right. It's Saturday today." Clover says, "Well, we don't have much time to prepare for it—"

"Let's do it!" Daisy exclaims, jumping up, "Mint! Could you design some fliers for it?"

"I-I suppose so?" Mint says, "Alright, sure."

"Hmm... Birdie, could you and Neptune drive around and find spots to put the fliers?" Daisy asks.

"I'm not sure he's feeling any better," Birdie says, "But we live in a walkable city! I'll just go on a stroll by myself."

"Okay! For the person collecting the money..." Daisy says, looking around, "Hmm... Well, if we each took turns, so we wouldn't be missing out on singing, then it would be fine, right?"

Everyone nods.

"We'd be stationed in the entrance room, and I could break out that antique cash register I found a while ago!" Birdie says.

"Sounds good to me, just as long as it doesn't break again." Mint says.

"Is there anything I can help with?" Clover asks.

"Or me?" Coffee says.

"Let me think..." Daisy says, "I'm not really sure... Oh, I guess you two could be on CD-gathering duty."

"W-What does that mean?" Coffee asks.

"Oh, you take requests from anyone who shows up," Daisy explains, "And try to find whichever CD in Mini Tunes they ask for."

"That sounds alright." Clover says, "We're not expecting too many people to arrive, so we won't be spending the entire time rushing around."

"Yeah! You don't need to worry." Daisy reassures Coffee.

Coffee nods.

"This is going to be great!" Daisy says.

(Full page for flyer)

## DAY 8: HOPE

It's 8:45 at night on Sunday. It's cold and quiet outside, but inside Mini Tunes it's stuffy and warm, and a feeling of excitement floats through the air. Birdie is showing an awkward-looking Coffee how to set up a speaker system inside Spring Symphony's headquarters. Clover and Daisy are discussing their favourite music in the main room, pulling CDs from the shelves and setting them aside for later. Mint is setting up the cash register in the entrance room.

"All done! Maybe." Mint says, heading back into the main room.

"We're finished with the speakers, too!" Birdie says.

After Birdie, Mint and Coffee choose *their* favourite CDs and place them in a stack in the back room, Birdie takes a large bottle of bright-pink, raspberry-flavoured soda out from behind the counter in the main room, pouring everyone a paper-cup-full.

"Do you want everyone to stay up until midnight?" Mint asks, laughing as she grabs her cup.

"That's the intention, yeah." Birdie says, smiling.

"These three have school tomorrow!" Mint says, gesturing to Coffee, Clover and Daisy.

"We'll be fine!" Daisy says slowly, clearly already tired, "The only one who needs to worry about getting home at a reasonable time is Coffee!"

"A-And my parents are probably going to be home by ten o'clock," Coffee says, "So I have some time."

"Alright." Mint says, "But Clover and Daisy have to leave by eleven o'clock at the *absolute latest*."

"Fine..." Daisy says, smiling.

"Uh, guys? It's about nine." Birdie says, "Are we all ready?"

"I think so!" Daisy says, "Clover, can you go out into the entrance room first?"

"For how long?" Clover asks.

"Fifteen minutes, I think." Daisy says, "Then I can do it. I just want to be able to sing the first song!"

"Ah, alright." Clover says, "That's fine."

Clover goes outside to turn the "closed" sign to "open", and sits back down inside the entrance room, behind the table. Pretty soon she can hear Daisy's energetic singing through the walls. In a matter of minutes, Neptune shows up, wearing formal, black trousers, and a different gothic blouse. He's holding a small box of tissues.

"Oh, hello!" Clover says to him, waving.

"Hey! The karaoke's happening here, right?" Neptune asks, still sniffing, "I'm Neptune."

"I'm Clover! And yes, it is." Clover explains, "Are you... Feeling alright?"

"Better than on Friday, that's for sure." He says, "I'm probably not going to be singing very much, though. I'm just here because the flier said something about snacks."

"Uh... I see." Clover says, "Oh, before you go in, you have to pay."

"Ah, classic Birdie..." Neptune says, rummaging through his pockets, "It *was* them who organised this, hey?"

"Birdie *did* come up with the idea," Clover explains, "But Daisy directed the whole thing."

"Interesting." Neptune says, "Might strike up a conversation with this 'Daisy' you speak of."

"You can hear her singing right now!" Clover laughs.



"If she's *that* loud, then I might have to leave a bit earlier than I thought I would need to."  
Neptune says, nervously laughing.  
He hands over a folded five-dollar note, and goes into the main room.

"Neptune!" Birdie yells into the microphone, their voice echoing.  
Neptune holds his hands over his ears, dropping his box of tissues.  
"Ow..." He mutters, "Please don't do that."  
"Sorry, man!" Birdie says, flicking a switch on the microphone, saying, "Testing, testing!" now without the echo.  
"That's better." Mint says.  
"Okay, where on Earth is Heavy Starry Heavenly..." Birdie says, looking through the tall stack of CDs on the cabinet. They still awkwardly hold the microphone up to their mouth as they do this.  
"Gotcha!" Birdie says triumphantly, opening the pink case and placing the CD in the CD player. They immediately skip to the 5th song in the album, and sing along.  
"So, you're not singing to off-vocal versions?" Neptune asks.  
"We would, but a lot of our favourite songs don't have official instrumental versions." Mint explains, "None of us mind, though."  
"Wouldn't you call this an 'open-mic night', then?" Neptune asks.  
"Too many syllables." Mint says.  
"I just like having another voice to fill in stuff that I miss out!" Daisy says.  
"I would, too, if I only sang nightcore versions of songs." Mint says.  
"Hey, I think they're fun." Daisy says, crossing her arms and jokingly pouting.  
Mint goes to take a sip of soda, but stops.  
"Ah, Neptune, would you like some soda?" She asks.  
"Oh, yes please." He says.  
Mint now pours *Neptune* a paper-cup-full, and hands it to him.  
"Pure sugar. Just what I like." He says.  
"Hmm... I don't think people would assume that about you if they hadn't spoken to you first."  
Mint remarks.  
"Well, if we had *not* spoken before," Neptune asks, "What would you think I liked to drink?"  
"Uh, well... I don't know, black coffee?" Mint says.  
"Hah!" Neptune laughs, nearly spilling his drink, "If that's the impression I give off, then I *really* need to change how I express myself, huh?"

At the quarter-hour mark, Daisy makes her way into the entrance room.  
"Hey!" She says to Clover, who is sitting at the table, painting her nails pink.  
"Ah, it's time." Clover says, clumsily placing the lid back onto the bottle of nail polish. "Sorry."  
"Oh, don't worry about it." Daisy says, "Do you want another five minutes?"  
"I'm nearly finished." Clover explains, "I can do the rest in the main room."  
Daisy laughs, "How did you even manage to bring that here?"  
"Backpack." Clover says, pointing to her small, tartan-check bag sitting on the ground, "You don't want to know what I have in there."  
Clover stands up, grabbing her bag.  
"Have fun!" Daisy says, sitting down at the table. Clover enters the main room, and then squeezes into the secret headquarters.  
"Oh, thank God!" Neptune says, "I thought we'd be stuck listening to Daisy's singing all night."  
"Neptune!" Mint hisses.

"Oh, you will." Clover says, smiling, "You're just getting a short break."

"Clover!" Birdie says loudly into the microphone, before handing it to Clover, saying, "Your turn." Clover picks up a CD. It's in a clear jewel case, labelled "One Room Survival" with bright-pink permanent marker, but the CD itself seems official, with a shiny, light-blue design. She places it in the CD player, skipping to track two.

It's a loud, brash, but bouncy song, switching from hostile- to fun-sounding in mere seconds. While Clover trips over some of the lyrics, her voice is loud and clear, and matches the song very well.

Once it's over, Birdie says, "Bravo! Do you know any of the other songs in the album?"

"I think I'm okay at singing 'Where Is Smiley,'" Clover says, laughing, "But I think I need a drink of water first."

"Here!" Birdie offers Clover a cup of soda, "It's close enough!"

"Can I sing something in the meantime?" Mint asks.

"Sure." Birdie says.

Clover hands Mint the microphone, and Mint leans over to put a different CD into the CD player. The first track is cheerful, with sweeping synth tones and a melody that seems easy to play on a xylophone. After listening to a good chunk of the intro, though, Mint skips to the seventh song, which is darker and panicked, with a high tempo, frantic detuned piano, and a scary chorus in the background.

Mint is good at this song, clearly singing in a lower range that's more comfortable than the original singer's high-pitched, slightly shrill voice.

Birdie applauds her, saying, "You're awesome!"

"Thank you!" Mint says, laughing despite being out of breath.

"Hey, would I be able to purchase that CD later?" Neptune asks.

"Yeah, we have loads in stock, but they're all burned CDs," Birdie explains, "The original is pretty elusive."

"Sounds like it."

Daisy, still sitting in the entrance room, is sipping from her paper cup of soda.

"*Sunday morning, I made a scotch egg,*" She sings quietly, "*Singing Jan's 'Ex-Fan Des Sixties'...*"

Somebody opens the door.

"Hey, is karaoke happening here?" She asks, running a hand through her long, blonde hair.

She's wearing a red, flannel shirt, sleeves rolled up to her elbows, over a long, white dress, which hangs just above her ankles, showing that she's wearing dull-blue tights and brown sandals.

She's carrying a large, brown bag, with a lot of colourful keychains attached to it, and there's a yellow starfish and a blue dolphin embroidered on the front of it.

"That's correct!" Daisy says, smiling and shaking her hand, "I'm Daisy."

"March," The girl says, taking a few coins out of her bag and placing them on the table, "I thought the flyer looked nice."

"It sure does!" Daisy says, "Mint made it. She's probably going to be belting out '*Chotto Itai-kedo Suteki*' by Chakra later tonight."

"Exciting!" March says, "Hey, I think you're in a few of my classes."

"Oh, yeah! I thought I recognised you." Daisy says, "I never thought you would be into J-fashion, though."

"I dabble, mainly outside of school." March explains, "I often feel like a bit of a poser, though, because I only really buy these types of clothes from op-shops."

"No, that's pretty normal, actually." Daisy says, "Clover, my best friend, is the same."

“Interesting.” March says, smiling.

“You should see the types of outfits she pulls together,” Daisy says, “She’s a fashion wizard!”

March laughs nervously.

“What’s your favourite band?” Daisy asks.

“I like YAPOOS,” March says, “Their work with Jun Togawa is really special. Oh, and I really like Jun’s album ‘Togawa Fiction’. It’s awesome that she’s still making music these days.”

“I think I heard a song from that album playing at a weird little cafe in *Karoro Pouri*,” Daisy says, “It was really long, and I wanted to stay and listen to the rest of it.”

“That was probably the first track, ‘Council Please’,” March explains, “It’s about eight minutes long. Very good song.”

“I bet Birdie has the CD somewhere,” Daisy says, “So maybe you could sing it tonight?”

“Well, there are long sections where there aren’t any vocals, so maybe not...” March says.

“Hey, that just gives you a little break!” Daisy says, “And if Spring Symphony can put up with listening to me singing old anime openings, they’ll be perfectly fine with ‘Council Please’.”

“Ah, okay,” March says, laughing.

She heads into the main room, where Neptune’s rather weak-sounding singing voice bounces off the walls. He’s singing an old 80’s rock song with a strangely-fluctuating BPM.

“Oh, hey there!” Clover says, looking through some shelves of CDs, “I’m Clover.”

“I’m March,” March says.

“Do you have any requests right off the bat?” Clover asks.

“Um, do you have ‘Togawa Fiction’ by the Jun Togawa Band?” March asks.

“Might be in the miscellaneous section,” Clover suggests, “Well, if there’s enough room in there, make your way into the headquarters and get comfortable! If I can find it, I’ll bring your CD over soon.”

“Thanks!”

March sits next to Coffee, who nervously introduces herself, and attempts to offer her some soda, before Birdie swoops in and asks her in a much more coherent way.

“Oh, and I think it’s late enough to break out the biscuits,” Birdie says, “Which should we have first: lovely Shrewsbury... Or the weird chocolate-coconut biscuits that your grandma offers you when you visit her?”

“Hey! They’re just an acquired taste,” Mint says, crossing her arms.

“Maybe you’re just a grandma at heart!” Birdie laughs, “An old soul!”

“Sorry Birdie, but I’m a chocolate-coconut person, too,” March says, shrugging.

“Hell yeah, sister!” Mint says, giving her a high-five.

“Fine, fine. We’ll have chocolate-coconut,” Birdie says, opening the glass-front cabinet and presenting the group with a packet of shiny, rectangular chocolate biscuits.

Mint and March immediately take a biscuit each from the packet. Coffee takes one after them.

Birdie and Neptune hesitate a bit longer for the sake of the joke.

“Oh, i-it’s probably my turn to sit in the entrance room,” Coffee says.

“Don’t worry, Coffee,” Birdie says, grinning, “You’ll do great.”

Coffee swaps places with Daisy, who excitedly hops up and tells her everything she needs to do.

“Just collect their money—make sure it’s the right amount—and try to seem inviting!” Daisy says.

“O-Okay,” Coffee says.

“You won’t need to try to impress them or anything,” Daisy says, “You’re a nice person already!”

"Thank you." Coffee says, "I can do this."  
"We know you can!" Daisy says, "No doubt!"

After aimlessly looking around the quiet entrance room, the only sounds being cars and Daisy's enthusiastic singing, Coffee is startled when she sees someone opening the door. They do it quietly and suspensefully, as though they're a monster in a horror film, with light-green eyes opened wide. Coffee gasps, but the person doesn't say a thing.

They have curly, shoulder-length hair, almost entirely covered by a striped bandanna. They're wearing an oversized red-and-yellow t-shirt, green-and-black striped tights under grey school-uniform shorts, and big, black boots that definitely make them look taller than they normally would.

They look strange, and just a bit mysterious.

Coffee swallows.

"G-Good evening." She says quietly, making futile efforts to maintain eye contact.

"Hi." The person says, equally as quiet.

Silence.

"I'm Coffee," Coffee says, "Karaoke's happening here."

"I'm Sera." They say in a low voice, "Thank you."

Sera quickly places a five-dollar note on the table.

Silence again.

"Um... What type of songs do you like to sing?" Coffee asks.

"I like PixelToy." Sera says.

"W-Where are they from?" Coffee asks.

"Hong Kong." Sera explains, "Their music sounds a lot like Shibuya-Kei, though."

"I-Interesting. Coffee says, "Well, I hope Birdie has one of their CDs."

"Yes."

Sera goes into the main room, and Coffee lets out a sigh once they close the door.

"Oh, wow, someone else!" Birdie says, waving to Sera, "Welcome!"

Sera silently waves back. They sit down on one of the floor-cushions in the headquarters, as far away from the rest of the group as possible—a bit less than a metre.

"Hey there!" Clover says to Sera, "I'm Clover."

Clover tells Sera everyone's names.

"I'm Sera." They say.

"Nice name." Mint says, "Are you interested in joining Spring Symphony?"

"Um... Yes." Sera says, "Very much."

"Cool, cool!" Birdie says, "We're planning to have karaoke nights pretty often, so look out for more fliers in the future!"

"Speaking of which," Neptune says, "Do you want to sing anything?"

"Do you have 'The Science Of Love' by PixelToy?" Sera asks.

"We might..." Clover says, "I can go and check."

A few minutes later, and one Sera has also been offered some soda, Clover comes back with a CD.

"This, right?" She says, showing Sera.

Sera nods, "Yes, thank you."

Clover places it in the CD player, and Sera skips to the \_ track, which starts with an ominous drone. There are high-pitched chip waves and guitar with lots of reverb, and the vocals, which

seem to be in English, are beautiful and sad but still matching the tempo of the song. Sera also sings this song lower than the original, but with just as much emotion.

“Woohoo!” Birdie says, clapping, “Okay, you’re officially a new member!”

“Uh... Thank you.” Sera says quietly, sitting down again.

“Ooh, we should sing something together.” Mint says, “Do you know anything by Kidorikko?”

“I’ve listened to ‘Ryukou Tsushinbo’ a few times.” Sera says, “Do you like YAPOOS?”

“Oh, yes!” Mint says.

“So do I!” March says.

Mint sifts through the CDs again.

“How about this?”

She holds one up, with a light-blue cover. There’s a monochrome photo in the middle of a group of people who look rather miserable.

The three proceed to spend a long time making their way through almost every song in the album. There are energetic and loud songs, melodramatic songs with slightly broken English, and suggestive songs with bizarre titles. March’s singing voice is strong and clear, complimenting Mint and Sera well.

Afterwards, Mint says, “Nice work.”

“Yeah, that was really fun.” March says.

Sera nods.

Mint looks up at the strangely-shaped clock on the wall.

“Ah, it’s nearly ten,” She says, “Coffee, you should be heading home soon.”

“Yes, you’re right.” Coffee says, standing up and grabbing her purse from on top of the cabinet.

“Me and Clover should probably get going, too.” Daisy says sleepily, “I need to go to bed...”

“And my marks at school are probably going to suffer if I don’t head home now.” March says.

As everyone is about to leave, Birdie says, “Hey, it was a pretty successful night, right?”

“Yeah! Aren’t you glad I helped organise it?” Daisy says.

“Yes, we absolutely are.” Mint says.

“So we’ll be hosting another next week?” Birdie asks.

“Sounds like it!” Clover says.

“I’ll make sure to get more snacks for next time, then.” Daisy says, rubbing her eyes.

“Well, see you later, everyone.” Mint says.

## DAY 9: ICING

It's a quiet Tuesday morning. It's a teachers-only day at school, so Clover and Coffee are sitting around the yellow dining table in Daisy's kitchen, and Daisy is fiddling with the knobs on the oven.

"So, can you tell us why we're here?" Clover asks.

"Y'know the lovely old lady?" Daisy says, "Well, Coffee won't, but you definitely do, Clover."

Daisy whispers under her breath, "*Why do I even have to preheat this thing anyway?*"

"Yes, I do." Clover says.

"And you know how I said I would bake her a cake because she's so nice to us?" Daisy says.

"Well, what if she's at work today?" Clover asks, "It's only *us* who have the day off today, you know."

"She's old! She's probably retired!" Daisy says, "Okay, there. 180 degrees, regular bake."

"Daisy, are you very good at baking?" Coffee asks.

"I'm alright at it, yeah!" Daisy says.

"Daisy has a huge cookbook from the 70's," Clover explains, "And I have no clue how she still manages to use it, because half of the recipes require some type of alcohol."

"Yeah, it's really weird." Daisy says, "There's a recipe for a 'family-sized Christmas pudding', and it has, like, three tablespoons of brandy in it, I think."

"Oh, wow." Coffee says, "Then are the other recipes any good?"

"They're kinda bland, but they're fine." Daisy says, "I add quite a lot of other stuff to them, anyway."

Daisy opens a cupboard and takes out said cookbook, placing it in front of Clover and Coffee on the table. It has a bright-red cover with a photograph of a plate of 'tournedos provencale'. It's generic.

"Have a look through all of the cakes while you're waiting." Daisy says, flipping to the start of the 'cakes' section, "Count how many times you see the word 'sherry'."

Daisy takes down a piece of paper that's stuck to the fridge with a heart-shaped magnet. It seems to be a handwritten copy of a recipe from the book, with a lot of notes on the sides.

"We're not going to make anything with alcohol for the old lady, right Daisy?" Clover asks.

"Goodness no! That'd probably *kill* her." Daisy says, "Probably. And my parents don't drink anyway, so we have none."

Daisy grabs a metal mixing bowl from underneath the sink.

"I have a good recipe right here." Daisy says, "We're making her a basic vanilla cake, but with lots of sprinkles."

"In the actual cake part, or the icing?" Coffee asks.

Daisy smirks at her.

"Both!" She says.

"Isn't that kinda gross?" Clover asks.

"How so?"

"Well, sprinkles are just sugar," Clover explains, "So if you bake them into a cake, they're just going to melt."

"Oh, right. Yeah, that happened last time I used this recipe." Daisy says.

"You've tried this before, and nobody warned you about it?" Clover asks.

"My parents weren't home." Daisy explains, shrugging, "It was going to be a surprise for them."

“So you were also unsupervised?” Clover asks.  
“I’m fifteen! I’m not going to burn the house down.” Daisy protests.  
“You’re the clumsiest person I know!” Clover argues, laughing.  
“Well, nothing bad came of it, okay?” Daisy says.

A few minutes later, Clover, Daisy and Coffee are wearing cute aprons, each made of fabric with lots of candy-themed details. They’re standing eagerly in a row behind the counter.

“So, Clover,” Daisy says, reading through her modified recipe, “Can you gather the dry ingredients?”

She shows Clover the recipe, and Clover nods, venturing into the pantry.

“I’ll get the wet ingredients, and Coffee,” Daisy says, “Can you do the mixing?”

“Alright,” Coffee says, “Actually, when we do baking at school, I always end up doing the mixing for my group.”

“You’re prepared! Nice!” Daisy says.

Clover and Daisy place the ingredients all around the metal mixing bowl—flour, sugar, softened butter, vanilla-flavoured essence—and Coffee stirs everything together steadily with a wooden spoon.

“Now for the sprinkles!” Daisy says, walking out of the pantry with a heaped tablespoon of rainbow sprinkles.

“Are you sure you still want to add them after what I told you?” Clover asks.

“Of course.” Daisy says, dumping the sprinkles into the bowl.

After a bit more stirring, Daisy and Clover help Coffee to pour the mixture into a circular cake tin, and they work together to place it in the oven.

“That wasn’t too hard.” Coffee says.

“Of course not!” Daisy says.

“It would have taken my group an hour and a half to do all of that at school.” Coffee explains.

“Well, they’re always being forced to make stuff,” Daisy says, “And they probably wouldn’t want to be there in the first place.”

“In contrast, we’re all friends, and we’ve made this cake for fun together.” Clover says, “So it makes a bit more sense that we’d do it faster, right?”

“Yeah... Friends.” Coffee mutters.

“In about 40 minutes we should be taking it out of the oven, and I’ll wait a bit longer before icing it.” Daisy says, “I know a really easy way to make the icing with just icing sugar and water, but you guys can still help with that if you want to.”

“We tend to skip doing the icing in cooking because we run out of time,” Coffee says, “So I do really want to help you with it.”

“I don’t mind helping either.” Clover says.

“Cool!” Daisy says, “Well, in the meantime...”

Daisy, Clover and Coffee spend the next 40 minutes playing a multiplayer, on-foot racing game. For some reason, the only character driving a car seems to be the slowest character in the game. “Why do I keep ending up in last place?” Coffee asks sadly, once again selecting the girl driving the car.

“Because in the 90’s, girls couldn’t run fast.” Daisy says, laughing, “No, I’m actually not sure. She *does* have a speed boost instead of a jump, so maybe try using that more often.”

“What’s up with the unlockable characters?” Clover asks on the ‘character select’ screen. There are four character slots taken up with black squares instead of cute, smiling portraits.

“I’m just not very good at this game!” Daisy laughs, “But I found a website with lots of pictures of the extra characters, and we’re not missing out on much.”

“That’s fine, then.” Clover says.

Clover stares intently at her character for a few seconds.

“Awww!” She exclaims, pointing at the screen.

“What?” Daisy asks.

“He just winked!” Clover says.

Coffee and Daisy stare at Clover’s character as he rotates on the select screen, and every few seconds, he does, in fact, wink at the camera.

“Oh wow, I never noticed that!” Daisy says, “Wonder if it happens with every character?”

“I thought I saw it happen with another character who got first place in the last race,” Clover says, “But I wasn’t sure.”

“That’s really cute.” Coffee says.

After a few more races, Daisy says, “It should be about time for us to take that cake out of the oven.”

They head into the kitchen to find that the cake is looking alright.

“Nice!” Clover says, “I can do it.”

Clover puts a colourful oven mitt on one hand, and holds a red checked tea-towel in the other, and carefully takes the cake out of the oven. She places it on a wooden cutting board on the bench.

“Hold on, Clover,” Daisy says, “Can you put the cake on that plastic board there?”

Daisy points at a circular board on the opposite bench.

“No problem.”

Daisy explains to Coffee, “That way, we can put the plastic cover over the top, and it’ll be easier to transport!”

“I see.” Coffee says,

“While we wait for it to cool, could we play more games?” Clover asks.

“Yeah, I actually have a special one to show you!” Daisy says.

Seated in front of Daisy’s CRT again, the three watch the intro to this special game, which sees the grasshopper protagonist driving around in a little car and playing the violin, set to a vaguely relevant rap song.

“And then... Skip, skip, skip, skip, skip!” She says, tapping buttons repeatedly to quickly get through the story segment at the start, which is entirely in Japanese.

“I would have bought the first game, because I think it looks a lot better,” Daisy explains, “But I don’t own a 32X, so I wouldn’t be able to actually play it.”

“Did that one also not get a localisation?” Coffee asks.

“It did, but that was because it wasn’t text-heavy,” Daisy says, “And they needed a way to pad out the 32X’s game library *somehow*.”

Once in an actual gameplay stage, it’s abundantly clear that Daisy hasn’t played much of this game before.

“This game seems really complicated.” Clover says.

“I’m sure it’d be easier if I knew what the manual said.” Daisy says, shrugging.

“Can I have a go?” Clover asks.



Daisy hands her the controller.

"What's up with the violin?" Coffee asks, "Or the bubbles?"

"No clue." Daisy laughs.

After a while of wandering around different levels and missing collectibles, Clover places the controller down slowly.

"Enough *Super Tempo* for one day?" Daisy asks.

"I believe so." Clover says, ejecting the game disk and powering off the console.

They check on the cake sitting on the bench.

"Seems fine." Daisy says, poking it with one finger. She shrugs.

Daisy makes the icing for the cake—bright-pink, *also* filled with sprinkles—and skillfully (and surprisingly) ices the cake, explaining every step to Coffee, who watches intently.

"There you have it!" Daisy says, "However, dear Coffee, the waiting is not yet over!"

"W-What?" Coffee asks.

"We have to wait a bit longer for the icing to set," Clover explains, "And since it's warm today, it'll take much longer than usual."

"Aww man!" Daisy says, looking sadly at the glistening pink icing.

The three girls look through what's airing on television for a bit, stumbling upon a show in which a group of people are tasked with fixing up an old couple's overgrown backyard. There are a lot of fancy 3D models showing what they plan to do with it, and by the end of the episode they've successfully moved the ugly, rusted benches, chairs and tables away, and have mowed the lawn and tidied up the gardens.

"Do you ever wonder whether anyone watching these types of shows actually gets anything out of it?" Clover says, "Like, whether they pick up any knowledge about decorating or gardening."

"I don't think so." Coffee says, "I like watching these types of shows because it's nice seeing the before-and-after shots at the end."

"Hmm... I would never really expect you to like this sort of stuff, Coffee." Daisy says.

"It's mostly because there isn't much else to watch..." Coffee laughs awkwardly.

"Well... Do you ever learn anything from it?" Daisy asks.

"I've learned that these people *really* don't like the same sort of interior design as I do." Coffee explains, "Every house they encounter that *I* think is cute, *they* think is gross, and they proceed to paint over the walls with 'eggshell white' or 'soft beige'."

"Eww!" Daisy exclaims.

"I know." Coffee says, "I'd love to start my own interior-decorating show for girls who want cute rooms, but have strict parents, or not much money."

"I'd definitely watch it." Clover says, smiling.

"Hey, I bought a Mini DV camcorder a while ago!" Daisy says, "You wanna film something tomorrow afternoon?"

"Um... Well..." Coffee says, "I'd have to get some ideas first..."

"Oh, don't worry about it." Daisy explains, "Was just putting an idea out there."

Coffee thinks for a moment.

"Wait," Coffee says, "That *does* sound sort of fun."

Daisy smiles.

"Clover!" She says, standing up and pointing at Clover.

“Yeah?”

“You’re our new costume designer!” Daisy says.

“I am?” Clover asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Mhm! I’m the camerawoman, and Coffee’s the show host!” Daisy explains.

Coffee thinks for a moment.

“Oh! What if we mastered them to VHS, and sold copies to anyone coming to karaoke nights?”

She offers.

“Sorry, but I have no idea how that stuff works,” Daisy says, laughing, “But what if we had everyone gather around and watch *during* karaoke night?”

“That would work.” Coffee says, “Oh... But I’m not sure whether I’d be happy seeing everyone’s reactions to it with me there...”

“Don’t worry,” Clover says, “*All* of our friends value independent and amateurish forms of expression, so even if it’s kinda bad, they’ll probably still love it.”

“Yeah!” Daisy says, “It’s fun.”

A little while later, Daisy places the clear-plastic cover over the cake.

“Clover, do you think you could carry it?” She pleads theatrically, “I’m *much* too clumsy to transport it myself.”

“Fine.” Clover says, laughing, “While the old lady *does* live just down the street, it’s a good idea anyway.”

She lifts it up from the bench carefully, shifting it around in her arms to get it into a position that’s more comfortable to carry.

“Ready to go?” Daisy asks.

“Totally.” Clover says, attempting a thumbs-up despite both hands being preoccupied.

The trio head out the front door. The footpath outside, lined with cheerful dandelions and daisies, looks almost bright white in the glimmering midday sunlight. There are young children playing hopscotch and drawing with chalk, and Daisy waves to them and compliments them on their drawings.

“This street would be so nice...” Daisy says dreamily.

“Would’...?” Coffee mutters.

“Oh, you’ll see pretty soon.” Clover says ominously.

They near a particularly run-down house, with peeling mint-green paint, an overgrown garden, and a dark-brown deck that’s definitely in need of a replacement board or three. Sitting on this deck are a group of boys, perhaps a bit older than Daisy, Coffee and Clover. They’re wearing dirty tank tops and smoking cigarettes, laughing at rude jokes and high-fiving each other.

Just as the girls try to quickly walk past them, one shouts out, “Hey, it’s you girlies again!”

The particular usage of the word ‘girlies’ noticeably annoys Daisy.

“What do you guys want from us?” Daisy asks them, her chin jutting out and her hands on her hips.

“Not you, I want to talk to the one here who’s actually in high school.” The boy says, pointing at Clover, who doesn’t say a word. She glares at him.

Another boy chimes in, saying, “Ha! Yeah, any girl wearing a dress like *that*,”—he points at Daisy’s frilly green dress—“Isn’t worth our time.”

“Don’t you *dare* talk to me that way!” Daisy exclaims, “This dress costs more than your entire wardrobe, and you know that.”

“Yeah, I bet it costs a lot to import *your* kinky shit!” Another boy says, and the rest laugh.

“Uh huh! What type of men are you trying to impress?” A boy says, “*Pedos?*”

Another round of laughter.

“And she wears them in *public!*” The first boy loudly whispers, “Like she’s *trying* to be a target for who knows what!”

Daisy gives them another glare, one that would probably be enough to kill a small animal. It’s not of any use in this scenario, though.

“Enough, enough!” Clover yells, “You’re all *pathetic.*”

“And this is coming from, what, *fashion disaster* over here?” A boy says, “Pray tell, did you or did you not get out of bed looking like that?”

More laughter.

“I could be saying the same thing about you!” Clover says fiercely.

Somebody spies the cake that Clover is holding, and says, “Maybe women just aren’t suited to being out and about on the streets, especially looking like *that*, you know. Get back in the kitchen and bake us some more cakes, why don’t you?”

Clover holds the cake tighter to her chest than before.

“Um... Y-You know what?” Coffee says.

“What, pipsqueak?” A boy says, smirking.

“W-We’ve made this cake for someone, b-because we think that people should always try their hardest to be kind to everyone around them.” Coffee says.

Daisy quickly adds, “Yeah, and I think that makes *us* better people than *you* ever could be!”

“Precisely.” Coffee says.

The three quickly walk away from the group of boys, half of whom are laughing at them while the other half yell more insults, or show them the middle finger.

“That went better than expected.” Clover sighs once they’re out of earshot.

“Oh... T-Then I can’t imagine how bad your previous talks with them might have gone.” Coffee shudders.

“Don’t worry, we don’t let it get to us.” Daisy says, “I’m just glad that none of that was directed at you, Coffee.”

Clover gently nudges Coffee in the side.

“But now you have first-hand experience!” She says, laughing.

“It sucks, doesn’t it?” Daisy says.

“Yeah...” Coffee says.

“Just remember that those types of guys have no future ahead of them.” Clover reassures her,

“They’re just lonely losers scared of people who are different to them.”

“Yeah!” Daisy says, “They’ll never experience all of the awesome stuff we do as Spring Symphony!”

“Honestly, the people living on this street have been trying to get them kicked out for the few months they’ve been here,” Clover explains, “I bet it’s going to happen sometime soon.”

“That house should be condemned!” Daisy exclaims.

At the end of the street is the old lady’s house. In contrast to the house that the group of boys reside in, *her* house is painted a cheerful yellow, with a red roof and a red door, and a garden that’s well-maintained and overflowing with colourful, healthy flowers. She has a white-painted deck with blue chairs and a small, round table, and there’s a sliding glass door leading to the inside of her house. Birds chirp happily as they eat from a bird-feeder.

The old lady is sitting at the table, drinking tea. She's wearing a dark-green cardigan, and a light-green flower-patterned skirt that reaches her ankles. She has short, wispy white hair, kind eyes, and a lovely smile on her face as she sees the girls.

"Hello!" Daisy greets her, opening the gate in front of the house and making her way into the garden.

"Good morning, girls!" The old lady says, "Who is this?"

"Ah, Mrs Copper, meet Coffee." Clover says.

The old lady smiles at Coffee, but says, "Just call me Dawn, dear."

"O-Okay."

"Anyway, we baked you a cake!" Daisy says.

Clover places the container on the table, and takes the plastic cover off. The cake looks just as good as it did in Daisy's house.

"Oh, thank you so much, girls," Mrs Copper says, "What's the special occasion, though? I don't think it's my birthday..."

"We made it to thank you for all of the times you complimented our outfits," Clover explains, "Especially when we first started, and everyone else just looked at us weirdly."

"I see!" Mrs Copper says, "Well, I really appreciate it, girls."

She places a hand on Clover's shoulder.

"Would you be able to get a knife from the kitchen, Clover?" She asks, "I'm not wanting to attempt standing up just yet!" She laughs.

"Oh, no problem." Clover says. She opens the sliding glass door and carefully picks up a large knife from one of the drawers in the kitchen.

"Would you like me to cut it?" She asks, and after a nod of approval from Mrs Copper, she slowly cuts into the cake, making perfect, triangular slices.

"Oh, I'll grab some plates!" Daisy says as she, too, heads into the kitchen. She brings back some pretty white saucers, decorated with paintings of happy teddy bears and flowers. Daisy hands one to everyone, and Clover places a slice of cake on each saucer.

"You made this, hm?" Mrs Copper says, "It's very good!"

"Thank you! We all did, and it took a while." Daisy says, taking a seat on one of the chairs on the deck.

"Until you're completely confident baking, dear," Mrs Copper says, "It will for a long while." She stops to chuckle.

"Feel free to bake me more cakes in the meantime, though," She says, "This is lovely!"

After everyone has eaten their piece of cake, Clover helps Mrs Copper to stand up.

"Thank you, dear," Mrs Copper says shakily, bracing herself against the wall, "That would have taken me a while if you weren't here. Makes you wonder how I survive on my own, hm?" She chuckles.

Nobody else laughs.

Mrs Copper makes her way inside slowly, walking over to the living room, where there's a flat-screen TV on the wall and a shiny new DVD player sitting on the cabinet below it. The two couches in the room are a light yellow colour, and so is the wallpaper on the walls, which has pink rose patterns and tiny bumble bees all over. There's a small collection of plants sitting on a shelf just low enough on the wall for them to be easily watered, and their vines cascade over the front of the shelf like a vibrant green waterfall.

"You told me you liked movies, so I bought some when I went out to town in the weekend," Mrs Copper explains. She opens the cabinet and shows the girls the small collection of children's DVDs that are inside.

"Wow, thank you!" Daisy says, "So we can watch these here?"

"Yes, dear." Mrs Copper says, "Oh, and would you all like some lemonade?"

Daisy, Coffee and Clover all nod eagerly, making her laugh.

"Okay, okay. I'll get you some lemonade." She says, hobbling back to the kitchen.

One Mrs Copper is out of earshot, Coffee asks, "I-Is she alright?"

Daisy laughs. "She's just a bit lonely, I think. Maybe she wants grandchildren to spoil, but we're the closest she has to that."

"That's exactly why I feel a bit uncomfortable when she offers us lemonade," Clover explains, "And DVD players are expensive, especially for someone who only ever watches whatever's on TV."

"Yeah, but..." Daisy trails off quickly, "Okay, yes, maybe we're doing something bad, but I think she's just trying to be nice to us. I get the feeling she's been through a lot, too."

"What are you girls talking about?" Mrs Copper asks, opening the door. She's carefully carrying a small tray of plastic cups, all full of carbonated lemonade. She places the tray on top of the cabinet.

"Oh, it's nothing," Daisy says, picking up her cup and smiling, "Thank you."

"Have you decided on a movie?" Mrs Copper asks.

"Yeah, I think we'll watch..." Daisy looks through the DVDs in the cabinet, pulling out one that catches her eye, "...This one!"

Mrs Copper takes the DVD from Daisy and squints at the cover, saying, "Well, I watched a bit of it because I wasn't sure if it was appropriate, and it's a bit scary, so if you don't like it, you can always turn it off and watch something else, alright?"

"Don't worry," Clover says, spying the 'PG' label on the cover, "I think we'll be fine."

"Alright, dear."

Mrs Copper exits the room once again. Coffee picks up her cup and takes a cautious sip from it.

"It's also a simple fact that it's sorta fun to be treated like a kid again." Daisy explains, carrying on the conversation from earlier, "Like, all of the adults around me want me to 'think about my future', or 'act more mature'. What rubbish!"

"I can't deny that." Clover says, "How on Earth am I meant to get my driver's licence next year when I still spend such a big fraction of my spending money on plushies?"

"I agree." Coffee says, "Driving is scary."

"I'm a fragile girl! Let me eat chicken nuggets and look through cute magazines in peace." Daisy says, "Okay, let's see..."

Daisy flips the DVD case over in her hands. On the front it has a detailed illustration of two girls standing together, one wearing a pink dress, the other wearing a blue one.

"Looks cute!" Daisy says. She switches the TV and DVD player on and places the disk in the tray.

The movie is cutesy and lighthearted, and feels a bit like an adaptation of an old fairy tale. It seems to be a musical, because there's a lot of spontaneous singing, but it's all pretty solid.

Once the credits are rolling, Clover remarks, "That was... Inoffensive, I guess."

"I liked all the pretty set design." Coffee says, "The princess's bedroom was nice."

"Yeah, yeah," Daisy says, putting her arm around Coffee's shoulders, "These people understand what girls want: a pretty bedroom!"

Coffee nods.

"I watched a low-budget spy movie a while ago," Clover says, "And if nothing else, it included a pretty great sequence where you can see one of the girls' bedrooms, and it's super cute!"

Daisy says, "Wait, was that—"

"Yeah, it was the lesbian one." Clover says.

"Oh, yeah!" Daisy exclaims, "That scene with the really rough greenscreen work that you showed me absolutely *rocked!*"

"I know!" Clover exclaims.

Once they've put the DVD back in its spot in the cabinet and turned all of the electronics off, Coffee, Clover and Daisy say good-bye to Mrs Copper and make their way back home.

## DAY 10: JAM

It's the first day of November, and it's getting to Coffee particularly badly. Once home from an uncomfortably warm day at school, she's forced to lie prone on the floor of her bedroom in her plain summer pyjamas, with windows wide open and a large fan facing her, buzzing loudly. Because her parents are out shopping, Coffee is free to play her music as loudly as she pleases, but even the likes of Serani Poji's "One-Room Survival" are almost exhausting to listen to. The only thing that could save her from this would be—

Coffee's phone buzzes, and she rolls onto her back to check it. It's a message from Clover.

"would u like to get some icecream!! im suffering n i bet u are too."

Coffee lets out a sigh of relief, then spends the next forty seconds clumsily typing, "absolutely".

The girls meet outside a small corner store. There are children sitting outside on red picnic benches happily eating ice-cream and chatting with each other. There's a cheerful song playing from a speaker within the store.

"It's not even December yet! This is *outrageous!*" Daisy says, decked out in a frilly purple dress in spite of the heat. In contrast, Coffee and Clover are wearing far more suitable outfits.

"Mm, heatwaves *are* particularly nasty here." Clover says.

"I just hope it leaves us as quickly as it got here." Coffee says.

The three enter the store, and it's far cooler indoors than out. There are small shelves with all sorts of goods on them, from canned spaghetti, and small jars of rainbow sprinkles, to menstruation products, and all manner of colourful, tacky birthday party decorations. It has a distinctly dark and off putting atmosphere, but that doesn't matter in the slightest, as this place sells ice-cream. Not just the stuff you can find in the freezers that's occasionally cracked or misshapen, but also soft-serve berry ice-cream; there's a large, professional soft-serve machine by the counter, and a young man with soft, light-brown hair is using it, making ice-creams for two young boys who excitedly watch, speaking to their smiling mother in Chinese.

Coffee awkwardly makes her way over to the freezer full of regular ice-blocks, avoiding having to tell a stranger just what exactly she wants, but before she can get a good look at them, Daisy grabs her by the shoulders and steers her away from it so that they can wait in line with Clover.

"W-Why?" Coffee whispers.

"Coffee, you need to participate in something called 'social interaction.'" Daisy says, rather loudly.

"As brash as she's being," Clover says, "I've got to agree with Daisy on this one."

"*What...?*" Coffee says, utterly defeated.

Daisy puts a hand on her shoulder.

"Okay, maybe not right now," She says, laughing as she looks behind her at the people who have already joined the line behind them, "Just tell me what flavour you'd like."

"U-Um... Let's see..."—Coffee scans the menu on the wall in front of them—"B-Boysenberry?"

"Good taste." Clover says.

Clover gets a boysenberry-flavoured soft-serve, the same as Coffee, and Daisy gets a strawberry-flavoured one, disappointedly forking over a larger fraction of money than she'd first anticipated.

Once they're all seated outside at a picnic table, and hastily licking at their ice-creams before they melt, Daisy says, "I'm sure those were cheaper the last time I came here."

"They're very good," Coffee says, "I think it's worth it anyway."

"Yeah..." Daisy sighs.

"Why are *you* worrying?" Clover asks, "It'll be Christmas next month. Your grandparents are probably going to send you even *more* money."

"Oh. You're right." Daisy says, a big grin suddenly appearing on her face.

The girls spot March walking past, deep in thought. She's wearing an old, beige dress with strings of beads sewn along the bottom of the skirt, and a bright-red, long-sleeved shirt underneath. She's wearing blue sandals with flower details, and mismatched socks—one striped and one spotted. She has her long hair pinned back with much too many hair clips, but they give her outfit a refreshingly juvenile quality.

"Hey, March!" Daisy says, waving to her.

"Oh, hi there!" March says, smiling sweetly.

She walks over and sits down at the picnic table, taking great care to smooth out her dress as she does so.

"It's so hot today," March laments, "I've spent the afternoon looking at the fridge in envy."

"Honestly, so have I," Clover laughs, "I can't imagine hosting another karaoke night in this heat... We might have to do it outside!"

"March, where'd you get that dress?" Daisy asks her.

"Ah, I think it was from an op-shop in another town..." March pauses to think, "Yeah, I got it while I was on holiday last Summer."

"It's cute!" Clover says.

"Where did you go?" Coffee asks, "Um, like, during your holiday..."

"To the seaside," March explains, "There's a quaint little town called 'Unicorn Rocks', which is hidden away by the thick bush, and my auntie and uncle live there. Takes just a few hours to drive there from this town if you don't get lost on your way there."

"Interesting," Clover says, "What's there to do there?"

"I think there's a carnival that comes every few months," March says, "I always seem to miss it, though. The beach is very nice, very well-maintained... Oh, and there's an old mall there, and most of the stores there are open until midnight, so you can go there when there are barely any other shoppers around."

"That would be fun!" Daisy says.

"I assure you, it is." March says, "The only downside is that you have to plan your day around it."

"Mm... Hey, can I get you an ice-cream?" Daisy asks.

"Oh, yes please." March says, "Do they have blueberry?"

"I believe so!" Daisy says. She hops up and prances back into the store.

A few minutes later, she comes back with a bright-purple soft-serve for March, and she carefully hands it to her.

"Thank you!" March says.

"No problem," Daisy says.

Later that evening, Coffee, Clover and Daisy spend some more time playing video games at Daisy's place, per Coffee's slightly nervous request. As it gets darker, it also gets cooler, so they only need to have a window open to prevent them from feeling absolutely miserable.

"I wonder if there are any games about home decoration," Coffee says, looking through the game disks Daisy owns, "And, like, cute ones, not ones that require you to fix up a house that should have been demolished years ago."



"The closest thing I can think of are, like, girly dress-up games," Daisy says, "Which, hey, they might be your speed, but I don't know..."

"I've been looking wistfully at the latest *Style Savvy* game every time I see it in the electronics store." Coffee says, blushing.

"Well, I know what to get you for your next birthday!" Daisy says.

"On the topic of home decoration," Clover says, "Have you had any interesting ideas about what to include in the little video we're making, Coffee?"

"Ah, yes, plenty!" Coffee says, "I've been writing down the things I like about any given house or store that I visit, it's all in my notebook."

She walks out into the living room, where her brown back-pack is sitting, and takes her fuzzy green notebook out of it. Coffee goes back into Daisy's room, and shows the two what she's written.

"Wow, there's so much stuff in here!" Daisy exclaims, "We'll definitely be able to work something out at this rate!"

"Yeah... Daisy, do you know where to purchase tapes from?" Clover asks, "Because I have absolutely no clue."

"Oh, my camcorder came with a blank one!" Daisy says, "If I'm remembering correctly, we can record, like, an hour and a half of stuff onto it!"

"That'll be plenty." Clover says, "What do you say, Coffee? Do we start filming this evening?"

"Maybe tomorrow...?" Coffee says, "I'll need to collect some stuff for it, and maybe we could film it at my place instead, because my room doesn't have much stuff in it."

"*Right*, good call!" Daisy says, "What's the situation with your parents, though?"

"It's Tuesday tomorrow, so they'll both be at work." Coffee says.

"Great!" Daisy says, "Would you like some time to prepare this evening?"

"Oh, yeah," Coffee says, "I probably *should* get back home and tidy up. Yes."

Coffee hops up and takes her bag from the living room.

"See you tomorrow, then!"

## DAY 11: KITTEN

Coffee awkwardly drags a plastic bag full of empty cans, colourful beads, and random bits of ribbon and fabric through the front door of her house, finally dropping it in the centre of her bedroom with a sigh of relief. After turning the fan on, she then looks through all of the CDs she has—Sonic Coaster Pop’s ‘Super Miracle Circuit’, and a few albums by Serani Poji she’s borrowing from Daisy—and decides on Serani Poji’s ‘Manamoon’ for background music. While it’s not of utmost priority, it’ll sure make the video feel a bit nicer.

Coffee checks her watch. It’s 4:30, about an hour since she got home from school. She picks up her phone, which is sitting on her dressing table, and after a few minutes of thinking things over, she messages Clover, saying “all ready i think, you two can come over soon”.

In under five minutes, Coffee hears the doorbell ring and rushes to open the door for Clover and Daisy. They’re smiling.

“Afternoon!” Daisy says.

She rummages around in the bag she’s carrying, and pulls out the camcorder. It’s grey, and pretty generic, but it has the capability to do some magical things.

“Nice!” Coffee says, “Um, well, welcome to my house... I guess I’ll lead the way to my room.”

She does just that, and the three sit down on the carpet around the plastic bag.

“Your room’s cute!” Daisy says, craning her neck around to get a good look at everything.

“Ah, it’s the best I can do under the roof of people who don’t love cute things nearly as much as I do.” Coffee explains.

“It’s a good blank canvas at least.” Clover says.

Coffee nods her head.

“Okay, can you give me a good outline of what’s happening in this video?” Daisy asks, “Like, what decorations have you got here, and what order are they going to come up?”

Coffee explains everything, Clover hands her the outfit she’s put together for her, and before long they’ve already gotten to filming. Coffee’s not quite a *natural* in front of the camera, but she’s rather good at reading from the little cards she’s written for herself, even with little practice. It goes well for a group of friends with no prior experience, with Daisy steadily filming and zooming in despite the camcorder not being on a tripod, and Clover quickly pausing each song at every cut and unpausing them when Daisy begins filming again, making sure that it’s as seamless as possible.

The final video ends up being just over seven minutes, and the girls smile as they watch it back.

“Could use some editing, but we don’t have the equipment for that.” Daisy laughs.

“It’s cute! I like it a lot.” Clover says.

“Mm. I think...” Coffee says, “I think I did well.”

“Oh, totally!” Daisy says, “I wasn’t sure whether you’d be fine in front of the camera, but you did well!”

Coffee blushes.

“Excited to share this with Spring Symphony on Sunday?” Clover asks her.

“I guess so,” Coffee says, then she shakes her head, saying, “Yes. I’m proud of this, and I think you two should be as well.”

“That’s the spirit!” Daisy says, “And I’m sure everyone’s going to love it.”

“Really?” Coffee asks.  
Daisy nods her head, grinning.

## DAY 12: LOVELY

At 8:45 on the next Sunday night, Daisy, Coffee and Clover have successfully connected the camcorder to the TV in the headquarters, and are now watching back their footage once again. “Thank you, internet!” Daisy exclaims, closing her laptop and flopping into the orange armchair. “Who knew that there were tutorials for dark magic on the web?” Clover laughs.

Coffee intently watches the video once again.

“Do you think the sound’s okay?” Coffee asks anxiously, “Will they be able to understand what I’m saying?”

“Well, if they can’t,” Daisy says, “You’ll be here to tell them!”

Coffee shrugs.

Birdie comes into the room, stretching their arms above their head.

“So, what’s up with your new indie horror movie?” They ask, and upon receiving puzzled looks from the three girls, they laugh and say, “No, I’m pulling your leg! I have no idea what you’re going to show us.”

“I think everyone’s going to love it!” Daisy says.

After eating biscuits and lounging around Mini Tunes for fifteen minutes, they officially open for the second ever Spring Symphony ‘karaoke’ night.

“You know the drill, everyone!” Birdie says, walking around the main room, “Same people on CD collecting, and I think... Coffee should man the cash register out front first.”

“Why me?” Coffee asks.

“It’s your video, right?” Birdie asks, “Shouldn’t you be the one to tell visitors about it?”

After thinking for a moment, Coffee says, “Yes. That’s right.”

She hurries off to the entrance room with much more confidence than last time.

“What did you guys do to her?” Birdie laughs.

“No clue.” Clover says.

March comes in at 9:00 on the dot. She’s clad in a floral dress over a light-green blouse, with ripped red stockings, and wooden clogs covered with brightly-coloured, intricate paintings of butterflies. She’s carrying the same bag as last time, with two new keychains—the cheap kinds you get while on vacation—one in the shape of an “M” that’s purple and sparkly, and one that’s rectangular with flashing red text spelling the name “Mary”.

And for just a moment, she seems a bit prettier and cooler than before.

“Evening, Coffee!” March says, grinning.

“Hi.” Coffee says quickly.

“I’ve been really excited for tonight,” March explains, placing her coins on the table, “So I burned a CD with a bunch of my favourite songs on it. I realised that there weren’t a lot of albums I recognised here.”

“That’s a good idea, then.” Coffee says, and when she realises she’s been staring at March for just a bit too long, she says, “Oh, um... If you don’t mind me asking, what’s up with that keychain?”

“Oh, this?” March says, holding up the ‘Mary’ keychain, “Got it a year or two ago when I was visiting my cousins. I think they all got ones with their names, but since ‘March’ is a bit of a strange name, I had to go with what was the closest.”

March laughs, and Coffee does too.

"It's, uh... It's cool to be a part of a group with equally weird names, huh?" March says.  
"That's true." Coffee says slowly, "I never really thought about it, though."  
"Well, I gotta go and see if this CD works," March says, opening the door to the main room, "Talk to you in a bit!"  
There's a lasting weight to the air that's difficult to explain, even after the door closes.

Once Neptune has arrived at around ten-past, and Sera, at a hefty half-past, the group squeezes into the headquarters to watch the video. Coffee stands to the right of the television to address Spring Symphony.  
"Uhm.. Hold on..." Coffee mutters as she sifts through unorganised cards she's written for herself, eventually saying, "Alright. This video that Daisy, Clover and I made... It's all about how you can make cute decorations for your room, um, even if you have strict parents, or not a lot of money."  
"Sick!" Birdie says, "This is way cooler than any horror film."  
"You're not fooling anyone, Birdie." Mint says, putting a hand on their shoulder.  
Daisy goes to stand next to Coffee, saying, "We're pretty happy with it for what it is, and we hope you enjoy it!"  
She starts playing the video on the television.

Coffee is seen standing in the middle of her rather empty-looking bedroom as a "My Love, Marshmallow" by Serani Poji plays faintly in the background.  
Coffee reads from a card, "Hi there. I'm Coffee, and I really like interior design. But not the bland stuff you see on TV."  
There's then a shot of Coffee sitting on her bed.  
"What most people think is 'inspired' or 'trendy' just isn't fun!" She reads, "So I made this video for all of the people who love cute and fun design instead."  
She hops up off of her bed, and the camera zooms out, zooming in once again as Coffee makes her way over to her desk.  
"Let's start with something simple." She reads.  
It quickly cuts to a shot of a few cans lying on the light-purple carpet, still with their tomato sauce or baked-bean labels.  
Coffee says from offscreen, "You can turn any old cans you have into cute pencil holders, with stickers, paint, or even ribbons." She adds, "Just make sure they're cleaned out first, and that they're not too sharp."  
It then cuts to Coffee standing by her window, saying, "One thing that I really like to do is tie my curtains with little ribbons."  
There's a shot of the open curtains without, and then with, ribbons tied around them.  
"It's very simple, and stuff like ribbon isn't too expensive." Coffee explains, "There's a good chance you have some in your house right now!"  
Then it cuts to a shot showing a small wall shelf with a few ceramic figurines of teddy bears participating in various outdoor activities.  
"You can find all sorts of cute figurines, such as these, from just about any op-shop," Coffee explains from offscreen, "And, in my experience, they're often not very expensive. I got these guys for less than ten dollars!"  
It cuts to another shelf, this time with a few vintage plushies on it.

“The same goes for plushies,” Coffee says, “As something that’s often thought of as just a children’s toy, they can also be a nice and cost-effective decor element. Makes your room look a bit more cosy, you know?”

Then there’s a shot of Coffee’s bed. She’s sitting on it once again, and looking at the camera.

“Your bed is often the largest piece of furniture in your room, so if it doesn’t look nice, it tends to make the rest of your room look bad, too.” She explains, “While I don’t have a particularly cute duvet cover, things like hand-knit blankets, or colourful quilts can look nice if a new duvet cover is out of your price range.”

It cuts to another wide shot of Coffee’s room, where she’s standing in the centre again, and she says, “I know it’s not much, but I hope you can take something away from this video, especially if you’re like me, and don’t have all too many options. Hope this helps. Good-bye!”

Coffee waves to the camera with both hands before the video ends.

“Good job, girls!” Mint says.

“Yeah, I’m impressed.” Birdie says.

“You did great, Coffee!” March says, clapping her hands.

“Mm. I like it.” Sera mutters.

“Thank you, thank you!” Daisy says, taking a dramatic bow in front of everyone before quickly sitting down again.

The festivities commence, and before long everyone’s holding a cup of soda—this time it’s lemonade, in a strangely saturated yellow colour—or mumbling the lyrics of songs on March’s CD as she passionately sings them with her entire chest.

Eager to get (what she calls) a duet in with everybody there, she asks Coffee, “Would *you* like to give it a go?”

“Um... Wait, what?” Coffee says, crash-landing back to reality after staring off into space.

“I don’t think I’ve heard you singing anything,” March says, “Not tonight, *or* last time. So do you want to sing something with me?”

Coffee blushes, though she isn’t sure quite why.

Swallowing, she says, nervously laughing, “Well... Why not?”

“Great!” March says, clasping her hands together, “Do *you* want to choose a song?”

“I can see if there’s something I like...” Coffee says, making her way out of the headquarters.

Suddenly she spots a CD she recognises, maybe from somewhere online. It has a lyrics sheet, so she brings it back into the room and starts playing it.

The rowdy chatter lowers in volume just slightly as the guitars and pounding drum beat kick in.

“We’ll alternate lines,” March explains as the intro plays, looking down at the lyrics sheet, “I’ll do the first, you do the second. Okay?”

Looking down at the floor, Coffee says, “Got it.”

*“Again, with again, it’s hard,”* March sings.

She then passes the microphone to Coffee so *she* can sing, *“I’m pretending my best,”*

Then March holds the microphone between them so they can yell,

*“And you never saw the sky!”*

All throughout the song she feels a strange sensation, though. It is, without a doubt, nervousness, but for some reason it’s heightened whenever March looks up at her with a sweet smile, silently making sure Coffee’s still having fun.

Once the final chord is played, light applause sounds from the rest of Spring Symphony, and the two take sips of soda from their cups.

“That song wasn’t at *all* structured like most songs of its kind are,” March explains, “So I think I did pretty well for not having heard it before.”

She laughs.

“Ah, yeah... We should have talked it over first.” Coffee says, “I just wanted to sing whatever I saw first that had a lyric sheet...”

“Eh, totally acceptable.” March says, “Would you like to look for something together? It’s not very late; we can sing plenty more songs.”

Coffee nods her head.

The two exit the headquarters, and look around the main room for a bit.

“You seem like an interesting person, Coffee.” March says as she looks through a shelf of miscellaneous CDs.

“Ah, I’m... Really not.” Coffee says, “At the very least, you seem *far* more interesting than me.”

“Hey, I would never be able to make my own home-decor show!” March says.

“It’s not quite a show...” Coffee says, “It was just an experiment.”

“Well, did you enjoy working on it?” March asks.

“Yes, greatly.” Coffee says.

“Why not make more episodes, then?” March suggests.

“Well... I’m worried I might run out of ideas,” Coffee explains, “And my room is really small, so what if I fill it up with the things that I make or buy for it? It’s really bland, too, and I hate my curtains—”

“Hold on.” March interrupts her, “Would it be okay if I told Birdie all of this?”

“Why?”

“Yes or no.” March insists.

“Yes, I suppose.” Coffee says.

“Great!” March says, rushing into the headquarters.

After a while—maybe five minutes, maybe fifteen—March calls out for Coffee to come back into the headquarters.

“Everyone! We’ve made a decision.” Birdie says, and everyone in the room is quiet.

“Wait, what?” Coffee mutters, looking around.

“So, you know about Unicorn Rocks, right Coffee?” March asks.

“Yes, you told us about it earlier in the week.” Coffee says.

“What if, hypothetically speaking,” March says, “We visited it as a group so we can help you make another episode of your show?”

“And we wouldn’t *just* work on it,” Birdie adds, “We’d go sightseeing, and attend every tourist trap we encounter, too! All in good fun.”

“There... *Huh?*” Coffee stammers, “I... I don’t know how that would work.”

“Let me answer all of the questions running through your head right now.” Birdie says, “March’s auntie and uncle run a lodge. For, like, tourists. And they’d probably be fine with letting all of us stay there if we were contained in, like, one or two rooms.”

“Fairly large rooms with en suite bathrooms, mind you,” March reminds them, “And they have plenty of spare mattresses, so nobody’s getting anime’d into the same bed.”

Mint snorts from in the corner.

“For actually getting there, we’ve got our lovely friend Neptune to help out.” Birdie says, gesturing towards Neptune, who waves sheepishly at Coffee.

“His job has him delivering all sorts of stuff, so they obviously trust him with driving great lengths.” Birdie explains, “Dude’s got his full licence, and our mysterious ‘friend with a theremin’ *might* be willing to let us use their big van. If not, then we all might have to sit on the back of Neptune’s pickup.”

Coffee looks at them with a horrified look on her face.

“Just kidding!” Birdie says, “I’ll sort something else if they won’t let us. Friends with theremins are pretty generous, though.”

“H-How am I going to get my parents to let me do this, though?” Coffee asks.

“Tell ‘em it’s a school trip!” Birdie says, “Mint’s great at making fake school notices, ‘n stuff like that; it’s come in clutch multiple times before.”

“Will they believe me...?” Coffee asks.

“Sure they will! You don’t seem to spend much time with them anyway.” Birdie explains, “Just tell them last-minute that you forgot to give it to them earlier, or something, and get them to sign it. Or whatever parents do.”

“I... I can try?” Coffee says.

“So you’re on board for it?” March asks.

Coffee looks around at everyone in the room. She takes a deep breath, then laughs at how bizarre this situation is.

“Sure!”



## DAY 13: MIRACLE

“Coffee,” Coffee’s mother asks, looking down at the piece of paper in her hands, “When were you given this?”

“At the end of last month,” Coffee says, her rehearsed lines practically flowing out of her mouth, “And I’m sorry I didn’t give it to you earlier.”

“But do you even *want* to go on this trip?” Her mother asks.

“It’s not sports-related at all.” Coffee explains, “It’s more... Getting experience in the big city, and stuff like that.”

“What do you mean by *that*?”

“Well, um, we’ll be visiting some big, historically important places, and a lot of museums,” Coffee says, “The whole trip has a focus on World War I and ANZAC, and I really want to learn about that stuff. I... Find it interesting.”

“What about the social aspect?” Her mother asks, “What if you get put into a group with people you haven’t talked to, and then have to work with? You’ll have to sleep in the same room as your entire social sciences class, too. Well, the girls anyway. It’s for an entire week!”

“P-Please stop worrying about me so much.” Coffee says, “I’m... I’m testing myself. Trying to grow.”

Her mother sighs.

“If you’re not going to cry yourself to sleep for a week straight afterwards,” She says, “Then I suppose it’s fine.”

“I promise, I’ve changed.” Coffee says, smiling.

“I’m glad, dear.” Her mother says, also smiling.

She signs the piece of paper, and instructs Coffee to put it in her school bag. This is *not* what Coffee does. She folds it up and puts it in the pocket of her hoodie to proudly show to Spring Symphony the next day.

She lies on her bed and messages Birdie with a “mission accomplished”.

Birdie, almost instantly, messages back with a happy emoticon, giving a thumbs-up.

They say, “friend with a theremin is on board + so r marches peeps.”

This prompts an excited flapping of hands and kicking of feet from Coffee, before she messages back with “im excited to visit the beach.”

Birdie ominously says, “ive looked it up + its so much more than that. trust me.”

Coffee gets up from her bed and starts frantically searching through her closet, her heart racing in excitement. She digs out a black suitcase with white polka-dots all over, clearing out the old toys inside and filling it with all of her favourite shirts... Of which there are not a lot. She settles on whatever she has that’s not hideous, folding up her houndstooth trousers, a dark-blue dress with star details that makes her look a bit too mature for comfort, and long, black pants that get stuck under the back of her shoes far too often. She covers these and more with two different cardigans, one pink and one dark green.

Shoes... That's right! She brings out a pair of shiny, black mary-janes she's had forever, and only recently they've begun to properly fit her. She wraps them up in a bit of fabric to preserve their loveliness for a bit longer, and places them in the suitcase. Then she grabs a pair of floral blue jandals to wear on the beach, and a pair of old red sneakers that seem to always look huge, like clown shoes. In they both go as well.

She digs around a bit more, unearthing a nearly unused, bright-red swimsuit she had bought last Summer in the hopes she would finally start swimming. It was big back then, but by now it seems to fit her fine, at least as she holds it up in front of her mirror. Then she imagines Spring Symphony seeing her wearing it, and she promptly tosses it back in the closet. Then, five minutes of thinking later, she grabs it again, stuffing it in the suitcase below all of her clothes and shoes.

Coffee puts a pair of cheap earbuds, her DS, an old book, and a few pads (just in case!) into a small tote bag; She'll put the rest of her toiletries in this bag the morning of the trip.

Then she collapses into bed and naps for the rest of the afternoon.

## DAY 14: NUMBERS

Coffee waves good-bye to her mother, far earlier than usual, rolling her suitcase across the footpath gently in the direction she normally goes to get to school. Once she's around the corner, though, she makes her way over to Mini Tunes instead.

Parked outside of the store is the van, owned by someone whom Coffee doubts she'll ever meet in her lifetime. The thing is *large*, and it's painted a bright-orange colour, with blue and green flowers, birds and various insects all over.

Birdie hops out of it, closing the sliding door on the side. They notice Coffee, and wave to her. She checks left and right, before jogging over to the other side of the street to speak to them.

"Pretty neat, huh?" Birdie says.

"Yeah..." Coffee says quietly, admiring the illustrations on the sides.

"It's pretty spacious inside, too." Birdie says, opening the door again and hopping inside.

Coffee follows, and yes, there is a lot of room. Plenty of comfortable-looking seats, fold-out trays, large windows, and even overhead shelves for storing bags. It's a bit strange that a regular person would own such a vehicle.

"Space for everyone!" Birdie says, "I've gone on another road trip in this beast before, and it was *really* great."

The two head into Mini Tunes, whose main room is full of suitcases, backpacks, and every member of Spring Symphony idly chatting with one another, all wearing *slightly* more casual outfits than normal. Coffee can see Daisy talking with Mint about her camcorder, and Clover attempting to strike up conversation with Sera. It's a bit overwhelming for Coffee, but she can tell they won't be staying here for too long.

"Coffee's here!" Birdie chants, "Road trip! Road trip! Let's get going!"

Everyone happily files out of the room, through the entrance room and out onto the footpath, awkwardly carrying their bags. Birdie is rather good at organising everyone, helping them find spots to sit and places to put their bags.

Neptune is sitting in the driver's seat, with Birdie in the passenger seat and Mint right behind them. Coffee is sitting next to March, and they're right across from Clover and Daisy. Behind Clover and Daisy is Sera, who doesn't seem to mind in the slightest that they're sitting alone.

"Before we begin, and I regret not asking this beforehand..." Birdie asks, standing up and facing everyone in the vehicle, "...But does anyone here experience car sickness?"

March raises her hand, saying, "Lightly. It's only when I try to read a book or play video games in a moving vehicle, though."

"We'll be going around a lot of winding corners... Do you need any medication or anything?" Birdie asks.

"I'll be fine. I visit my auntie and uncle quite often." March says, "Oh, Coffee, can we swap places? I like looking out the window... I don't have much else to do."

"No problem." Coffee says.

They swap seats in a rather haphazardly manner.

"Okay!" Birdie yells, "Road trip! Road trip!"

“Road trip! Road trip!” Daisy echoes.

Neptune starts the engine.

“I might be going kinda slow, since I’ve only ever driven this thing a few times before,” He explains, “But that way you’ll all be a bit safer, I guess.”

“It’s no problem, man!” Birdie says, giving him a thumbs-up.

Birdie rolls down their window, pokes their head out of it, and yells, “Road trip! Road trip!”

“Birdie, don’t!” Mint hisses, laughing, “It’s barely 7:00 yet!”

“We can’t receive complaints if we’re gonna be outta here in fifteen minutes!” Birdie says.

“You’re so immature, Birdie!” Mint says, “I love you.”

“I love you, too!” Birdie says, grinning.

As they make their way out of town and onto the highway, Coffee tries her best to talk to March.

“Um... Hey, March,” She asks, “What are you looking forward to the most on this trip?”

“Well... I’m excited to help out with the next episode of your show,” March says, “That is, if there’s anything for me to do.”

“I’m sure we can fit you in somewhere.” Coffee says, smiling.

After a moment too long, March says, “Uh, I’m also excited to see my auntie and uncle again so soon. They don’t have children of their own, but they’re very kind to me. My uncle has a big collection of VHS tapes with all sorts of movies on them, around two per tape, I think. And he has a big book cataloguing them, with codes and stuff. It’s really something!”

“Would we be able to see that while we’re there?” Coffee asks.

“I’d think so, yes.” March says, “Ooh, and my auntie has the recipe for a type of cake my great-grandmother would make, called ‘favourite cake’. It’s chocolate-y and very sweet, covered in bits of coconut.”

“W-Would she be able to make some for us?” Coffee asks.

“Maybe... Yeah, I don’t think it’s too difficult.” March says, “Whenever we would visit my great-grandmother, she would always send us home with a container of favourite cake, so it can’t be too hard to whip up on short notice.”

After a moment, Coffee nods awkwardly.

On a rather empty, long road just off the highway, Neptune drives a bit slower, allowing Birdie to stand up.

They say to March, “Hey, could you help with directions? We can swap places if you want.”

“Oh, alright!” March says.

She moves to sit in the passenger seat, and Birdie sits next to Coffee.

In this new spot, Birdie says to Sera, “You alright back there?”

“Oh. Yes.” Says Sera, shifting in their seat.

Then Birdie asks Neptune, “Hey, dude! Can you play that CD on the dashboard?”

“Wait, what?” He asks, still focusing on the winding road ahead.

“It’s wrapped in paper!” Birdie explains, “To prevent scratching!”

“Hold on...” Neptune mutters, driving until he gets to an area where he can pull over.

He puts the CD in the CD player, then turns it down when he realises it’s on max volume. The first song is the one that March and Coffee sang together on Sunday. It makes Coffee feel a bit strange hearing it again.

“I’ve gotten a bunch of your favourite songs and burned them all to one CD!” Birdie says. They fold their arms and grin.

“That’s really thoughtful.” Clover says.

“D’you have a tracklist?” Daisy asks excitedly, hopping up and down in her seat.

“Nah, it’s all a mystery!” Birdie says, “More fun that way.”

March can be heard humming along with the song happily. Coffee joins in.

She looks out the window, and the scenery around her has changed from the fun and colourful town to a lush and gorgeous forest, packed with tall native trees with trunks covered in moss, and large, heart-shaped ferns and the colourful flowers and leaves of other plants. It’s nothing short of amazing to Coffee, somebody who otherwise detests any sort of trip—with classmates, or with family members—but now, alongside Spring Symphony, she’s ecstatic to be here. Rolling down her window just a bit, she can hear the faint chirps of birds over the sound of the engine, and she catches glimpses of them, brightly-pigmented stars twinkling in the green night sky.

Neptune pulls up beside a small gas station that, all things considered, looks to be in rather good condition, despite being surrounded by nothing but trees.

“Doesn’t look like they get many customers...” Clover mutters.

“I’m gonna fill up,” Neptune explains, “If you guys wanna buy some snacks or whatever, now is a good time to do that.”

“Okay, everyone!” Birdie says, standing up once again, “Single-file now! And Daisy, if any creepy old men try to talk to you, insult them with every cuss word you know, even if they seem normal!”

“Roger that!” Daisy laughs.

Spring Symphony make their way out of the vehicle and into the store, one by one. There are a few Filipino tourists crowded around a fridge, who all turn to stare and point when the group enters the store, but other than them and the tired-looking cashier, there doesn’t seem to be anyone else there. Spring Symphony quickly splits up to scavenge through shelves and drink fridges in search of their favourite snacks.

Coffee walks over to a shelf with many bags of chips on it. Quite a few are strangely-flavoured or have non-English text on their bags. She picks up a bag with photo-realistic images of pea pods on the front that are covered in shiny water droplets.

Daisy comes over to take a look, and says to Coffee, “Oh, I’ve tried those before! They *do* actually taste like peas! But, like, in a good way.”

“I might try them, then.” Coffee says, turning the bag over to look at the back.

Clover walks over and says, “Daisy’s a weird-flavoured-chip connoisseur.”

“Yeah! Whatever that means.” Daisy says.

Coffee grabs a can of cherry cola from one of the big fridges, and a pack of grape-flavoured bubble gum, and after Sera, Daisy and Clover have bought their snacks, it’s her turn to. She nervously places her things on the counter and rummages around in her purse, quickly finding the right amount of cash and placing it on the counter as well. The cashier says nothing, perhaps being a quiet type like Coffee, and quickly counts up the money before handing her things back to her. Coffee manages a quiet “thank you” before heading back outside and into the van.

“What did you get?” March asks her. Having gone in and out of the store fairly quickly, she now kneels on the passenger seat, resting her chin on the top of the headrest as she looks back at Coffee.

“Um... Chips, gum, and cherry cola.” Coffee says, showing her each item, her hands shaking just a bit.

“Cool!” March says, “I packed my own snacks, but I remembered they sold comics here, so I picked up an issue of a series I used to really like.”

“I-Is it any good?” Coffee asks.

March turns around, sitting normally in her seat. She opens up her comic book.

“Well, it’s a lot better than where it was at last time!” March laughs, “The art’s gotten better, and the writing’s really great now. So, I guess, yeah!”

“Oh, could I have a look at it?” Coffee asks.

“Sure!”

March stands up, comic book in hand, and sits down in the empty seat next to Coffee... A bit too closely. Their shoulders touch, and looking upwards would make their faces dangerously close to one another. So instead, Coffee looks down at the pages of the comic sitting between them.

It’s colourful and fun, with lots of action and cool quips. None of the characters in the comic look familiar to Coffee, except for the main character, who seems very cocky, making fun of his enemies before even thinking about attacking them.

March flips through a few pages quickly before going back to her seat.

She says, “Cool, right?”

“Um. Yes.” Coffee says quickly.

Once everyone’s back in the vehicle, happily munching on chips or candy, Neptune starts it up again, backing out onto the main road. March helps him a lot more with navigating the area, expertly guiding him around corners and through tunnels. Peering out of her window, Coffee can now see the tall cliffs and mountainous rock formations, covered in bright-green grass, like icing on a cake. Sparsely spread out among the hills are rather nice-looking but near-identical holiday homes, each with a white patio and a smattering of conical plants and flowers. What’s especially lovely, though, is the ocean. Once again, it’s something that Coffee only ever sees very rarely, so watching the vibrant blue water wash onto the glimmering white sand is mesmerising.

Once they’ve made their way into town, though, it becomes clear what Birdie meant in their message; lining the roads, between every beach house and convenience store, or squeezed into every abandoned corner, are large, decommissioned trains.

There are ones still with their original bright red, green or blue paint, and ones with none at all, stained a deep amber by rust and corrosion. There are ones with massive dents and holes, lying on their sides and overgrown with weeds and vines, and ones that stand proudly in backyards, painted with pictures of pretty flowers and exotic animals, taken care of as though they were household pets.

Seeing these, Coffee presses her face against the glass, and blinks hard, as though her eyelids are shutters. Birdie laughs at her, though they’re also noticeably excited about it.

With March’s directions, Neptune makes his way there and parks the van right outside the “Unicorn Rocks Lodge”. It’s rather tall with lots of big windows, definitely multi-story, and painted a soft coral colour, with a bright blue roof. Outside, it’s surrounded by a white picket fence, with well-maintained gardens of colourful flowers and conical bushes.

As Neptune’s about to walk inside, March grabs him by the arm, saying,

“We need to meet up with my autie and uncle first!”

So the group go over to a small house right next to the building, bright yellow in colour, with an almost identical garden out front. That is, except for the train, which is painted in tacky stripes of magenta and turquoise, and its identical carriages snake around the back of the building.

March knocks on the front door using a pink lion's-head knocker. Almost immediately, her auntie and uncle answer it, standing side-by-side.

They're far younger-looking than any member of Spring Symphony had assumed, perhaps being in their early 30's at most; the auntie has the exact same shade of blonde hair as March, tied back in a long ponytail. She wears a dark-brown blouse, and a long skirt made out of intricately-patterned fabric, with bright-orange fringe lining the bottom edge. The uncle, to match his messy, inky-black hair, wears a black cardigan over a tropical-patterned shirt, and orange-and-pink gingham pants. Despite being inside, he also wears a purple, wide-brimmed hat. They both have chunky brown sandals, and show off matching warm smiles.

"March, dear, we were so excited to hear you'd be visiting us so soon!" The auntie says, giving March a big hug.

"And with a big group of friends, no less!" The uncle says, scanning the colourful cast of characters who are standing in his front yard. He adds, "We're happy to have you all here."

"You seem like lovely people, March's auntie and uncle!" Daisy says, giving them a big grin.

"Ah, please call us by our first names." March's auntie says, "I'm Charlise."

"And I'm Spike!" March's uncle says, putting his hands on his hips.

In a rather comical fashion, Spring Symphony lines themselves up, and one by one they introduce themselves to Charlise and Spike. The group then enter the house, spilling out into the main room and aimlessly looking around at the peculiar decor.

March explains as she stands on the second step of the open spiral staircase, "My auntie and uncle are both train nerds—they met while watching trains pull into a station—and they moved here, because, well, where else do you go?"

While Sera, Mint, Birdie and Neptune stay downstairs to chat to Charlise and Spike, Coffee, Clover and Daisy follow her upstairs. The entire place is filled with all sorts of strange trinkets, no doubt things the two had collected throughout years of travelling, and each wall seems to be painted a different colour, and covered in tapestries, wood carvings or strangely-shaped mirrors. March leads the three into a room at the end of a hallway. It's rather small, with no furniture other than a bed and a small bedside table, with an old sheep plushie sitting at the end of the bed, and a band poster hanging on the wall above.

"And this is my room!" March says.

She sits down on the bed, and Clover, Daisy and Coffee do too, so they're in a small circle.

"I like this house. It's fun!" Daisy says.

"Yeah, I think every house in Unicorn Rocks is a bit quirky." March says, "I used to wish I could stay here forever, but now, being part of Spring Symphony, our town is just fine after all."

"It's really sweet that you feel that way." Clover says, "But I wonder if there *are* any J-fashion folks around here..."

"Probably!" March says, "I mean, our town is pretty unassuming, and yet look at how many people are here with us today! Just imagine how many there would be in a place like this!"

"We'll have plenty of time to look around." Clover says.

Before very long, Mint calls out from downstairs, "Girls! We're going to need your help!" Clover, Daisy, Coffee and March all rush downstairs, and into the living room, where they all sit down on the mismatched couches with everyone else.

"You're all here right before tourist season," Charlise explains, "So most of our rooms aren't booked yet. You've got quite a large group, so I'd suggest spreading out between two or three rooms."

"Completely free of charge, I might add." Spike says, "Anything for our niece and her friends!"

“Oh, thank you.” Mint says, “I was thinking that two rooms would be just fine for all of us, but what do you all think?”

“While two rooms might be able to house us comfortably,” Clover asks, “What about our bags?”

“Yeah, I brought, like, three!” Daisy exclaims.

“We might be able to set up an area for you all to keep your bags outside of your rooms,” Charlise suggests, “We have two rooms at the end of a hallway, so you could keep your bags at the end of that hallway instead of in your rooms.”

“What if our stuff gets stolen?” Daisy says, “I can’t afford that!”

“While none of our guests have ever been the stealing type... We *could* set up a little divider if you’d like,” Spike says, “And in the unlikely event that your stuff *was* stolen, we’ve got security cameras operating 24/7 in those hallways. You should be all good!”

“That’s a relief!” Daisy says, letting out a real sigh.

“What kind of stuff do you have in your bags, Daisy?” Charlise inquires with a curious look on her face.

“Mainly *Angelic Pretty!*” Daisy says.

“I see.” Charlise says, laughing.

With March leading the way, Spring Symphony make their way over to the lodge, placing their belongings at the end of the hallway, and getting comfortable in their rooms. These two rooms have been hastily prepared beforehand, with four mattresses per room, each with colourful quilts or knitted blankets, and plenty of pillows.

One room (where Neptune, Mint, Birdie and Sera are staying) is ocean-themed, with fish-shaped decorations all over the blue-and-white walls, and a bright-red, crab-shaped lamp in one corner.

The other (where Clover, Daisy, March and Coffee are staying) is garden-themed, with flower- and rabbit-shaped decorations, pastel green walls, and lots of colourful fake plants.

Neptune immediately sits down on a mattress in the corner of their room, saying, “I think I’m going to sleep for the rest of the afternoon.”

“Same here, I think.” March says.

With Birdie’s help, she carefully lifts herself out of her wheelchair and onto another mattress.

“Sorry I won’t be there while everyone’s exploring this afternoon.” Mint says, laughing, “I think Neptune and I are both exhausted.”

Neptune nods sheepishly.

“No worries, guys!” Birdie says, “We’ll be here for a week, so there’s always tomorrow.”

Birdie looks over at Sera, who is quietly looking around at the decorations in the room.

“What about you, Sera?” Birdie asks.

“Ah, yeah. I’ll come with you guys.” Sera says.

Birdie gives them a thumbs-up.

In the other room, the four girls are hanging about—having drinks of water and eating snacks, getting changed or touching up their outfits, grabbing their purses, or just chatting about whatever—when Birdie knocks on their door. Clover answers, opening it just a little bit.

“It’s only me ‘n Sera who’ll be going into town from our group,” They say, “But I take it you four are happy to come as well?”

They receive a resounding “yes” from everyone in the room.

“Okay, good to know!” Birdie says.

“What would be a good time for us all to be ready?” Clover asks.

“Eh...” Birdie looks at their green-plastic watch, “In twenty minutes? Is that fine?”



Nodding her head, Clover says, "That sounds okay, yes."

Once everyone is ready, they stride out onto the streets of Rosemary Glade, Unicorn Rocks. It's very cute and small, with red-brick buildings, each as small as the outside of Mini Tunes, squished together in long rows. There are fabric stores, sweet shops, the odd antique store, and one or two ice-cream stands out on the streets. There are white-painted iron tables and chairs, though only a few people sit at them, drinking tea or talking about their families or their crochet projects, or frantically describing their theories for whatever's going to happen next on their favourite soap opera.

The street itself is rather narrow, paved with bricks rather than being made of tar, and it gives off the impression that it's not meant to be driven, especially because of the rails in the ground made for a tram. Upon seeing these, Birdie races over to a sign next to the road, with what looks to be times of departure and arrival for this tram.

"If we're on vacation, why not?" Birdie says, pointing at the sign.

"It's a bit strange that such a small town would have a tram system in place," Clover says, "You only really see them in larger cities."

"Yeah, it's a bit weird," March explains, "But it actually functions as a little tour; It goes through little tunnels in the mountains, and you can see all sorts of cool sights."

"Wow! Then we've *gotta* try it out." Daisy says, as she instinctively goes to sift through her purse. There's a man standing just a few metres away from the sign, wearing a white shirt and blue trousers, with a scruffy brown haircut and a face sprinkled with freckles and blemishes, who goes over to the group upon hearing them discussing the tour.

"Are you kids wanting to go on a tram ride?" He asks, but upon recognising March, he puts a hand on his hip and says, "Y'know what? It's 50% off, today only."

"Why thank you, Julian!" March says, smiling, "Oh, right, yeah. Guys, this man's name is Julian. Julian, this is Spring Symphony... Well, most of it."

The group all chants at once, "Hi, Julian!"

"He's been one of the operators of the tram service for many years," March explains, "And so I've spoken with him plenty of times!"

"And after all these years, you still haven't gotten enough out of the tour?" Julian laughs.

"Of course not. It changes every time I go on it!" March says.

"That is the nature of, well... Nature, I suppose." Julian says.

"Ooh! I think I can hear it coming!" Daisy exclaims.

The sound is quiet at first, but before long the tram comes click-clacking down the rails, stopping right next to the sign. It's bright-red and yellow, with big windows and glossy wooden seats, and it takes up most of the space on the street. Daisy hands Julian the money for the trip, before Birdie, Sera, Coffee, March, Clover *and* Daisy hop on.

There aren't any other people on the tram, as they had all gotten off before Spring Symphony hopped on. The only other person there is a middle-aged lady at the front, who says into a small microphone, her voice projected all throughout the tram,

"Welcome to the world-famous Unicorn Rocks midday tram tour! I hope you like our wonderful native plants, since that's all you're going to see for a little bit! While we *will* be going slow enough for upright traversal around the tram to be safe, please practise caution around windows, as they do not have glass in them, and doorways, as they are designed to swing open. Keep young children under constant supervision, and don't forget to..."

The woman rambles on for a bit longer about safety, but adds to the end, "And hello there, March! I hope you and your friends enjoy the trip today."

“We will!” Says Daisy.

The tram starts up again, wobbling a bit as it begins to move. It goes along the main street of Rosemary Glade, before rounding a corner through a dark tunnel. On the other side, it’s as if the town doesn’t exist. The tram, surrounded by moss-covered rocks, large ferns and small, trickling waterfalls, goes through a few natural archways made up of tree branches. It’s absolutely gorgeous, and without proper glass windows, the group can smell the rich, earthy scent of the place, and can hear the small streams below them rushing past.

They exit the dark, forested section, and go out onto the mountainside, which, even though they’re far from the edge, makes them feel scared of falling into the ocean below.

Sparse trees and rocks quickly change back into thick forest again, but now, almost every tree the group sees somehow has some type of mushroom growing on it, whether they’re the thick, brown, shelf-like variety, protruding from old, rotting stumps, or they’re tiny red or blue toadstools, growing in clusters around the roots of trees.

“This part was always my favourite.” March whispers to Coffee.

“I can see why.” Coffee says.

The tram slows to a halt as it reaches the end, then starts up again, and heads back the way it came.

“That’s pretty much it!” March says.

“It’s so pretty...” Coffee says, looking out the windows once again.

“Yeah, we’ve got places like this just outside of *our* town,” Birdie says, “But I never really have the excuse to check them out!”

“I have to agree with you on that one.” Clover says.

Once the group have had enough exciting photo opportunities and strangely-flavoured ice-creams, they head back to the lodge. Mind you, they’re *not* wanting to go to sleep just yet. Birdie knocks on the door of the girls’ room.

“What is it?” Clover asks, opening it once again.

“Neptune ‘n Mint are still fast asleep, and because I don’t want to wake them,” Birdie asks, “Could we play truth-or-dare in *your* room instead?”

Clover raises an eyebrow, then shrugs.

“Sure. What do *we* all think?” Clover asks the girls in her room, turning around to face them.

“I’d be down.” March says.

“Heck yes!” Daisy says.

“What about you?” Clover asks Coffee.

Coffee blushes, before saying, “Um. Yes. That sounds alright.”

“Hell yeah!” Birdie exclaims, entering the room and sitting down on a mattress. Sera follows them in.

The group sits in a circle in the centre of the room, with the lights turned off and the curtains pulled shut.

“We’ll go around in a circle,” Birdie explains, “Just, like, don’t make anyone do anything *too* weird.”

“Um... You got it.” Clover says, “Who’s going to start?”

“To set the tone...” Birdie says, “Why don’t I start?”

Birdie looks around thoroughly at everyone in the room.

“Okay.” They say, “Clover. Truth or dare?”

“Truth.” She says.

“Are you a lesbian?” Birdie asks, smirking.

“Oh, you already know that!” Clover says, “Yes. Of course I am.”

Coffee goes pink once again, frantically trying to come up with an excuse to get out of this game of truth-or-dare now that she knows what’s up, but she can’t think of anything, so she stays seated.

Birdie elbows Sera in the side, and Sera immediately says, “You. Daisy. Truth or dare?”

“Dare!” Daisy says confidently.

“I dare you to eat a piece of liquorice.” They say.

“B-But we don’t have any—”

Daisy’s quickly interrupted as Sera pulls out a piece of shiny black liquorice from their bag, and places it in one of Daisy’s hands.

She looks down at the piece with disdain, then looks up at everyone in the room with a nervous look on her face.

Clover, who is sitting on her left, says, “You have to do it.”

Daisy frowns, and with another utterly defeated glance at the liquorice, she places it in her mouth, her face scrunching up as she chews. After far too long, she swallows, and shivers.

“I need a drink of water.” She says, reaching over to her plastic pink water bottle and taking a few big sips from it.

“How did you know she hated liquorice?” Clover asks Sera.

“She exudes a particular type of aura.” Sera says without further elaborating.

“Nothing’s more fun than torturing your friends with strange dares!” Birdie states, “Okay, it’s your turn, March.”

March glances around at everyone, before pointing at Birdie.

“Birdie, truth or dare?”

Birdie thinks for a minute, then shrugs and says, “Truth.”

“What’s your favourite song?” March asks.

Birdie suddenly exclaims, “Raaagh! It’s too difficult to choose just one! It changes every day!”

They then stop and think for a second.

“At the moment, it’s probably ‘(This Is a) Key’ by Spoochy.” They say, “The samples they used in that song are really awesome, and I can appreciate it even if I know nothing about the band.”

“We’ll have to listen to it sometime.” Clover says.

“Totally. It was really cheap to get the CD in.” Birdie says.

“Oh, it’s your turn, Coffee.” March says.

“Knock ‘em out of the park!” Birdie says.

“Um... Well...” Coffee mutters as she, too, looks around. Her eyes land on March, who is encouragingly smiling at her.

“March.” She says shakily, “T-Truth or dare?”

“Hmm...” March says, “Dare.”

In an instant, the words “compliment me”, or “hug me”, or even... Or even “*kiss me*”... Dance in circles around Coffee’s brain. She can feel her face going very red.

“Um... Stick your head out the window, and y-yell, um...” Coffee stammers, “Yell, ‘spicy chips?’”

“Spicy chips?” March laughs, “Alright...?”

Coffee lets out a sigh as March opens the window of the room, and out onto the rapidly-darkening town, yells “Spicy chips!”

“Coffee.” Birdie says once March has sat down again.

“Yes?”

“What were you *actually* thinking about making her do?” Birdie asks, folding their arms.  
“W-What do you mean?” Coffee asks nervously.  
“Girl. Your face went *far* too red just now.” Birdie says, “That wasn’t just anxiety.”  
“What are you *talking* about?” Coffee asks.  
“Yeah, chill out.” March says, “Coffee’s fine. She wasn’t going to, like, make me cut up my dress with a pair of scissors.”  
“We’ll see.” Daisy says, “Coffee, truth or dare?”  
“T-Truth...?”  
“Are *you* a lesbian?” Daisy asks her.  
“Ah. So *that’s* what you were talking about.” March says, shifting uncomfortably.  
“I...” Coffee stutters, her face going hot, “I-I don’t know...”  
“Well, then I think you will very soon.” Clover says, eyes glimmering menacingly, “March, I dare you to sit in the en suite bathroom with Coffee for seven minutes.”  
“W-What do you mean?” March asks furiously, folding her arms, “I did *not* agree to this.”  
“C’mon! It’s *tradition* at this point.” Birdie says.  
March sighs angrily, standing up. Coffee shakily stands too, and follows her to the bathroom.

The en suite bathroom is rather small, with a square shower at one end (above which, golden evening sunlight peeks through a tiny window) and a toilet and sink at the other. It feels far more cramped once the two are locked inside.  
“Heh. So it ended up like this, huh?” March laughs weakly, trying her hardest to lighten the mood. Nearly in tears, Coffee says, “I-I don’t understand... They were all so kind to me up until now. T-They suddenly started acting so hostile...”  
“H-Hey, it’s okay.” March says, putting a hand on Coffee’s shoulder, “Maybe something’s up with them tonight. It doesn’t mean *you’re* the problem.”  
March realises she’s been looking at Coffee for a bit too long, and blushes.  
“We... May as well get this over with.” March sighs, “They’ll probably keep pestering us if we don’t.”  
“W-What?” Coffee stammers.  
“Have you never been in this scenario before?” March asks her incredulously.  
“N-No...?”  
“The reason we’re in here is because everyone wants us to kiss.” March says, rather matter-of-factly.  
“*What?*” Coffee exclaims.  
“What did you think Clover meant?” March asks.  
“I have no clue.” Coffee says.  
“Well, I guess...”  
March gently holds Coffee’s hand, pulling her a little closer to her. Then both girls, with bright-red faces, kiss. It’s a strange feeling, but before very long, it’s over.  
Coffee takes a step back, before sitting down and holding her arms around her knees.  
“I-I suppose this is what happens when you don’t read the fine print.” She mutters, staring off into space.  
“HA! I guess so!” March says, laughing awkwardly.  
She sits down beside Coffee.  
“So, have you experienced any *revelations* about your sexuality just now?” March asks.  
“Um... I don’t know.” Coffee says, “I-I think it’s sort of funny that my f-first kiss had to be with a girl...”

“Same here.” March says. She shrugs, seeming far less distressed by the situation.

“Hold on... You seem like the type of person who *would* have kissed someone before, though?” Coffee says.

“Well... Before I joined Spring Symphony I was pretty lonely.” March explains, “I had a couple of friends, but I never got too close to anyone out of fear of them thinking that the stuff I wear is weird.”

“Huh.”

“Makes me glad I have friends now who understand—”

“You finished in there yet?” Birdie calls out, banging on the bathroom door.

They unlock the door and March and Coffee leave.

“Thoughts?” Birdie asks, folding their arms, as the two sit down in the circle again.

“I-If anything, I’m *more* confused now...” Coffee says, blushing.

“Same here.” March says.

“Aw, man!” Birdie exclaims.

“On second thought, I don’t think it’s a great idea to rush this sort of thing.” Daisy says.

“Yeah, and if it makes Coffee uncomfortable, then, well...” Clover says, “We don’t want to be scaring her off.”

Birdie nods their head. Clover looks up at the bee-themed clock on the wall.

“Hey, I think we should all be getting to bed sometime soon anyway.” She says, “We’re going to start filming tomorrow, after all.”

“Oh, yeah!” Daisy says, “Do you have all of your equipment for filming, Coffee?”

“Um... Well... Yeah, I-I do.” Coffee says.

Birdie stands up, making their way back out the door after Sera. They look back at Coffee, though, and say, “Uh... Sorry for tonight, Coffee.”

“It... Um...”

“I know you seemed uncomfortable, and while we *all* forced you into doing something you didn’t want to do...” Birdie says, “It was me who started it all. And I don’t want you to hate me, because you seem cool. So... Sorry.”

“Uh, thank you.” Coffee mutters, “I, um...”

Unable to get any more words out, Coffee gives them a weak smile and a nod before Birdie closes the door again.

That night, Coffee lies with her eyes open for a while, staring at the ceiling as she replays the events of the evening over and over in her mind. She shivers despite feeling a strange warmth inside.

## DAY 15: ORANGES

Coffee awakes in a cold sweat after being shaken by the shoulders by March. The room is dark and quiet, with curtains drawn and only a small lamp in the corner lighting up a small fraction.

"Coffee...?" March whispers.

"I... I'm awake." Coffee mutters, rubbing her eyes.

"Oh, thank goodness!" March exclaims, "Everyone else has headed over to the shooting location, but it seemed like you were having a nightmare or something, and nobody wanted to wake you out of fear that you'd scream at them... Or whatever... So I was entrusted with keeping you company until you woke up properly."

"I don't... Have any recollection of any nightmares?" Coffee says.

"That's good! Maybe you're just a particularly heavy sleeper." March suggests, "Well, whatever. You're awake now! That's great!"

"Why are *you* so energetic this morning?" Coffee laughs, suddenly far more comfortable talking to March.

"I'm excited to help with filming your show! Don't you remember?" March says.

"Ah, right..." Coffee says, "Sorry, we've been doing so many tourist-y things that I forgot that we were here for a more important reason."

"Well, it's been really fun so far." March says, "While I've lived here for a good chunk of my life, somehow Unicorn Rocks' magic never fades."

Just making eye contact with March causes the thoughts to swirl around in Coffee's head, and while she tries to shut them up, it's difficult.

"I, um... March...?" Coffee mutters.

"Yeah?"

"I... I-I really want... Uh..." Coffee stutters.

March tilts her head to one side.

"Are you alright?" March asks, laughing.

Coffee takes a deep breath.

"I want to kiss you again." She says quickly.

"O-Oh, I..." March laughs nervously, "I thought you really hated it...?"

Coffee quickly shakes her head.

"I don't know, It just felt... Right." Coffee mutters, "A-As stupid as that sounds..."

"No, no. Um..." March sighs.

Coffee gasps.

"D-Do I sound really weird right now?" She asks, "Because I have a habit of doing that."

"No! You're fine." March says, "Do you want to right now? I-I mean, kiss?"

Coffee slowly nods, a grin creeping across her face.

March shuffles towards Coffee just a bit, leaning in. She laughs quietly, and kisses Coffee. It lasts for a bit longer this time, and feels just a bit more normal to Coffee. She places a hand on March's upper arm, and March gently places one on Coffee's thigh. Coffee feels a wonderful sensation, real warmth coursing through her and March.

Once it's over, the two laugh.

"I don't think friends kiss like that." Coffee says, smiling.

"What friends actually kiss, though?" March asks.

March stands up.

“So... Do you think you’re gay?” She asks, smirking.  
Coffee clasps her hands together, and nervously says, “I... I think so, yeah.”  
She stands as well.  
“But... Are you?” She asks.  
“Yeah, I knew it from the start.” March says.  
“But you told everyone last night—”  
“I can act.” March says, “Or, more accurately, I can lie.”  
Coffee laughs.  
“You’re such a bad girl.” She says, smiling at her.  
“I just didn’t want them to give you a harder time than they were already.” March explains.  
“Well, thank you.” Coffee says.  
Coffee pauses for a second.  
“You know... I’ve never really thought about whether I actually *liked* boys or not.” She says, “I... I figured that I didn’t need to stress about falling in love with anyone until it was actually time for me to. D-Does that make sense?”  
“I think I understand, yeah.” March says.  
“But I think I understand stuff a bit better now.” Coffee says, “And I think Spring Symphony helped with that, in some way.”  
“How so?”  
“Well...” Coffee says, “Before I met Clover and Daisy, I never really spoke with anyone. So to be bombarded with so much personality, colour and culture in an instant was crazy to me. It caused me to question aspects of myself I had never really thought about before. Is that weird?”  
“No, not at all!” March says, “Most have experiences akin to yours, in fact.”  
“Did you?”  
“Let’s see...” March pauses to think, “Well, I was speaking to this little-known musician online quite a few years ago. She had released an album or two on CD—not brilliant stuff, but it was sweet—and I recognised her in a chatroom or something. We started talking more and more, she taught me all sorts of stuff about queer people because she was pretty openly transfem, and... Yeah, I quickly developed a crush on her.”  
“Did you ever meet up in real life?” Coffee asks.  
“No, never. One day the chatroom service shut down, and I don’t think she’s making music nowadays, so I wouldn’t know how to contact her.” March explains, “But I’m pretty sure one of the songs on her third and final album was about me.”  
“Woah.”  
“Then again, maybe not.” March shrugs, “But it was about a pretty girl who wore weird clothing and was really into music and art, and had spent her life in a strange town... Ringing any bells?”  
“Yeah, yeah. It’s plausible.” Coffee says excitedly, “Could I hear it sometime?”  
“Totally!” March says, “Oh, but right now, I think we need to get ready. We’ve got a big day ahead of us.”  
“Right!” Coffee says, standing up.

The two walk down the sunny street right next to the beach, Coffee wearing her trousers and a green cardigan borrowed from March, while March is wearing a long navy-blue skirt, a yellow tank top and a pair of big black boots.

“Are you feeling okay, Coffee?” March asks her, “I know this morning might have been a lot.”  
Coffee smiles, saying, “I’m fine, I think.”

"Do you want to hear about the place we're filming at?" March asks.

"Oh, yes!" Coffee says, "For some reason, I never really had anywhere in mind. So I'm glad that you guys have picked somewhere for me."

"No problem!" March says, "So... We're going to this little abandoned house at the edge of town... No, 'abandoned' makes it sound like it's in terrible condition. If I recall correctly, it was meant to be some sort of accommodation a few years back, but I guess the people running it thought it wasn't viable, or perhaps they had to leave in a hurry. They left it fully furnished, but the overgrown garden and thick layer of dust over all of the furniture makes it pretty apparent that nobody's stayed there in a long time."

"I see..." Coffee says, nodding her head.

"That being said, I've been to a few live shows there," March explains, "So it's still being used in one way or another."

"Oh, are there very many shows in Unicorn Rocks?" Coffee asks.

"Yeah, there are heaps at this time of year," March explains, "While there are only a handful of bands that actually play here, they play *really* often. I remember last summer, I went to, like, *five* Neigic Reaction shows in the span of a month, just because tickets are dirt cheap and I think their bassist is pretty."

"I... I-I've never been to a live show..." Coffee mutters.

"Woah, seriously?" March says, "Then we'll *all* go to one while we're here!"

"Really?" Coffee asks excitedly.

"Yeah, of course!" March says, "But we'll need to get everyone earplugs beforehand. Trust me."

March and Coffee meet up with the group at the abandoned house. It turns out that the driveway up to it is rather long and steep, but it's not a problem.

The house itself is a pale purple colour, with a white roof, white door, and white deck.

"Hello!" March says, waving to everyone.

Some people are sitting on the deck and talking, some inside the house opening the curtains and windows. Daisy has somehow made her way up onto the roof, crawling around like a strange goblin creature.

Upon seeing Coffee staring at her, Daisy explains, "There's a ladder behind the house that goes up to the roof!"

Inside, it's surprisingly clean. Stray bits of rubbish litter the floors, and there are a few dents and bits of graffiti on the walls, but otherwise the place is okay. Birdie, with a plastic dustbin under one arm, has begun to clear out all the rubbish, while Mint is dusting off the tops of dressers and tables with a small cloth.