

# Into your heart

Von chicchai

## Kapitel 2:

"So, Ninomiya-san," the interviewer asks after a long day of photo-shoots and a lot of questions, trying to wrap the interview up, "Now, to round this off, we could talk a little bit about Arashi. Our readers are great fans of Arashi, and excited for any news you could reveal. How would you describe the atmosphere in Arashi, among the members? What would you say has changed through all the years of being together, and what is still the same? Do you like how things are going?"

The main thing Nino doesn't like right at this very moment is the fact that his entire body is craving nicotine; his manager had made the whole interview-photo-shoot appointment sound like it would barely take a couple of hours, but it is 5PM by now and Nino feels tired. Both emotionally and physically, and he really needs a cigarette. His brain works more slowly than usual today, but what with that awful morning he has had, it is not really surprising.

"The atmosphere amongst the members is great," Nino states, though, with a little smile. His manager looks down to him worriedly; Iwata has known him for years already and it is no surprise he notices that something is off immediately. "We are getting along as well as we always have. The other members are like family to me. However," Nino makes a long pause, inwardly preparing for what he is going to say next. When he had agreed on the interview earlier, *this* moment had been the sole reason for it, and Nino knows he has to word it correctly.

"We've come a long, long way until now," he starts off, pretending like he has a hard time finding the right words for it to buy himself more time, "We are existing for eight years by now, after all. We've started off as kids—I was sixteen, and the oldest one, Ohno-kun, he was eighteen. By now, though, all of us have grown up. We're adults; we've grown out of being those playful highschool boys, clinging to each other all the time and hugging each other like brothers. I think that's the main thing that has changed. While we are still as close as ever emotionally, we just treat each other like adults now and don't cling to each other like helpless puppies anymore." Nino laughs when he compares them to puppies, cocking his head back a little, wrinkles showing around his eyes. "It has taken a long time, but I think I can finally say that we're all adults now. And it feels good."

The man across the table is nodding at every word Nino says and the camera next to him is filming the whole time. Nino feels his heart beating hard and fast against his ribcage, and his palms turn a little sweaty. His manager has maybe not realized yet what exactly Nino is trying to accomplish with such statements, but soon enough he will.

"So you've grown up, you say," the interviewer repeats with a smile, and Nino nods

enthusiastically. It hurts, it really does—but he doesn't have a choice. He just doesn't. This morning had been the final proof of how urgently things need to change, and in order to avoid talking to Ohno (or anyone from Arashi, really) directly about it, he has to trick them all. "And you don't hug so much anymore?" the man continues, sounding a bit bemused.

Nino nods. The lump in his throat is throbbing heavily, and he doesn't know when it even formed there.

"Yeah," he agrees, "Ohno-kun and me, for example. We used to cling to each other all the time. We've always seen each other like brothers, and that's why we hung out so much together. Nowadays, however, we aren't as touchy anymore and don't spend that much time with each other anymore, either. I think, though, that's just natural during the process of growing up, right?"

When his manager widens his eyes, Nino knows the information was delivered correctly.

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Nino is inhaling the much-needed nicotine of the cigarette between his trembling fingers in fast and short breaths, his body only slowly coming down from how much he has put himself through today. Ohno is gone; he feels it—Ohno is gone, the night is gone, the warmth of Satoshi's body is gone, and it won't come back. Their affair is over, and their friendship will be over in no time as well.

Nino had initiated it earlier after all, and the interview is just the beginning.

"Why did you say such things, Ninomiya-kun?" Iwata asks. They are on the emergency staircase of the building of the magazine company; Nino is leaning over the railing, blowing the white smoke of the cigarette up into the sky. Iwata is standing behind him, leaning against the wall next to the emergency door, his arms crossed in front of his chest. Nino can almost feel the older man staring holes into his back, but he doesn't really care.

"Such things?" he asks back, playing dumb, and takes another pull on his cigarette. Inwardly, his body is throwing a tantrum, and Nino isn't sure if he might not have collapsed already if not for the cigarette between his fingers, keeping his emotions barely at bay.

"About hugging, about closeness," his manager elaborates, sounding annoyed. He knows that Nino knows, and playing dumb doesn't get either of them anywhere. "You had no right to make such statements! The agency *will* get back at you, or, well, at *me* once they see the article, and they will most likely stop the magazine from printing any more copies after the first circulation is out." Iwata sounds truly angry and like he has to compose himself a lot—which is no surprise, Nino knows. Usually he is easy to work with, but he *does* have some personal issues here and there, and when it is about them, he is a very difficult person to deal with.

"I said nothing but the truth," Nino monotonously responds, though, and flips the cigarette stump down into the streets, wondering how high they are here right now. Must be fifty metres, at least. "And I didn't say we weren't close anymore," Nino continues, now turning around to his manager and looking at him with a determined expression in his clear eyes. "I simply said Ohno-kun and me are not touchy anymore because we've grown up. And that's exactly how it is, and how it will be: Ohno and me will stop continuing this ridiculous fanservice all the time when the cameras are rolling—we will stop acting as if we were married, or a couple at the very least. I'm fed

up with it, and that's why it will stop from this very second onwards. I delivered you a believable interview to base all of this on. If you aren't pleased with the outcome... well, that's not my problem."

Nino knows it actually *is* his problem and by the way his manager is giving him a cold and barely restrained, angry look, Iwata is just about to state the very same. But Nino simply *doesn't care*. He can only take so much before breaking completely, and he is sure that if Iwata just knew the *whole* story, he would be grateful for Nino to act this wisely instead of simply leaving Arashi—leaving *Ohno* for good.

Thus, before Iwata can even open his mouth and hiss back an angry answer, Nino waves him off and passes him to open the door back in. "Today is my day off," he underlines slowly, "Isn't it enough that I already came to your appointment on my day off and spent more than *half* of the day here? If you excuse me now, I have *urgent personal matters* to attend. Call me in case my schedule for next week changes unexpectedly."

And with that, Nino leaves, ignoring how Iwata's jaw clenches visibly in anger.

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Jun would probably explode and insist they talk it out (and forget all of this has ever happened), and Sho would worry more than is good for his own health and annoy the fuck out of Nino—and in the end he would be suffering even more than Nino himself is, because Sho is just that kind of person who takes every single band matter to heart and wants everyone to be happy.

Aiba is a different kind of person, though. On first glance, he is cheerful, playful, childish and way too energetic for a normal person to endure for more than half an hour at once, but he has a very special place in Nino's heart. He is one of the people he has known for almost his entire life, and maybe it is a unique bond only Aiba and Nino share, but he knows that no matter what, Aiba would never let him down. He wouldn't judge him either, and he would certainly leave a topic alone if he realizes it is for the best.

And contrary to what people think, Aiba Masaki is clever and witty, too, and he knows exactly how to behave in what kind of situation.

It is no surprise that Nino writes an SMS to him out of all of Arashi the second he has reached his car, and barely half an hour later they meet up in the corner of a private restaurant, high up and hidden in one of Tokyo's countless skyscrapers.

Aiba looks awfully worried when he sits down at the table in a corner of the restaurant, and Nino only speaks once the waitress has brought them both a glass of water.

"It's nothing bad," Nino tries to calm the taller man down before the conversation has even started, and he ignores the fact that he must look pretty desperate like this, literally clinging to the cigarette between his fingers as if for dear life. "Or," he corrects, "no worse than the usual, anyway."

Aiba sighs quietly and nips on his glass of water. "Leader?" he asks, not really expecting any kind of explanation.

Nino only chuckles and closes his eyes for a moment while inhaling the nicotine. It is ridiculous how addicted he has become to cigarettes all over these years, but if there has *ever* been one time of his life where quitting smoking is certainly *not* an option, it is now.

"Yeah," he says, calmly, breathing out the smoke. It is funny because Aiba and Nino

have never talked about his crush on Ohno that had slowly developed into a full-fledged, blossoming, deep love over the years. But Aiba knows—Nino *knows* that Aiba knows—and still, as intrusive and pushy as Aiba often seems, the taller man knows very well when to keep things to himself.

Nino swallows, and he knows Aiba won't ask any further. Aiba doesn't expect explanations; perhaps he simply thinks that Nino needs some friendly and distracting company.

Only not—not this time. This time, Nino feels like even Aiba's energetic spirit cannot help pull him out of his deep, deep hole anymore.

"I need help," Nino finally admits and looks up to Aiba who is silently watching him.

Aiba nods without hesitation. "What is it?" he asks.

"I want you to take care of Oh-chan from now on," Nino explains further, and now he doesn't quite manage to meet the intensive look in Aiba's eyes anymore. "Because I can't anymore. I'll stop. With—with everything, actually. I gave an interview earlier and basically said the fanservice will stop, too. I just—" Nino breaks off then and shrugs helplessly, his facial expression faltering, his lips trembling, his fingers squeezing around the cigarette in his left hand. He feels how his emotions are just about to boil up within him—but this is the wrong place and the wrong company for it. Nino doesn't lose his face in public; in fact he doesn't lose his face in front of anyone. Not even in front of Aiba.

"I just need a break," Nino finally settles on ending his sentence in a whisper and swallows, trying to get his trembling under control. "Could you—could you just distract him for a while? So he won't notice the lack of my presence around him. And once he notices, later, he probably won't even mind anymore."

Aiba is just staring at him, but he doesn't even look shocked. His eyes mirror sadness and empathy, and some part of Nino wants to believe that Aiba can imagine exactly what is going on within his soul.

Aiba opens his mouth then, searching for words, closes it again—and then he simply nods, obviously not even knowing what to say.

"Are you sure?" he asks, though, while Nino is taking pull after pull on his cigarette.

"Have you—I mean—*talked* at least?"

Nino gives Aiba a look at that says *are you stupid? What do you think of me?*, and then shakes his head. "We haven't, and we won't. Now, can you do me this favour or not?"

Aiba seems to ponder for a moment, but then he nods hesitantly, sighing, and Nino realizes just how tensed up his body had been up until now as he suddenly, instinctively, slumps down into himself in relief. His heart is, again, beating hard against his ribcage from nervousness.

"Thank you, Masaki," he honestly and truthfully mumbles. "This means the world to me, you have no idea."