

Sohma, Kuroumo

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THIS IS MY FURBIE STORY. unfortunately, i dont own Furuba, and if anyone has any problems with this story i will delete it AGAIN, it is only back by popular demand. My character, Kuroumo, replaces Rin.

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Chapter 1 - Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2 - Chapter 2	8
Chapter 3 - Chapter 3	12
Chapter 4 - Chapter 4	16
Chapter 5 - Chapter 5	21
Chapter 6 - Sidetracked 1	24
Chapter 7 - Chapter 6	25
Chapter 8 - Chapter 7	28
Chapter 9 - Chapter 8	31
Chapter 10 - Chapter 9	34
Chapter 11 - Chapter 10	37
Chapter 12 - Sidetracked 2	41
Chapter 13 - Chapter 11	43
Chapter 14 - Chapter 12	49
Chapter 15 - Chapter 12	51
Chapter 16 - Chapter 13	53
Chapter 17 - Chapter 14	55
Chapter 18 - Sidetracked 3	57
Chapter 19 - Chapter 15	58
Chapter 20 - Chapter 16	59
Chapter 21 - Chapter 17	61
Chapter 22 - Chapter 18	63

Chapter 23 - Chapter 19	65
Chapter 24 - Chapter 20	71
Chapter 25 - Chapter 21	76
Chapter 26 - Chapter 22	81
Chapter 27 - Chapter 23	84
Chapter 28 - Chapter 24	88
Chapter 29 - Chapter 26	92

1 - Chapter 1

I sat on the train, my head leaning against the cool glass. Flashes of scenery rushed past my eyes, although I was not concentrating on it, and in fact paying very little attention at all to the world around me. I knew my brother was definitely going to be mad this time. I had delayed my return for as long as possible, until I had run out of medicine completely. I knew that I shouldn't have just gone away, but I found it so hard to cope with the restraint put upon me by my family, I just needed space. And at least I was returning, I could have simply stayed, but that would have been a suicide for me, I would have killed myself, without my medicine.

I had been in Paris, for nearly 4 months, and I was enjoying myself. I had been staying in an apartment with some fellow artists and musicians, and had been living the high life. Days on end had been spent painting, making music and generally having a good time. The apartment we had lived in had been swathed in a permanent cloud of cigarette smoke, and there had always been some form of coffee on tap. Many a time I had tried writing to anyone in my family, but I didn't know what to say. I could never find the words, which expressed my feelings, and so I never did write. None of them even knew that I was returning, I had told no one.

The train reached my stop, and as I climbed off, pulling my bag behind me, I suddenly felt dizzy. I sat down, in the middle of the platform, regaining my balance. The dizzy spells came more frequently, without my medicine to keep them at bay. I knew that I had been foolish to forget about it, I had never planned to be away for quite so long. The medicine was what kept my 'illness' at bay, the illness I had suffered from for a nearly as long as I remembered. It wasn't too bad, it just meant that I had severe dizzy spells, and had to take medicine regularly, and what with my nicotine and caffeine addictions, I didn't really help myself, all that much. The quicker I got home, and to my doctor, the better.

I walked down a long street, lined with houses, and entered into the grounds of a large house. All this land was owned by my family, the Sohma's, and it felt good to be home. I walked past the house of Hatori, my close friend, distant cousin, and doctor. I must see him later. I walked past the front entrance to my house, and slid between my house and Hatori's, and into my house through the back entrance, through my small garden, with fish pond, fountain and ornamental cherry trees, as well a Japanese Maples. Entering the house, I left my suitcase in one of the rooms, and went to one of the doors. This one lead into my brother's home. He lived in the biggest house, as he was head of the Sohma family.

I entered into a dark room, inside his house, and saw him sitting in the corner. I bowed low, out of

respect, even though he was younger than me. "Akito," I began tentatively.

He turned to look at me, his eyes piercing deep into mine.

I faltered, but then began again, "I've come back."

"I can see that," his voice cut into me, heavy with sarcasm, and dripping with anger. "You should never have gone away. I thought I forbid you to ever leave me. I thought I told you that you, especially you, must always stay near me, in your house?"

"I am sorry, Akito-san..."

"SORRY?!" he screamed, getting up with alarming speed and racing towards me. He grabbed my long dark hair, and pulled me to my feet. "Sorry isn't good enough! You must be punished."

I looked up defiantly, I didn't like conflict, and I could only tolerate so much, such was my incredibly short temper. "Must I be punished, cannot you just berate me, and let it lie? Have I really done something so terrible and wrong? I'm 25, for shoot's sake, can't you let me live like any other person?"

"You're not like any other person. You're ill, and, well, you know. And you cannot just disrespect my wishes like that. It is rude, and I will not tolerate it." He lifted a hand, and struck me across the face, my head throwing itself out to the side. "You will be punished, Kuroumo. It is your own fault. You must not leave here."

I turned to face him once more, "Why not? Why can't I have my freedom? If only you knew what it was like. If only you kn..." I couldn't finish. Akito struck me once again, with force that wouldn't have seemed possible emanating from his frail body, and I went flying across the room, although I didn't hit the wall. I hit the window, and went flying out, landing on the hard paved ground outside, unconscious.

Hatori came running out of his house, hearing the shattering glass, and the sound of my limp body hitting the floor. He looked at Akito, not yet seeing my body lying on the floor. "What happened? Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," Akito fairly roared. "Its that stupid dog on the floor," he indicated me, and Hatori turned to look. "She was rude, and so I punished her. Take her away, I do not wish to see her anymore. I am done with her." And he turned away, and went back to sitting in the dark, on his own.

Hatori lifted me up into his arms, and took me into his house. Laying me down on one of the couches, he quickly checked to see if I was breathing or not, and looked for a pulse. Checking for wounds, and seeing I had none on my head, just scratches from the glass, he decided it was safe to leave me momentarily, in my unconscious state, and make a phone-call. "Shigure...its Hatori...Yes, I know you were just here...Ku has returned...she is injured...out of the window...yes...I'm bringing her over now...yes...I'll be there in about 20 minutes."

Hatori lifted me once again, and gently carried me over to his car, laying me inside it, across the back seat. He strode around to the driver's side, and opened the door, smoothing down his jacket as he climbed in. Placing the keys in the ignition he revved the car into action, and slowly, carefully, turned the car onto the road, driving calmly out of the city, and to Shigure-san's house in the forest. Upon arrival there, he climbed out of the car, and lifted me out once again, as I was still unconscious, and by now bleeding, more than before, due to the glass that had scraped against my thin form as I had travelled through the window.

He walked up to the front door, and knocked urgently. A tall boy, about sixteen, with grey hair, and deep purple eyes, answered the door. "Yuki," Hatori greeted him, walking past him and hurrying in.

Yuki stood at the door, his mouth slightly open, and a dazed look on his face, as he stared after us.

Hatori carried me into the front room, and laid me on the bed that had already been laid out for me. He had sent Yuki out for his doctor's bag, and as Yuki returned, he was checking again for a pulse, making sure that I hadn't accidentally died in the past twenty minutes.

"How is she?" a tall young man entered the room, "Will she be ok? Can you make her better, this

time?”

“She should be fine. I just need to patch up these cuts, and get all the glass out, and she'll recover as soon as you or I know it. She may be ill, but she's still very strong, huge immune system. You know that.”

Hatori continued to care for me, removing glass from a huge slit on my arm, and then gently cleaning it, as the other young man left the room to get some warm water. He walked into the kitchen, and right into a young girl, or rather, she walked into him. “Oh, I'm so sorry Shigure-san, I-I-I didn't mean to, I'm sorry.”

“Don't worry Tohru-kun...you didn't hurt me...I should have looked where I was going,” he smiled kindly, if slightly perversely, scaring the hell out of poor Tohru, “Ignore what's going on in the living room,” and he walked off, forgetting the warm water, and leaving Hatori to it.

Tohru Honda wandered cautiously into the living room, and saw Hatori, the man she had only recently met, leaning over someone's body. Seeing nothing, and with no thought except that which came immediately, that it might be Yuki, or another friend, Kyo, she gasped, and ran over. “Don't worry,” Hatori said, “It isn't Yuki, or Kyo. She is another Sohma. Miss Honda, I would like you to meet Kuroumo Sohma.”

I slowly opened my eyes, at the sound of my dear cousin Hatori's voice. “Hello,” I said weakly, still slightly confused, and not at all awake properly.

“No, Ku, you are home now. You have been injured, remember? But I just cleaned you up, so don't do anything silly to get these stitches out,” he indicated the stitched on my arm, holding together a slit, and then another on my side, “And this is Tohru Honda, a new family friend,” Hatori spoke kindly.

“I am please to meet you, Kuroumo-san.”

“And I you, Miss. Tohru Honda. But please, call me Ku, everyone else does.”

At that moment a tall ginger haired boy entered, muttering under his breath. Kyo Sohma was once again angry at some wrong against him, obviously done by Yuki. "Kyo," I smiled wanly, guessing that I must be at Shigure's home, for where else might Kyo be, as I highly doubted he would be at the main house.. "I am pleased to see you again."

Kyo looked taken aback, and then angry, and then very frightened, and then angry once again, "Kuro, is that you? What the hell are you doing here? I thought you'd gone?"

"Like you, you mean? You can't get rid of me that easily." I smiled again.

I frowned slightly, in discomfort, and then had the feeling that my strength was slowly returning. As it did, so did the memories of what had happened. The window. Akito. How I hated my brother. "Where is Shigure?" I asked, "Does he not want to see me? Have I angered him?"

"In what way could you have angered me, ma petite ange? Je pense que tu dois rester ici. Don't you agree?"

"Yes," I smiled, glad that I had returned to my family, even if it hadn't been such a pleasant reunion.

2 - Chapter 2

I slept in the room that I dared to call mine. It had all my clothes that I had left from previous visits, plus the clothes that I had “borrowed” off the rest of the family. My slumber was fitful as I relived the horror-filled happenings that had passed that day. I slowly drifted through the usual cursed dreams, and awoke at six in the morning, just as the sun was making its path into the sky. I got up, and slowly changed into some longish shorts, that I think were originally meant to be a pair of boxers, either Shigure's or Hatori's, and a black strappy top, before pulling on one of Hatori's white shirts for warmth. I padded through the gently snoring house, and out onto the veranda. I sat on the hard wooden steps, looking deep into the forest, my heart and mind running away with me. I didn't hear Shigure softly approaching, and only noticed him when he gently touched the top of my soft dark head, in a loving way. I tilted my head back, to look up at him, and he kissed me gently on the forehead.

“Good morning,” he spoke softly, before sitting down, on the steps, next to me. I leaned my head against his shoulder, and simply sighed in reply. He brought a cigarette out of his pocket, and lit up.

“Je pensais t'avoir dit que je souhaitais que tu ne fumes pas?” I asked him, as I reached out, taking the cigarette from his mouth. He looked at me, as I raised the cigarette to my own lips, and took a slow and gentle drag, letting the smoke reach down my throat, leaving an exciting and tingling sensation.

“Hypocrite,” he said, and smiled, a soft and gentle smile, with the slightest movement of the corners of his mouth, as I exhaled, and we both watched the stream of smoke twist its way up into the dawn, like a snake.

I smiled as well, and as he put my arm around me, I leant deep into him. We stayed like that until Tohru-san came outside, and found us. “Oh...I'm so sorry...I didn't mean to interrupt,” she mumbled.

“Don't worry,” I smiled supportively. “It's going to be a beautiful day.”

I stood up and walked into the house, surprising Kyo in the process. “DON'T SNEAK UP ON PEOPLE! IT'S NOT NICE!” he berated me.

“I didn't sneak up, I would have thought your senses would have been sharp enough to notice my presence.”

“Well they weren't. And what the hell are you wearing?”

“Clothes. You?”

“Grrrr. You are just so annoying. SO annoying.”

“What's wrong with Kyo-kun?” asked Tohru.

“He doesn't approve of what I am wearing.”

“Well he wouldn't,” Yukie entered the lounge, and spoke softly. “They are a bit, interesting.”

“Well I like them,” Shigure joined us. “I think they are very flattering.”

“You would.” Yuki said.

“Pervert.” Kyo, stating the obvious, as usual.

I smiled, “Blame Hatori, they're his clothes. I need to go home, well, back to my house, in a minute, to get some proper clothes. Are you guys going to school in a little while? Because I could surely do with the company.”

“Will you change?” asked Kyo, suspiciously.

“Maybe.” And I slowly walked towards my room, smiling to myself, as I heard Kyo muttering to himself after me.

I emerged wearing a pair of baggy black jeans, and still wearing the black top and white shirt. “Is this more suitable?” I asked Kyo's approval.

Kyo mumbled.

“Well, are we going, or not?” he asked impatiently.

“We're going,” Yuki responded.

“I don't want to go with you.”

“Fine, don't.”

Tohru looked bewildered. I simply left the room.

We finally left, and basically ran into town, because they were running so late for school. “Do you want me to come and talk to your teacher, an apologise?” I asked.

“NO!” Kyo answered for the three of them.

We parted ways, and as the three of them turned off to go to school, I turned in the direction of the Sohma house. I walked slowly along the same road as the one from the day before. A road full of Sohmas. It was easy to see why I wanted out of it all. I walked towards the entrance of the main house. Not only was I returning for new clothes, but also I knew Hatori wanted to see me, to check on my stitches.

I was apprehensive about seeing Akito. I didn't know whether he would want to see me or not. I doubted it, and I certainly didn't want to see him. He was more than likely still mad. I just wished he could see how I felt, but he couldn't, and he never would. That was him, pure and simple.

I walked between the flowers towards my house. Pausing to touch the trunk of a cherry blossom tree as I did so. I loved this tree and it meant so much to me. As I paused, deep in thought, Momiji came hopping up to me, full of his usual amount of energy. "Guten Tag!!!!" he greeted me loudly, "Are you better now Kuro-kun?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied, before looking past him, to the quiet girl, "Nari-kun, how are you? I haven't seen you in a long time."

"And neither have I seen you, Kuro," Nari was a quiet 17-year old, slightly prone to madness.

"What are you doing here, Kuro?" asked Momiji.

I began walking towards Hatori's house, seeking peace, "I need to see Hatori."

"Oh, ok." And he disappeared again, hopping off, dragging an extremely reluctant Nari behind him.

I breathed a sigh of relief, and was on the verge of entering Hatori's house when I heard someone calling my name. Akito.

3 - Chapter 3

I looked around slowly. He was sitting by the window of his house, looking at me. From the distance at which I stood I could not see whether he was angry, and I wasn't wearing my glasses. I walked towards his house, glancing wistfully behind me at Hatori's house. "You came back."

"I had to, didn't I?"

"Did you? I don't know."

"You know too well. I needed my clothes."

"You will stay here, for the time being."

"Must I?"

"Yes."

I had never even entered his house, just stood outside. Thinking he had finished, I started to walk away.

"I'm sorry."

I started, was I hearing things? Or had my brother really just apologised. I turned to face him, questioning. "What did you say?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. Well, I did, but not, not that hard. Will you be ok?"

"Well, I've lived haven't I? It's just the scars now. That's all."

"Will you stay?"

I sighed, "If you want me to."

"I do. And not just for that. Because you're my sister, and we should stay close."

"Am I still allowed to go and stay with Shigure, and Ayame?"

"Yes."

"I have to go now, Hatori wanted to see me."

"Ok."

I once again walked towards Hatori's house, and entered. "Did no one ever teach you to knock?" called Hatori, from his bedroom.

"No," I answered, sitting in a chair. I was in pain now. Maybe I shouldn't have walked here. I hoped the stitches weren't coming out. I leant back, and let my head rest against the back of the chair, shutting my eyes.

“Tea?” Hatori asked. I opened my eyes, to see his hand holding a steaming cup in front of my face.

“Thanks.”

I heard you speaking with Akito, what did he want?”

“He's told me I have to stay here. I can go and see Shigure and Ayame, but otherwise, I have to stay here. He also apologised.”

Hatori looked just as shocked as me, and nearly spat out his mouthful of tea. “Don't you have any manners?” It was now my turn to be condescending.

“Are you ready for this check-up, then?”

“Ready as I'll ever be.” Shigure and I shared a loathing for needles, and I was squeamish.

“I would have though by now that you were used to my check-ups, or any doctors check-ups.”

“Hmmm...that's a good point, I do need some more medication, I've nearly run out.”

“It's ok, I have some in the cupboard.”

He walked into his small examining room, and I followed, climbing onto the table in the corner, and taking off my two tops. I knew what he wanted already. He pulled on his white coat before turning to me, pulling on some rubber gloves. “Lets see these stitches then.” I lay down on the table, flinching as Hatori's gentle hands looked at the tender cuts that lined my body. “They should heal nicely. Just don't

do anything to strenuous, and try not to pull out the stitches.”

“It's a good job I don't have claws, isn't it?”

“Yes.”

I clambered off the table, and redressed myself. I quietly said goodbye to Hatori, and left his house through a door that lead into my own, via a small courtyard. In here was growing a beautiful Japanese Maple, as well as another cherry blossom tree. I crossed the small patch of grass, and walked to the small water feature, hoping that someone had fed my fish. Three elegant Koi Carp were happily swimming in the clear water. I continued to a door on the other side of the area, and entered into my own house. There stood the bags that I had left yesterday. I would get a maid to unpack them later.

I walked into my own kitchen and prepared a small lunch. I wasn't that hungry, and I just made a light soup from the vegetables left in the cupboard.

I then wandered into my small study, and checked that all my work was still in order. I was glad to see that it was. I picked up a telephone and dialled Shigure's number, telling him that I was staying at the house. I agreed to go around to his house for supper the following night. I put the phone down, and awaited the next evening with expectation.

4 - Chapter 4

I rose out of the water gasping for breath as the water dripped in a steady flow off my hair and body. My long black hair encased me like a cloak. I splashed water to my face to help clean my face, and ease up the opening of my eyes. I opened my eyes and saw only blurs, my eyesight was getting worse, I would soon have to wear glasses all the time. As my eyes slowly began to focus a little more, I groped along the side of the bath for some sort of soap, or shower cream.

I rose out of the bath, completely clean and smelling of jasmine and lavender, thanks to the shower gel and shampoo. Climbing onto the bath mat, I grabbed the fluffy purple towel and wrapped it around my wet body. My hair still hanging behind me, soaking wet, I walked out of my small bathroom and into the main room, on route to my bedroom, where I was hoping to dig out some clothes.

Rummaging in my closet, I picked a fitted kimono, made of pale green silk, with very long flowing sleeves. It was bordered with a dark green material, and had hidden pockets for my glasses and cigarettes. As I changed into this I started humming a little French love song, one of the songs I had performed in France.

Nearly ready to leave for Shigure's, where I was having dinner, I grabbed the last thing I needed, and rushed out of the house, keys in hand, in the general direction of the exit from the Sohma house.

The wind rushing through my hair, and forcing my sleeves to billow out behind me, I steered my mo-ped between the many cars along the road, and indicated that I was turning into the forest. My little black scooter, one of my favourite possessions. It got me from A to B. I slowed down as I drove through the forest, not trusting the simple roads. As I got closer to Shigure's house, I pulled up, and parked, he didn't like me riding the scooter, none of them did. Apparently it was, 'too dangerous for someone like me', to which I replied that walking was just as dangerous. But they had just glared at me. So now I only rode it in secret.

I removed my helmet, and hung it on the handle-bars of my vehicle, before, removing the keys from the ignition, and walking away. I followed a small footpath and came to the front of Shigure's house. Before I even had a chance to knock, the door was whipped open, and Shigure stood before me, grinning stupidly.

“Hello,” he greeted me.

“Imaginative.”

“Welly welly well then, I am a writer after all, but there is no need to be quite so sarcastic. But seeing as it's you, I might let you off.” He grinned even more.

“Can you just let me in? I'm freezing.”

“You're cold?” he suddenly looked concerned, “you're not getting ill are you? You feel ok, don't you?”

“I'm fine, I'm fine,” I said as I pushed him backwards and entered the house, shutting the door behind me.

“Good,” he said as he leant down, and kissed me gently. “We don't want you getting sick again.”

“Mmmm.” Was all I could manage, “is anyone else here?”

“Yes, they're all here somewhere, I think. If not, they're on their way.”

“Ok.”

By this time we had walked into the lounge, and I walked over and sat onto the sofa, sighing as I relaxed. I let my head fall back and looked at Shigure, standing behind me. I smiled at his upside-down

image.

“What?” he asked, smiling also.

“You're upside down.”

He walked around to sit beside me on the sofa, and I lifted my head to look at him. “

How about now?” he asked. I simply smiled and laid my head on his shoulder.

We were still sitting like that half an hour later, with Shigure stroking my hair, when Kyo, Yuki and Tohru returned, having been grocery shopping together. Shigure and I hurriedly jumped up, as if embarrassed to be seen together, and not doing any work. We greeted them awkwardly, both feeling guilty for no reason.

For dinner, young Tohru had prepared a delicious nikujaga, followed by some ice cream, which we just ate straight out of the tubs, the best way of doing so. For a change, Yuki and Kyo weren't arguing, so dinner was a quiet and peaceful affair, ending with the five of us sitting around the table and talking.

“Kuroumo-san, please could you tell me a bit more about yourself? I feel that I would greatly wish to know you more,” Tohru asked me.

“I don't think I quite understand what you are asking me, Tohru.”

“Well, what do you do? What do you like to do? Who are you?”

“Yes, Ku-chan, who are you?” Gure-kun decided to try and be helpful.

I slapped him playfully on the shoulder, “ you know full well who I am. But where do I start. Ok, well you basically know that I am Kuroumo Sohma. I am 25, going on 26. I was born to loving and kind parents, but was a sickly child. So my doctor at the time prescribed me with a medicine that I had to take every day, to stop me from becoming ill. Because of this, and my other weaknesses, I was never allowed to attend school, and I only learnt what it was like through my *kind* cousins, Shigure, Ayame, and Hatori. I was home-schooled, and therefore I learnt less about science, and more about the arts, which have become my passion. When I was about 7, my brother, Akito, was born.” I paused for breath, as Tohru gasped.

“Akito-san is your brother?”

“Yes,” I smiled, amused by her amazement, “Akito Sohma, the cruel and heartless head of the Sohma family is my brother, my little brother. He too was a sickly baby, and everyone was always so nice and polite to him, because he would one day be head of the Sohma family, that I was soon left alone, and to my own devices, my previous schooling forgotten. So my older cousins took it upon themselves to teach me. They would come home from school each day, and then teach me what they had learnt, Shigure teaching me the English, Hari-kun the maths and the sciences, and Ayame, well, he would just describe what everyone had been talking about, and generally get in the way. So I started to learn more academic subjects, yet I still continued to teach myself art, by studying books, and other people's art work. I continually listened to music, and so formed my own ideas, scribbling them down as I went. I taught my self to play the piano, and I have also learned the clarinet, the guitar, and I sing. My final talent was dance, I would watch the fine ladies dancing on the television, and copy them, I entered my self in dance lessons, and soon picked up the basic moves of ballet, as well as some of the traditional dances from different countries. My one problem was that I could not have a male partner, so I would either have to dance solo, or dance with another woman. That was quite a problem, so now I focus more on the ballet side of dancing. For the past few months I have escaped to France, where I was living with a group of artists. Mostly male,” I said, looking pointedly at Shigure, purposefully trying to wind him up.

“What is France like?” asked Tohru.

“Beautiful, amazing. It has such a rich culture. I spent my time there performing, and getting paid a lot for it too. I danced, I sung, I played. I painted pictures and sold them. I had the time of my life. And then I had to come back,” my voice turned bitter, “I came back, even though I knew my brother would try to kill me. Because staying away, I was killing myself. Not only from lack of medicine, but from lack of love.” I turned away, my eyes welling with tears. Shigure had stood up, and he walked over, laying his hand on my shoulder.

"It's ok," he murmured softly in my ear before turning to the others, "Don't you three have homework or something?"

"Yes," they answered in unison, before traipsing off."

"Are you sure you're ok?" he turned back to me.

"I think I will be," and I nuzzled deep into his soft kimono, cherishing my time with him.

At that moment, the phone rang.

5 - Chapter 5

Yuki came into the room, holding the phone, "Kuro, it's Hatori-san, he wants to talk to you."

"Oh, ok. Thanks," I took the phone from Yuki's hand and took it back into the hallway, "Hi...Yes...shoot...she's ok?...good...yup...ok...no...I won't tell him...no...ok...yes...I'll be right there." I put the phone down, and returned to the lounge. "I've got to go."

"What's wrong?" Shigure asked, looking concerned, "is it Akito-san?"

He looked so worried I almost laughed. Why was he always so concerned for Akito? "No, no. Akito is fine. I just have to go. I'll come again soon, say goodbye to the others for me." And before he could say another word, I left the house, running through the woods, and towards my scooter. As I climbed onto my small vehicle I again remembered how Shigure's first thought had been of Akito. He did not seem to think it might have been his own sister, Nari-chan.

I pulled into the Sohma household just as Hatori walked out of his own house, "I thought you weren't riding that any more, he asked?"

"Well, I am. Just don't tell Shigure. Where is she?"

"Who?"

"For shoot's sake, be serious, Where is she? Where's Nari?"

"Nari? I presume she's at home. Why?" Tori-chan looked confused.

“You told me she was seeing things again. You called me. Told me to come straight over. Remember? Didn't you?” I was beginning to wonder after my own sanity.

“No, I didn't.”

“Then why did you come out, as if to greet me?”

“Because Akito-san said you should be home soon.”

“How the hell does he kn...the bastard.”

I stormed off, letting my scooter, that I had still been holding up, fall to the ground, with a resounding crash. As I strode towards my house, I fumed, and rolled my eyes, shaking my head in sheer anger at the way my brother managed to simply pull my strings, and summon me so easily. I sometimes forgot that I was the older sibling, because he treated me like such a child.

I pushed the front door open with a great force, surprised it didn't break, and I then slammed it after me, kicking it with my back foot. This time, it did break, and as the door, its frame, and part of the wall fell down onto the porch outside, several people came running, Akito and Hatori included. I couldn't bear to talk to anyone, so I simply walked into my bedroom, again slamming the door, just with much less force this time.

I emerged the next morning in a shoot mood, thanks to a slight hangover after drinking myself stupid with quite a lot of French wine. My brother hated me drinking, so that's why I got drunk, to spite him.

My head thumping, I plodded into the bathroom, and took some aspirin, as well as my medicine. As I stumbled back to my room, bleary-eyed from both drink and no glasses, I saw a faint outline sitting on my sofa, asleep. I mooched over and poked the sleeping form. As it slithered into consciousness, I realised it was me dear cousin, Ayame. To hasten his awakening, I sat on him.

“Good morrow, fair cousin,” he greeted me.

“Ill met by moonlight, I mean dawn-light, proud Aaya,” I replied.

“And now we stop speaking Shakespearean,” Ayame giggled.

As we sat on the sofa and talked, the sun slowly rose, lighting the room with soft and iridescent glows. I finally noticed the time, and decided it was time for breakfast. I reached over to grab my glasses off the coffee table, and as I put them on, I asked Ayame if he wanted any breakfast, “I'm making waffles.” He agreed straight away, and as I made waffles, scenting the house with warm cream, syrup, and vanilla, he made jasmine tea, my favourite.

We dined in my small lounge, eating around the coffee table. I watched as Aaya delicately picked at his waffle, trying to keep himself as clean as possible. I laughed softly to myself, feeling my happiness riding inside me. If only there were more people like Aaya-chan in the world.

Later that day I decided it was time to start concentrating on my music again. As I walked into what should be a spare room, I spooked at the amount of dust everywhere. I walked slowly over to my piano, and as I ran my hand down its side, I cleaned off a little of the dust. I went over to the stool and sat down, slowly lifting the lid of the piano at the same time. My fingers gently stroked the keys, caressing the grooves that I had worked into them over the years. I quickly started playing one of my favourite pieces, ‘Pavane pour une Infante Defunte’ by Ravel. As the notes poured from my heart, so did they sound on the piano, filling my house with gently flowing tones and undulation. I did not know at the time, that as time stopped for me whilst I played, so did it stop for most of the Sohma household, and the melancholy tune I played reached them, they stopped in their work, pausing to listen.

I played the final chords, and it felt as if the whole world sighed, letting their worries fly from them. My next piece was a happier one and I smiled as the notes skittered over the keyboard, forming an arrangement of the much-loved ‘The Pianist’ by Saight-Sans. The notes played and ended, and I kept playing piece after piece, feeling the energy of the music flow out of me.

6 - Sidetracked 1

Sidetrack 1

“Hey, ku-chan?”

“Yes Aaya?”

“Wanna know something funny?”

“You mean you finally sold something?!”

“No, but do you wanna hear something funny?”

“Ok.”

“Heheheheheh, you know that Hari's your doctor?”

“Well done!”

“Well, hehehehehehehehe, that means that he is also your gynaecologist!!!!!!”

“Hahahahahaahah, so NOT funny! Jerk!”

7 - Chapter 6

I reached into the bathroom cabinet, searching for some aspirin, hoping to ease a pounding headache. As I swallowed the two pills I, my head back and my eyes closed, I felt some hands close over my ears, and someone's breath tickling the back of my neck. I turned around slowly, and my eyes still covered, I leant forward and gently kissed the man in front of me, hoping that it was indeed Shigure.

“Happy Valentine's Day!” he said, as he uncovered my eyes.

“And you!” he held my hand and led me into the lounge.

“What are you doing next Tuesday?”

“Nothing much, why?”

“Can I take you out for the day? Please? Pretty please?”

“Umm...I'll have to check my schedule,” I said, teasing him. “Yes, of course.”

“Ok, see you then,” and he was gone.

I walked into my bedroom, and changed into some ballet clothes, lacing the slippers around my ankles. I walked into a room, like a conservatory, in which was set up ballet apparatus. I put on some music, and began stretching to the sound of a Swedish band, the Rasmus, in the background.

My loud music attracted Nari, yet I didn't notice her presence, or her growing fear. I danced to the music, letting the beats pulsate through my dance. As the drums crescendoed to a resounding note, I pirouetted, gaining speed and agility as I did so, building up the energy inside of me. Whilst I danced, Nari watched my movements, her fear building up also. I slowed down, and finally noticed her, hiding in the corner, rocking backwards and forwards. I ran towards her, shocked by her presence. Exactly what I shouldn't have done.

“No, don't bring them closer, stay away. DON'T BRING THEM NEAR ME!” she was screaming and crying, as if in pain.

“Nari, Nari, its me, it's ok. It's only me, Ku. Don't worry Nari, it'll be ok. They wont come near you. There's no one else here. It's just me. They can't hurt you. What's not there can't hurt you.”

“DON'T COME ANY CLOSER. Leave me alone. THEY'RE TRYING TO HURT ME. Stop it. STOP IT. Stop them. Make them leave. MAKE IT STOP. Don't touch me. Don't come any closer.”

I had no idea about what to do. I sat and watched, hoping se would calm down soon. I had seen her like this before, of course, but it till rendered me shoot-scared every time I saw it again.

We must have sat like that for at least an hour, me just waiting for Nari to feel better. She finally got up, and walked away without saying anything, letting the doors swing shut behind her. I stoop up and stretched, easing my aching joints, before going to change. I quickly threw on a pair of skinny-fit jeans, a tight fitting black and white stripy top that stretched down to nearly my knees. I did a red leather belt up around my waist, and sat on the edge of the bed as I pulled on a pair of stiletto leather boots, rolling up my jeans to expose the intricate leatherwork. I stood up, and walked through the house to my front door. Before leaving I grabbed a beret and my black overcoat, as well at a red scarf and red leather gloves. As I put on the clothes, I left the house, pulling my coat around me to keep myself from the cold February air.

As I walked through the town I looked at all the signs of the coming snow, grey clouds, frosty air. We had already had snow, and I didn't want much more. I made my way to a small café, in which I knew it would be warm and toasty. I opened the door, and a bell tinkled to alert the owner of my presence. I walked over to the counter, and placed my order, “Can I have a large Vanilla Latte please.” As I waited for my drink, I looked around for somewhere to sit. The café was nearly empty, except for an old man sitting in one corner, and a young couple sitting in a little alcove. The boy was wearing a cap, and was smiling

happily at the young girl opposite him. As he looked up, I was shocked to recognise him, if only by his ginger hair. Shock registering on my face, I spoke before I could stop myself, "KYO?!"

I grabbed my drink off the counter and walked over to his table, pulling a chair up for me. I sat down, and stared at him with questioning eyes. "And this is who?"

He grimaced, and squirmed in fear.

8 - Chapter 7

“Ummmm...this is Kakuro, a, ummmmm...friend?” Kyo stuttered.

I looked at him, hoping to bore some sense into his skull. I knew all too well that she wasn't just a “friend”. I put on a brave smile, “I'm pleased to meet you, I am Kuroumo, Kyo-chan's cousin.”

“I am pleased to meet you too, Sohma-san,” the girl greeted me brightly. Her brown hair falling lightly around her shoulders, she smiled brightly up at me, her brown eyes shining happily in the warm light of the café. I looked at Kyo, and he too looked happy, at least for him. I couldn't help but smile at him. I punched him playfully on the shoulder, and he fell off his chair, “What would Kagura say if she could see you now?”

“Kagura, who's Kagura? You have another girlfriend? I don't believe you could do this to me, how could you?” Kakuro became all flustered.

I placed my hand on her shoulder, “Kagura is another cousin. Don't worry. It is nothing.”

“Hmmm, yes, nothing,” Kyo blushed, and glared at me.

I quickly finished my drink, draining my mug, before standing up again. “Je sors,” Kyo had also stood up, and I leant slowly towards him, “Be careful,” I whispered in his ear. I pulled on my winter clothes once more, and walked out of the café, into the freezing fog.

I walked into the small bookstore, and walked straight over to the music books. I knew exactly what I was looking for. I picked up the book and let my hand run over its smooth cover, reading the words on the cover,

Chansons Des Reves

Par Sohma Kuroumo

The cover was intricately decorated with flowers and butterflies. I walked over to the counter and purchased the book, even though I already owned the original manuscript. This was something I could frame, the first time my music had ever been published.

I sat on y sofa, curled up in a small ball, watching the early morning television, the American shows. I was licking a spoon that had previously been coated in fromage frais, one of my favourite foods. As the show ended and the theme tune came on, I uncurled my legs, and stood up, walking into my bedroom. Today was when Shigure was taking me out for the day, and I was going to decide what to wear.

Reaching into my wardrobe I pulled out a heavy kimono, that was a pale blue and embroidered with flowers and humming birds. As I pulled it on, I shivered, though not from the cold. I walked back into my living room, en route to the kitchen, and jumped, having seen my brother sitting on my sofa. I regarded him nervously, "Akito-san, what are you doing here?"

"Nothing. I was bored, so I came to see what you were doing today."

"I'm going out with Shigure, for the day. It's all been arranged."

"Well unarranged it."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean, I am bored, and I am ordering you to spend time with me, and entertain me."

“You are *ordering* me? You have no right to order me about. I have a life you know, and I intend to live it.”

“You will stay with me, *or else*.”

“Or else what, Akito, you'll pull my hair? You'll tell Daddy? Why can't you leave me alone?”

Quick as a flash Akito had got to his feet, and was standing directly in front of me. He grabbed me by both wrists and forced me up against the wall. “How many times have I asked you not to be indolent towards me? How many? And still you are. You have not learned yet.” He let go of my wrist and slapped me sharply across the face. “You will learn to treat me the respect that I deserve. I am no longer your brother, but the head of the family. What I say must be done. My word is law, you got that?”

I looked him in the eye, my pain and rage showing in my face. He became even more enraged by this, and dragged me across the room, and into his home. I was nearly in tears. He threw me down, and I hit the table with my leg, falling to the ground in pain, I looked up at him. “What are you going to do now? Kill me?” He came over and kicked me hard, “Maybe,” he said through gritted teeth. I groaned in pain. Then I remembered that I hadn't taken my medication last night or this morning. I was in deep shoot. If he went any further he really might kill me.

He pulled me to my feet again, and dragged me to a dark room, void of furniture. “You will not be going out today. You will not be going out tomorrow. You will be staying in here.”

I lay crying, feeling ill and in great pain. The two days passed slowly and painfully, with me fighting for consciousness. As tiredness washed over me, I would black out, and then come to, feeling worse than ever. I lay in my own vomit, and wished that my life would truly end.

The second day ended, at least I thought it did, and still no one came to free me. I had not eaten or drunk, or even been to a proper toilet for over 36 hours, and still I was left. I was dying, slowly.

9 - Chapter 8

Shigure walked into Akito's house confidently, he had to know where Kuroumo was, no one had heard from her for nearly a week. He knew Akito-san was feeling quite ill again, but he still might know something. Shigure entered the room in which he knew Akito was lying, fighting his sickness, "Akito-san," he bowed low in greeting, showing his respect and fear for the younger man, "I am sorry you are ill again, if there's anything I can do to help, however I was wondering if you knew where Kuroumo-kun was?"

"shoot," Akito sighed. "Find Hatori for me, please."

Shigure walked off, exasperated. Akito hadn't answered him at all. He walked across the estate and up to Hatori's front door, knocking on it. When Hatori answered he didn't have the effort to make any jokes, he just sighed and said that Akito wanted to see him.

Together they walked back to Akito's house, and once more entered, both bowing low to him. Akito lifted a frail hand to his trouser pocket, and pulled out a key. He struggled to speak, "In a room.... at the back...go...both...open."

Shigure and Hatori looked at each other uncertainly, yet they still followed Akito's wishes and proceeded through the house towards the back. They came to the door about which Akito had spoken, and as Hatori inserted the key into the lock and opened the door slowly, the most horrendous stench reached them, a mixture of vomit, urine, and death and decay. As they looked cautiously in they saw a feeble body lying on the floor, motionless. They both walked over the messy floor, and looked hard to see it was.

"Kuro," they both yelled, quietly. Her hair was matted and hung lankly around her body. Her skin was papery, and her lips dry. She looked awful, and smelt even worse. She wasn't breathing. As Hatori bent forwards to listen for a heartbeat, a shadow entered the doorway. Akito was leaning against the doorway, breathing heavily, "Is she dead?"

"I don't know. But I'm taking her out of here. I'm taking her away from you." Hatori was being firm with Akito.

"She can live with me," said Shigure quietly, shocked into a melancholy mood by the sight of his Ku. He bent over and scooped her up in his arms, before turning to Hatori, "I'll take her into your house so that you can examine her."

Hatori nodded.

As Shigure carried Ku, the tears dripped down his face, how could anyone treat another person like this? Akito really did take things too far. He laid her down on Hatori's examining table, and slowly undid the kimono she was wearing. It had once been very beautiful, one of his favourites, and hers, that Ayame had given her for her 21st birthday. He pulled it off her, and left her lying on the table in her underwear. She looked so thin, her ribs showing through her nearly transparent skin. She still had vomit around her mouth, so he grabbed a wet cloth, and carefully sponged it off, before doing the same thing to her whole body, intent upon making her cleaner.

Hatori walked into the room, and Shigure looked up, about to ask something, but Hatori was one step ahead of him, and answered before he even asked, "She's been in there for a week, with no food or water. She hasn't had her medicine for that long either."

"But is she still alive? Check her now. Make her better. Now. You must. You have to. Then she can come and live with me, and everything will be ok again."

Hatori said nothing but set to work.

I was lying in a deep sleep, and concentrating on keeping every muscle as still as I could. All I could see was blackness, and there was a light at the end of it, getting closer as I went towards it, if I got close enough, then maybe it would all end. Everything. Finished. I was nearly there. Just a little further to go.

"We're losing her," Hatori stated, rushing around Ku as she lay dying on the table.

"No, no," Shigure pleaded, grabbing her hand, "Ku, if you can hear me. Please Ku. Please Ku, don't give up. Don't leave us now. Fight. Fight and show him. Show us all."

A few more metres and I would be there, just a few more. But why was I going backwards now, something was pulling me back, away from the light. I fought mentally. NO! Let me go to it. It will liberate me. Let me GO! I heard a voice in the distance, "Don't leave us now...Ku, come back, Ku? Please wake up."

The desperation in the voice scared me. Yet I recognised it. And it needed me.

"Come on Ku, come on. You're nearly back," Hatori pleaded as he pumped her with drugs. He watched her body carefully for any signs of life. He was looking so hard that he wasn't sure if he was seeing things or not, "She's breathing. She's breathing. She's alive. She's alive! SHE'S frackING ALIVE." He was overjoyed, and watched, smiling, as Shigure gathered her into his arms, in a deep embrace. "We should leave her for a bit, let her come around in peace. She needs some rest."

10 - Chapter 9

I opened my eyes and found myself in more darkness. Thinking I was once again in that damned room, I panicked, and screamed, letting all the angst flow out of me. I stopped gasping for breath, and fell back, exhausted. My chest was really hurting me. I heard footsteps, and I blinked rapidly as bright lights were turned on above my head. Someone walked towards me, and I held my breath thinking it was Akito. I was relieved to see Hatori standing above me.

“You are awake then?”

“Yes,” my voice sounded raspy, “How long...”

“Nearly two days, since we found you...before that I don't know...”

“Am I...?”

“You're going to be fine. You have a couple of broken ribs, and a few bruises. Then your lungs had shut down, but they're working fine again now, you're still a bit dehydrated, and need a lot of nutrition, but we'll soon have you well again.”

“I don't want to go home. I want to stay away.”

“Don't worry, you're not. We're sending you to live with Shigure. You'll be fine there. You'll be safe. Sleep now. You need your rest.”

I sighed, and was about to protest when I realised how exhausted I really was. I closed my eyes and drifted off into sleep, although this time it wasn't as deep, and I was happy.

When I woke up, I was looking deep into another person's eyes. I smiled as I realised who it was, "Gure," I smiled happily as he let his lips gently brush against mine. He stroked my hair back off my face, and I felt it pull as the knots got even more tangled.

"I need a shower." I stated.

"I'm not sure you can, well not just yet. But I'll brush your hair for you, if you want."

I nodded. He disappeared and then reappeared brandishing a hairbrush. He gently began to brush my hair out, taking care not to pull too much at the knots. "Ah, Gure, you can still be a hairdresser if you really want to."

He smiled, concentrating too much to do anything else.

I spent the next few days sleeping and eating and drinking, trying to regain my strength. Hatori had explained to me that I might be a bit weaker for a little while, but hopefully, if I took great care, it wouldn't be for too long. I just hoped I would be able to dance again.

Shigure would come and visit as much as he could, and gradually he and Hatori, Yuki, Kyo, and Haru, started moving my stuff, well some of it, over to Shigure's house.

A month after the incident I was fully settled into Shigure's house, with two rooms to myself, as well as a share in Gure's study. My piano had been squeezed through the house into one room, as well as all my art materials. My computer had been put in my bedroom, and all my discs and other music things were muddled up in random boxes all around the house.

I walked around, slowly unpacking my things. Taking life easy for a moment. I sat on my bed, reading and listening to music. I would occasionally paint; paint the music I was listening to. My belongings

began to spread out through the house. My stuff mixing in with Gure's. We were fast becoming too much of a couple. Next thing we would be sharing a room, then before you know it, we would most definitely become a couple. Which would upset some people. Well, one person. Bastard.

11 - Chapter 10

The house became quiet once more after the long winter break was over, and Yuki, Kyo and Tohru returned to school. As soon as they had gone, on their first day back, I fwomped into a chair, and sighed heavily. "Tired?" Shigure poked his head around the door, and looked at me.

"Just a bit," I replied. I closed my eyes and mentally cleared my head, before standing up again. I had just remembered that I had some work commissioned for in a few days. I needed to get it finished, so that it could dry properly in time. I was concentrating on this as I walked into Gure's study; to where we had decided was the best place for my easel. I was concentrating on ideas for my painting that had been commissioned by a local shop owner to hang on his wall. He wanted a watercolour that was a picture of a young woman and a horse. I did not know the person who had asked for this, or why he wanted such a picture. My job was simply to do the painting, and get paid.

I picked up a pencil, and began sketching the basic outlines for the woman and the horse, when Shigure came in and peered over my shoulder. "Whatcha doing?"

"Painting."

"Painting what?"

"Surprisingly enough, a picture."

"Awww, can't you come and play?"

"I need to do this, Gure, it has to be finished within the week."

“Awww, but I'm so lonely.”

“Well, surely you can do some work too, I know your editor would be pleased if you actually did do some work.”

“That's exactly why I'm not doing any. Pleeeeeease come out with me. Please.”

“Why are you so damned determined,” I sighed resignedly as I laid down my utensils, and followed Shigure away from the study.

“Because I have something for you.”

“What do you mean, ‘you have something for me’? Last time you said that, you and Aaya were ten, and I was eight. Ten seconds after you said that, you poured spiders down the back of my ballet tutu. I had spider bites all over me for ages.”

“Yes, that was extremely funny, but I am actually, for once, being nice and serious this time. Come on, I managed to get us a car. Hurry up.”

I followed Shigure out of the house, and climbed into the black car next to him, both of us sitting in the back seat. As Shigure leaned over me to shut the door behind us, I leant forward and kissed him quickly on the cheek. He looked at me in surprise, “What was that for?”

“Nothing.”

He shrugged. As we drove out of the city, I looked out of the window, staring at the winter, rushing by as it passed into spring. We drove for about forty-five minutes, and when the car finally stopped, I burst out the door, and leant over beside the car, letting nearly all the food I'd eaten in the past twenty-four hours stain the ground. Shigure climbed out after me, and looked at disgust at the ground, before taking my

arm and leading me into a field. I looked around for something, anything, "What is it I'm meant to be seeing?" I asked him. He pointed into a far corner of the field, and I squinted to see what it was, "A cow? You brought me all this way to see a cow?"

Shigure smiled at me, and took off his glasses, and passed them to me. As I put them on, everything became more focused. I saw at last that what I had thought to be a cow, was indeed a horse. "It's a horse," I stated.

"It's *your* horse," Shigure corrected me. "He is now your horse, to train, to break in, and then do what you want with. Sell, keep. Its up to you."

"Ummmm, ok. But why the hell are you giving me a horse?"

"Let's just say I though you needed another friend, and also, it's a late white day present."

"Ummmmm.Ok." I really should get used to Gure's weird whims. "Where are we keeping the horse?"

"In a field near the house, so you can go and see him whenever. In fact, we're taking him now, so you need to go and catch him..." he passed me a head collar, and I walked off in the direction of the horse. As I got nearer to the horse, I could tell that it was beautiful, and must have been expensive. He lifted his head as I got closer, and I whispered to him, softly. He looked at me, and slowly walked over, snorting slightly as he did so. I slipped the head collar over his neck and walked slowly back over to Shigure, and the horsebox that had just pulled up.

As I lead the horse up the ramp, Shigure stood at the bottom and smiled. After securely tying the horse, I walked back down the ramp, and helped shut the doors, before watching the box drive off again in the direction of home.

"Il s'appelle Mailus."

“Bon, merci beaucoup Gure-Chan,” I said as I threw my arms around him, and buried my face in his chest. How I loved him.

and round.

AUTHOR'S NOTE Kuroumo (me) just wanted to say that this NEVER ACTUALLY happens, and is just me in my disturbed mind having little dreams again. Maybe I truly am more perverted than my darling Gure.

13 - Chapter 11

I soaked in the bath, thinking about my new horse, who was happily eating in the small paddock nearby. I could understand him so well. It was nearly time for the kids to come home from school, after their first day back. I wallowed under water, thinking about the great day I had enjoyed. I closed my eyes momentarily, and let the happy images run through my head, when I opened them again, I nearly had a heart attack, due to the fact That Shigure's face was looming over me. I was so mad; I could've slapped him.

"What do you want?" I demanded instead.

"Is that anyway to treat me? I just bought you a horse, after all."

"Then they are paying you too much to do nothing."

"I don't do nothing!"

"Pfuit, whatever."

"I really don't. Anyhow, you have now distracted me, my love, and put me off course. Oh yes, I remember," the idiot was once again talking to himself, "I was wanting to have a bath with, no, no," I gave him an evil look, "I'm kidding. I joke, I joke. No. I've totally forgotten what I wanted."

"What you wanted, dear COUSIN was to perve on me. Numbskull." I pulled myself out of the bath, and put my hand out for a towel, and waited whilst he took his time passing one to me. When I had finally covered myself, I walked towards him, seductively, and moved my face closer to his. He smiled gently, and then grimaced in pain, as I kicked him hard in the shin, and punched him in the stomach. "Go back to your *hentai*, pervert!"

“OWOWOWOWOW! Ku, you're such a bully! Ku you're...” he then proceeded to follow me around the house, telling me how mean I was, even persisting whilst I changed into a blouse and jeans. He finally shut up when we heard the door open, and three sets of feet storm in. As we walked down to the front room, Gure still muttering, only quietly to himself, we could sense the anger omitting from the room.

“Good day?” Gure asked.

“No,” Yuki was first to answer.

“Why not? Wasn't it fun having Haru and the most *charming* little Momiji come to school with you?” I was next to speak.

Kyo gave me a withering look.

“So what happened?”

“Akito. That's what happened. Akito came to school, and threatened Miss Honda.”

“He did what?” I was shaking uncontrollably, and randomly sat down in the middle of the room. The others just looked at me, and continued their conversation. I sat there; looking completely dazed, and only returned to my senses when Kyo, in a great rage, tripped over me. He stood up again, and swearing, stormed off to the roof.

When everyone had calmed down a little bit, Yuki walked in, and sat down next to me. “Are you ok?”

I looked at him, started, “Yes, yes. I should be. Just ignore me. Being stupid. Heh. Are YOU ok?”

“Yes,” he smiled sadly.

He stood up, and then helped me to stand. As we stood there, I thought how like his brother he was to look like, but how different in personality. I envy the girl who he will one day tell her he loves. I spoke quietly, and earnestly, “I’m going to bed. I don’t feel well. Don’t worry about it, it’s nothing. It’s just my old age.”

I walked off, leaving a puzzled Yuki behind. He stood there for a few minutes, before shaking his head, and walking in the direction of Shigure’s study. As he entered without knocking, Gure looked up, “Yuki-kun, to what do I owe the pleasure of such a visit?”

“Isn’t it Kuro’s birthday tomorrow?”

“Ummmm...is it? I can’t remember.” He picked up the phone and dialled Aaya’s number quickly, “Hi...Aaya-chan...yes...its MEEEEEEEE...hello!!!” Shigure glanced up at Yuki, and noticed his serious expression, “Ummmm...yes...anyway, do you know when Kuro’s birthday is? Because Yuki thinks it is tomorrow?...Aaya...hello? Aaya?”

A resounding shout was heard down the phone, “YUKIIIIIII...BROTHER DEAREST IT IS !!!!!!!”

Yuki pushed his hand on the button, and disconnected the phone, as Shigure quietly wet himself laughing. He then dialled again, only this time a little more seriously. “Hello Hari-san! It is I, your dear cousin and friend, requesting your services...ok...when’s Kuro’s birthday? Oh, so it IS tomorrow?...ok then...no...of course I forgot...ok...bye-bye.” He turned to YUKI, “It IS tomorrow.”

“I got that.”

Meanwhile, I had gone up to my room, and instead of changing, I collapsed onto my bed, exhausted by the emotions I had felt during the day. I quickly fell into a deep and troubling sleep.

“KUROUMO, I hope you are being nice to your brother!”

“I am, I promise. I'll always be nice to my brother, for he is my little brother, and I love him.” The little girl took the little boy's hand, and smiled sweetly up at her mother, “see mommy, I am looking after him.” Her mother didn't look, but smiled, “That's nice Honey.”

The little boy grinned, evilly, and wrenched his hand away. He then pushed her over, and she landed, with a thud, on the floor. Her mother then turned around. “Oh, Akito, my darling! Are you all right? Did you hurt yourself?” The little boy allowed his mother to pick him up, and as she cuddled him to her, he glared at his older sister over their mother's shoulder. She sat there, and felt the tears stream down her face. She sat there all day. No one had remembered, again. No one cared.

“Mommy, can I go to school,” she stood, quite tall even at the age of twelve, “Mommy, can I got to High School, please. I want to go to school with my cousins. Please.”

“No, Kuroumo. How many times must I tell you? You can't. You wouldn't cope, you'd get sick and then I would have to spend my time looking after you. I need to look after Akito, he is younger.”

“But mom...”

“NO buts. That's it. Final!”

She lay on her bed, dealing with puberty, quietly, and by herself. No one warned her about this. She didn't know her own body. She wanted someone to care. But no one ever came. Nobody minded. She touched her face gently, and winced in pain as she felt the wounds from the previous day, "What happened?" everyone had asked. But Akito, even at seven, answered for her, "She walked into that dumb cherry blossom tree she loves so much. She loves it more than anything else in the world. She's so stupid."

But that never happened; it wasn't her tree's fault. Akito had done it. But no one believed her. "I HATE YOU!" she screamed at no one. "I HATE YOU ALL! I HATE YOU ALL SO MUCH!" She grabbed the books that Hatori had leant her, and threw them at the door, watching them fall to the floor, and break.

The door slid open, and Shigure walked in, "Ku, are you ok?"

"Do I look ok? I don't feel ok. But I don't need your help. I don't need anyone's help. I can cope by myself, just leave me alone!" She sank off the bed and onto the floor, her head in her hands, murmuring to herself. He walked over and sat beside her, speaking gently, "You might not need my help, but I'll give it just in case. I'll always be here, just in case."

I woke up, sweating in fear. Those memories, coming back now. I rolled over and noticed that it was only four in the morning. Four in the morning on this, my twenty-sixth birthday. Not that anyone had remembered. They never did. Not from when I was seven. Now from when Akito was born. I stood up, and quietly walked out of the room, softly going down the stairs until I reached Shigure's bedroom door. I quietly opened it, and walked in, trying not to wake him. As I lifted up his bed covers, he came into semi-consciousness, but said nothing, only moved to give me some space. I climbed in beside him, and comforted myself, by lying deep in his arms, throughout the remainder of the night.

14 - Chapter 12

I woke up the next morning, completely oblivious to the horrors of the night. I felt warm and safe in the arms of the man that I loved, and as I snuggled deeper into his arms, I sighed deeply. He moved slightly in his sleep, and his grip around me tightened. We lay, contented in our sleep until the sun began to awaken the rest of the household. When we eventually got up, I sat and watched as Gure changed. I had no need to, as I was still in my clothes from the previous day.

We walked into the dining room, and were greeted eagerly by Tohru. We ate breakfast, and discussed our plans for the day. Tohru and Yuki were going out for the day, Kyo was, well, Kyo was just being Kyo. Gure was going to try and do some work, and I thought, well, I thought that I really should do some work as well.

We all went our separate ways, and so the day started. I sat at my piano trying to figure out the melody of a new piece I was composing. I fingered the notes gently, and was humming away, when before I knew it, my simple melody turned into a full-blown piano arrangement of 'Moon River'. I sat there, and played and sang. When I stopped, I heard the floorboards creak. Turning around, I saw Gure standing there, his eyes moist, "that was beautiful."

I smiled, and was about to respond, when I heard Yuki and Tohru return. Yuki sounded mad. Shigure went downstairs, to see what the fuss was about, and I tidied up my papers before joining them all. As I got downstairs, I heard Yuki shouting, a rare occurrence. When I walked into the room, I understood why, Aaya. It was good to see him again.

Having walked in, I turned around and walked out again, leaving them to argue about it all. I waited until I knew that Aaya had transformed, and then I entered the room again. I walked over to him, and kissed him lightly on either cheek, outraging Yuki, "How can you do that? It's gross."

"How is it *that* gross?" I asked.

"HE'S NAKED!"

I smiled and nodded, "Yes, Aaya-chan, I agree. You do need to change. It is unsuitable in the presence of females."

"You never minded before."

"Shhhhh," I giggled.

Aaya disappeared for a while, and came out again, fully clothed in flamboyant and indulgent clothes. He walked into the kitchen, and after a bit of clattering around, he walked back into the room in which we were all waiting. "Let's have a tea party!" he suggested, looking extremely thrilled with the idea.

Gure soon picked up on the idea as well, and before we knew it, we were sipping tea, and eating biscuits, chocolates, and little sandwiches. Thankfully there was no cake, because it sometimes, if in the wrong circumstances, made me feel ill.

We finished our little party shortly, as Kyo and yuki quickly developed foul moods, due to Aaya's presence. As he and Gure gently joked about with each other, about their bisexuality, I stood up, and unfolded my legs, using the dancing manners to help exercise myself. I walked out of the house, and into the surrounding woods. I knew of a clearing that would do perfectly for some exercise.

As I grew nearer to the clearing, my muscles began to twitch as the adrenaline pumped through me. The moment I saw the space, I threw myself into a wild and erotic dance that let out all my emotion and any energy. I felt the beats of a silent music pulsate through my body, and resound through the clearing.

I fell to the floor, exhausted by my exercise. I felt a cool breeze blow over my face, and I sighed, as I smelt the mossy floor. My eyes closed, and before I knew it, I had fallen into a sleep, lulled by the sounds of the forest.

15 - Chapter 12

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16 - Chapter 13

"Kuroumo, are you ready yet? Hurry up. She's waiting."

"Coming mama. Akito, let go of my skirt. Leave me alone." She hurried down the stairs and into the lounge, where the hairdresser stood waiting. Kuroumo hate having her hair cut. The hairdresser would lop off great chunks, and leave her with short and unkempt hair. Then Aaya would come around and point and laugh. He though that because he was older, he could.

She sat on the chair, and flinched as she heard the sound of the scissors slicing the fine dark hair, splitting it up, and damaging it. "Mama, make her stop, now. Please."

She didn't realize Akito had come downstairs. "Mama, I want a go."

"You want your hair cut too?"

"No, I want a go at cutting Kuroumo's hair."

The hairdresser laughed, a tinkling little sound, and handed Akito the scissors. "Here you go, big boy."

She felt the terror rise up inside of her. Please. Don't let him cut my hair. I don't want him to."

But he already had. He had gone straight to the crown of her head, and cut off a great chunk. Realizing he had missed some strands, he drove the scissors in again, not stopping. The scissors bored into her head and through her skin. She screamed, yet he carried on, their mother not noticing. She was talking. She never noticed her daughter's anguish.

Kuroumo was crying now, begging her little brother to stop, "Please, Akito. Please stop. Please. I haven't done anything to you, have I? Please stop."

"No."

I opened my eyes and looked cautiously around me, hating all these dreams that were haunting me. I was still in the forest, but not where I had fallen asleep. I must have walked in my sleep. It was dark and overgrown, and I could feel the wild eyes of the forest watching me. I wanted to get out of there, I needed to escape. I'd had enough.

I thrashed my way through the thick undergrowth, and managed to find my way out of the forest, only to find myself in the town. And standing opposite me was the last place I wanted to be, its chain fence

showing off the garden beyond. He stood there, and looked at me. A smirk playing across his face.

17 - Chapter 14

I stood there, frozen to the spot in fear, not daring to move either way, not daring to be breath. The smile played across his lips, and he looked deep into my soul, eyes burning out my heart, “*Dear sister,*” he sneered, and I was gone, I couldn't cope with such pain and fear, and I fell to the ground, unconscious. I felt more cool air brushing over my face, and the clammy touch of my skin, as I felt a cool hand on my brow, “She should be coming around now. Where was she?”

“She was on the edge of the forest, near the town. Just lying there. I passed her on my way to pick Aaya up, and I'm glad I did. She was nearly blue, and could have become extremely hypothermic. Who knew she was gone?”

“Ummmm, no-one?”

Hari just glared at Gure, who cowered in his presence. “I'm sorry, Hari-kun,” he muttered quietly. I lifted up my hand slowly and brushed Shigure lightly on the chest. He took my hand in his, and leant forward slowly, to kiss me lightly on the lips, “hi,” he said. I put my hands around his neck, and buried my face in his kimono, and as he put his arms around me, I felt safe once more. He lifted me up, and carried me through the house, to his bedroom. As he laid me on the bed, I sighed deeply and pulled him down on top of me, smiling softly.

He held me in his arms for the night, and as it came to morning, I woke as did nature, and scrawled out of his arms, and out onto the floor. I quietly walked through the house, and onto the veranda stairs, where I sat, and looked into the forest, that was teeming with birds full of early morning song. I felt a tap on my shoulder, and looked up at Gure, passing me a cigarette. He lit it, and I lifted it to my lips, inhaling the sweet poison, and letting it slowly kill me. I exhaled, and sent a column of smoke spiralling into the air.

Gure left me again, and I sat, with my head resting in my hands. The sun gradually grew higher, and its early morning redness seemed to iridescently ignite the sky, and the forest. Shadows silhouetted on the dew eaten grass, and I watched the perfect moisture lining an innocent cobweb, with dew drops in the right places to make it seem crystallized.

I stood up and walked back into the house, putting the kettle on as I walked past it, and into my room, getting changed for the day, seeing as I was currently only wearing Gure's bathrobe. As I selected my outfit for the day, a pair of skinny fit jeans and a dark red shirt-like thing, I thought about the day ahead.

I knew that Yuki, Kyo and Tohru were planning a visit to Tohru's mother's grave, as it was a year since her death. My heart would be with her on this hard day. I, however, would therefore have the opportunity to spend a day with Gure, hopefully with no distractions this time. I walked into the kitchen again, and made some green tea, sipping it slowly, and letting its antioxidants work their way through my system.

The others didn't wake up and emerge for another hour, by which time I had already visited my horse, and sorted out his stuff. I would ride him later. I entered the kitchen, and slowly ate a piece of bread, taking my time over it. I needed to start that damn picture sometime. I had just over a week to finish it.

I contemplated beginning work with my watercolour pencils, but decided against the idea, and instead began to read a book. I was deeply engrossed in this when the rest of the house finally woke up, emerging from their separate rooms, and walking about the house in a still zombie-like state.

18 - Sidetracked 3

I walked into the kitchen to grab a drink, and nearly had heart failure when I saw Shigure crouched on the floor. "What the frack are you doing?" I asked him.

"Eating," he replied.

"Eating what?" my eyes narrowed in suspicion as I grabbed the plate out of his hand. "Ewwwww, I can't believe you. YOU ARE GROSSS!!! YOU GROSS ME OUT. WHY THE frack WERE YOU EATING...DOG FOOD?????"

AUTHOR'S NOTE this actually did happen,

Signed, Kuroumo Sohma

(well, technically not signed, coz I can't sign a computer screen, but you know what I mean.)

19 - Chapter 15

I sighed in relief as the house became quiet once more, after the kids had left, leaving me in peace, with Gure. I put down the book I was reading and sidled into Shigure's study, where he was, for once, actually doing some work. I went over to the desk where he was working and leant against it, looking at him, but saying nothing

Eventually he got unnerved by this, and started to look busy, trying to do his best to ignore me, yet still I continued. He got up, and left the room, but I followed him, and never took my eyes off him. Until he went through door and slid it shut behind him. I sighed, and instead of stopping to open it, I walked straight through it, thinking I would fix it later.

At the sound of the ripping paper he turned around, not able to ignore me any longer. "You broke my house!" he exclaimed in an exasperated voice. I didn't reply, and he looked at me, "What?" he asked, "What do you want? You're scaring me leave me alone."

"Awww, but I'm lonely. And I want to play, and talk. Please Gure. Please. Just for a little while," I gave him my most appealing look and fluttered my eyelashes. He succumbed pretty quickly after that. We went into the lounge and he sat down, and I promptly went and sat on top of him, nearly squashing him flat.

He stood up, and picked me up in his arms, carrying me into my bedroom, rather than his. Was interesting when we got stuck on the stairs. He laid me on the bed, and, well. Stuff happened.

Later that day we were as in love as ever, with one of us following the other around. He helped me as I patched up the door, and cleaned me up when I cut myself with a craft knife. As he stuck a plaster over the deep cut, he looked deep into my eyes. He hated the sight of blood or pain.

The day was so perfect I hoped it would never end, but it did. All too quickly. We had spent the rest of the day together, or rather what was left of it, and Shigure came with me to see once again to my horse, watching me as I rode, and commenting on how the horse and I moved as one, for obvious reasons.

When we returned home, we found Yuki, Kyo and Tohru returned also, and after exchanging detail of our day, but leaving out certain parts, we sat down and enjoyed a pleasant dinner together, as a family. They were happy days.

20 - Chapter 16

Once again I found myself resting my head against the cool glass of a train window, but this time I was not full of dread or anxiety. This time I was filled with exultance and expectance. For the other day Shigure had returned from town, with a large announcement. "We're all going on holiday!"

We had hurriedly packed, and prepared for our journey to the Sohma summerhouse, only realising afterwards that there wouldn't be enough space for all of us in the car (as Ha'ri was coming also). It was quickly agreed that I would go by train. I chatted happily in the car as Hatori drove me to the station, and saw me off. I would have to wait at the other end, but I would cope.

I hoped they had all managed ok in the car, because I knew how annoying Shigure could get on long journeys, or how annoying he could get full stop, seeing as he would just sit and yap and get thoroughly overexcited, extremely annoying Ha'ri, and also Yuki and Kyo.

I took my time alone to think about Kyo. He was a strange one, always never quite true, or so I felt. I recollected my meeting with him in the café, and the girl he was with, Kakuro. As I contemplated her, I felt something vibrating in my pocket, making me nearly jump out of the seat in shock. I pulled my phone out of my pocket, looking at the display screen to see the caller identity. Not recognising the number, I flipped it open and answered, "Hello?"

"Ummmm...Hi?! Is that Miss. Sohma?"

"Yes, this is Kuroumo Sohma. Who's calling?"

"My name is Kakuro, we met the other day? With Kyo?"

"Uh, yes, I remember. What can I do for you?"

“Can you help me?”

“Help you with what?”

“I just didn't know if Kyo liked me or not, and he is always being really distant and I really, really like him....” She gabbled away, and I spent some time reassuring her before she finally agreed with me, and hung up.

I looked once more out of the window, and saw that we were gradually getting closer to my destination. I stood up and looked for my baggage, preparing to get off. Luckily my bags had gone in the car, bar one bag that I carried with me, containing painting equipment. I climbed onto the platform and walked into the waiting room, as it was still quite cold out even though it was spring.

I sat there for what felt like hours, waiting for someone to come and pick me up. At last I heard the screech of breaks and I knew that for some weird reason Ha'ri had made the most awful mistake of letting Gure drive his car. A bad move.

I walked out of the waiting room and over to the black car that was waiting for me. However, instead of climbing into the passenger seat, I wrenched open the door on the driver's side, pulled Gure out and dragged him around to the boot, pushing him in once I had opened it, “Pets belong in the boot!” I then walked back around and climbed in behind the driver's seat, before driving smoothly in the direction of the Summerhouse. All I heard from the boot was one muffled phrase; “I love it when you play rough!”

21 - Chapter 17

When I pulled up in front of the house, Tori walked down the steps, looking relaxed for once. I walked over to him, and we greeted each other. He looked at me, and I looked at him, my eyes questioning what he was doing. "I was just giving you a quick check-up." He explained. "

"I'm fine."

"Ok," he began walking back into the house, "hang on a minute, where's Shigure?"

"shoot!" I yelled, running back to the car and opening the boot quickly, letting a choking Shigure fall to the floor, nearly suffocated.

I would have checked if he was ok at that point, if I hadn't been nearly pissing myself was laughter. He looked so stupid, rolling on the floor. Ha'ri soon joined my laughter, and Gure gave us such an evil look, which only increased the amusement that we found in the situation.

Eventually we managed to get into the house and Shigure and Hatori soon disappeared to read some of Gure's "dirty" books. They really weren't that bad. I had read much worse. I decided to find my other bags and go and sort my stuff in my room. I knew that the kids were somewhere by the lake. I sat in the room that I had spent so many holidays in, thinking of the times of my youth, when I heard the shouts that meant that they were back. I walked into the entrance room, and looked at the scene before me, and one which I had seen many times, of Kyo, shouting. This time, he was having a hissy fit because Aaya had randomly turned up.

But not only was Kyo mad, oh no, Yuki too was shouting angrily at Shigure, and through it all Hatori seemed to be sleeping on the sofa, well until he opened one eye and signalled for me to stay quiet, and pretend to be asleep also. I tiptoed back into my room, and silently shut the door, and I really did fall asleep, well for about two minutes, until I was woken again by high-pitched screams coming from the lounge.

It turned out Aaya had brought a reluctant Nari along with him, insisting that she needed the holiday. She had been very quiet, and no one had actually noticed her, that is until she pointed at Tohru and started screaming, instantly setting off Tohru as well. Of course Gure and Aaya then started to panic, whilst Kyo got mad and Yuki got mad at Kyo, and ha'ri just sat there looking all wise.

So I walked in, and told Tohru not to panic, because Nari was nearly always the same around new people. I quickly explained poor Nari's disposition before giving both Kyo and Yuki a very hard kick up the backside to stop them fighting.

Gure and Aaya...well they just went back to being Gure and Aaya, and pretty soon everyone was pretty much settled, well, except Nari, and we all sat down around the table, and enjoyed a pleasant meal together, as a family.

22 - Chapter 18

The next day dawned beautifully, and I soon knew what I would do all day, or most of it. After establishing the fact the Gure, Ha'ri and Aaya would be talking amongst themselves most of the day, I decided to use the opportunity to go swimming in the lake...one of my childhood pastimes. I managed to find a swimming costume in the bottom of one of my bags, and as I reached for it, I felt my hand brush against something hard. I groped for what it was, and pulled out a box, containing...cake mixture. I was nearly in the right frame of mind to kill Gure at that point in time.

As I pulled a towel around my body, I walked out of the house, and in the general direction of the lake, tripping occasionally in my flip-flops. I hoped it wouldn't be too cold, but it shouldn't be.

I reached the lakeside and tenderly dipped a toe into the water, before walking back up the shore. I then turned to face the water, and ran, not stopping as my legs hit the water, and then I dived, soaring into the shallow water, my body merging into it and residing in it with less than a splash. I swam in fast sweeping strokes, gliding effortlessly through the water, forgetting where I was, and living only to swim.

I broke to the surface, taking a deep breath of fresh air, letting it fall deep into my lungs. I swam on the surface, backstroke, my face bathing in the sun, and I swam lazily across the surface of the water.

After a couple of hours I got out of the water, now much warmed by the sun, and climbed onto the lakeside, pulling the towel around my wet body, I walked back to the house, shivering. Hatori was going to be mad with me. Oh well. He could just live with it.

I crept into the house, hoping no one would notice me. Leaving wet footprints everywhere I tiptoed to my room, and then again to the bathroom, taking a quick shower, and ridding my body of the clingy green algae I found in some annoying places.

When I again went to join the others, it was nearly lunchtime. Tohru had again surpassed herself in her cooking, and we eagerly enjoyed a delicious meal. After lunch, we all simply lounged around and did what people generally do on holidays: relax.

That night I lay in bed, thinking and listening to the sounds of everyone going to sleep. I finally heard Aaya at last go to bed, and I at once climbed out of my own bed, swinging my legs to the floor, and once more creeping through the house.

I went first to the kitchen, and took a glass of water, quenching the thirst that had been rising inside me. I set the glass down on the counter, and sighed, having fulfilled my stomach. I crept along the corridor to where I hoped Gure would be sleeping, because I had embarrassed myself often enough with Aaya. But that was a different story.

I opened the door I had come to, and soon saw that Gure was indeed sleeping in here. I quietly approached the bed, and walked up to his head. Leaning in close to his ear, I made to whisper in his ear, but before I could, he had grabbed hold of me, and pulled me on top of him. He pushed his mouth against mine and I couldn't help but smile, as I felt laughter and happiness bubbling up inside me, warming me up.

He held me closer, and kept his mouth firmly against mine, kissing me. I felt his tongue explore my mouth, and let it, enjoying the sensation. He let his hands slide down from my back, and down over my hips.

The night passed quickly, and Gure and I slept long into the morning, thanks to the happenings of the night. We would have slept longer, had not Ayame taken it upon himself to wake us up at lunchtime. I got up, and changed and spent the rest of the day, and maybe even the rest of the holiday, filled with a warm and satisfied feeling, that grew inside my belly, and radiated out of me, giving me a happy feeling.

23 - Chapter 19

We all travelled home at the end of the week, with Aaya, Nari and I taking the train. The journey passed quickly, and before I knew it we were all back into a routine at home, with Tohru, Yuki and Kyo back at school, and Gure and I again doing our work.

Life was fast getting back to normal, and we had occasional visits from other members of the Sohma family, like Haru and one of our younger cousins, Kisa. She was only twelve, and still in middle school. She came with Haru, and stayed for a few days in which she hardly left Tohru's side. She was an adorable little kid. Nearly everyone in the family loved her to bits.

I would sit on the veranda and paint, as the summer came closer. It grew warmer, and I would spend more time with my horse, who was slowly becoming an excellent mount. I would ride in the dusk, enjoying the warmth that came in the evenings, and relishing the light.

The weeks passed, and I found myself getting more hungry than usual, and also needing to pee a lot more often. Thinking it was nothing; I failed to mention it to anyone.

I had been left at home alone one day, when the phone rang. Walking slowly to answer it, due to aching joints from falling off my horse the previous night, I only just got there before the answer phone cut in. I picked it up, and held the receiver to my ear, "Hello?" I spoke into it.

"Hi, Ku, its Hatori."

"Oh, hi," I leant against the wall and waited for him to speak.

"You need to come and have a check-up sometime."

“I do? Seriously? Can't you come here? Please...”

“I could, but I'm quite busy, so you might have to wait for a month or so.”

I scowled. “Fine. I'll come. When do you want me?”

“Akito should be going out later today, so why don't you come over about 4-ish? I'll meet you at the gate, so don't worry.”

“Ok,” I sighed. “See you then.”

“U-huh. Bye.” He rung off

I spent the rest of the day mooching around the house, feeling utterly dejected, and a tad lonely. As it got closer to 4 o'clock I knew I would have to get ready to go soon, and so I started to prepare my things, as I was going to have to walk into town.

I left the house, not bothering to lock it. No one came out here anyway, so it didn't really matter. As I walked through the wood, I felt nerves eating away inside of me. I wasn't looking forward to this, and I really hoped Akito wouldn't be there.

I neared the main estate, and as I walked up the road of Sohmas, I heard a voice call me. I whirled around, ready to run if it was Akito. I had no need to panic; it was but my cousin Ritsu. “Hi, Ritsu!” I called and waved. “How are you?”

“I'm fine...yet how SELFISH IT WAS OF ME to not ask how you were first...I AM SOOO SORRY!!!”

I was used to his behaviour by now, and soon counter attacked it, "AND I AM SOOOOO SORRY that I didn't wait for you TO ASK ME FIRST!!!"

He looked taken aback, "Ummmm, that's ok."

Finally, I could speak normally, "So what're you up to?"

"Me? Oh ummmmm... I've come to see Nari."

"You and Nari, eh?"

"No. NOOO...OOOHH NOOO. Just going to see her. Anyways, what are you doing here?"

"I have to have a check-up," together we started to walk towards the main house.

"Why? You look fine to me. In fact, you look positively glowing."

I laughed, "thanks," I noticed Hatori standing at the gate, waiting for me, a glowing red cigarette hanging casually from his one hand, "Nice seeing you," I said as I walked towards Hatori.

"And you," he called, walking towards Nari's small house.

"Ku," Tori nodded, before taking a drag of his cigarette, and dropping it to the ground, stamping on it.

“Ha'ri-kun.” I walked up to him, and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, before linking my arm through his, in way of protection. Together we quickly walked through the estate to his house, and I was soon settled in a chair, drinking a much-needed cup of tea. We sat and chatted, before Hatori finally walked into his surgery, and summoned me in.

He made me lie on the table, and as I did so asked me a few questions about my general health.

“Have you been smoking?”

“Sometimes.”

“Drinking?”

“No.”

“Sleeping well?”

“Very.”

“Eating enough?”

“Too much, I've been putting on weight.”

He looked thoughtful at this, and stood up pulling out his stethoscope. He lent over me, listening to first my heartbeat, and then moving the end down over my stomach. I was confused by this. He took my temperature, and made a few other tests, taking a blood sample, much to my distaste, before finally letting me sit up.

I rearranged my clothes and sat, waiting for Hari's verdict. I looked at him expectantly, but he was bent over his desk, making notes, and not letting me see them, no matter how hard I strained my eyes. He finally looked up, and sighing, took his glasses off and laid them on his desk. He looked at me, his eyes all-serious, I would have laughed, but the look made me feel strangely grave.

"I need to know, Ku, and please answer me seriously. Do you promise?"

"Ummmmm...yes?!"

"Have you had sexual intercourse lately, with anyone?"

"Yes," I was bewildered.

"With who?"

"Who do you think?!"

"Ok, and did you use any contraception."

I thought for a bit, and realised what Hatori was implying.

"Ku?"

"Yes," I breathed.

“Did you use protection?”

“No.”

Hatori sighed, and took a deep breath, “Ku, you're pregnant

You're pregnant.

You're pregnant.

24 - Chapter 20

“Congratulation!” Hatori stood up and walked over and hugged me. I was too shocked to say anything. H stood and looked at me for a moment, “Ku? Did you hear me? Are you ok?”

“No.” I whispered.

“No, what?”

“No, I can't be pregnant. I don't want to be. I don't want it. I'm not ok. I'm not happy. And I don't want this child. It's not mine. I don't want it. Please, take it away.”

“Ummmmm, Ku, you can't just decide like that.”

“Yes, I can. I just did, so I can.”

“Well, you shouldn't. You need to talk to Shigure about this. It's a big decision. You can't just say no, just like that. This is something you and Shigure need to discuss, as a couple.”

I blinked back tears, yet they still rolled down my face, splashing onto my lap. Hatori sat next to me, and put his arm around me. “It's because of Akito, and what he would say, isn't it?”

I nodded.

“Kuroumo? Kuroumo, where are you?” Called a woman, not much more than 30. She had short dark hair, and was dressed in a smart suit. She sat and waited until a young girl entered the room. The girl was only 7, and had long dark hair, and big brown eyes. She wore a pretty pink dress, and looked at the woman.

“Yes, mother, you called me?” she said in a small voice. She was scared of the mother whom she felt held no love for her.

Her mother smiled, “I have some excellent news, child.”

Kuroumo looked at her, wide-eyed.

“I'm pregnant. I'm going to be a mother, and this time he'll be a boy, and he'll be perfect, and I will love him.”

Kuroumo just stood there, fully aware that her mother would now not need her again. She turned, and walked out of the room, not looking back. When she was out of earshot, she said to herself, in a small voice, “You already have a child, mother. You already have a child, and you do not love her.” She walked down the corridor, tears dripping down her face.

I left Hatori's house, declining his offer of a lift home. I hurriedly walked through the estate, and into the woods. It was dark, the sun having long ago set, and I let my feet guide me, as I was preoccupied by other thoughts. My world was spiralling out of control, and I couldn't stop it.

As I was thinking, I tripped on a root, and fell to the ground. Failing to stop myself, I fell, and landed with a crash, with nothing protecting my belly. My first thoughts were of it, and I knew that what had just happened was a bad thing, especially for a developing foetus.

I sat for a moment, trying to regain my balance, and stood once more, holding onto a tree. The fall had knocked the wind out of me, and made me feel quite ill. I grabbed my stomach, as if to steady myself, and continued through the forest, gladdened when I could finally see the lights of the house in the distance. As I got closer to the house, I felt convulsions running through my stomach, and I was nearly doubling over in pain. It was all I could do to heave myself up the stairs, and it was just as I reached the front door that I could no longer move. I sat on the floor, and screamed as the pain racked through my body.

Yuki came running out and I quickly ordered him to phone Hatori at once. God knows where Shigure was.

I sat outside for what felt like hours, with Yuki sitting beside me, soothing me, and Tohru bringing me water, and the occasional damp cloth. Kyo stood to one side, looking awkward. I heard the car pull up, and waited as I heard Hatori running over to us. He took one look at me, and I knew what he was about to say, so I stopped him.

"I fell, on the way home...landed..." I indicated my stomach, "Hurts here, really hurts." He took a quick look at me, and gently touched my stomach, before turning to Yuki.

"She's bleeding internally, so I need to get her inside and lie her down. I'm going to need things to keep her warm; I'm going to need a bowl of warm water, and a few clean clothes and towels. I also need some bowels. Get this sorted out you three. And where's that damn Shigure when you need him."

We heard him before we saw him, he seemed to be singing. Hatori called out to him, "Shigure?"

"Ah, yes, dear friend, it is I. What a pleasure it is to see you. What are you doing here?"

“For once in your life, I need you to shut up, and not be squeamish. Help me lift Kuro into the house.”

I could tell that Shigure was about to ask why, but when he saw me lying on the floor, and sweating like a horse, he immediately did as he was told. Together they carried me into the house, and laid me beside the stuff that the kids had prepared for us. “What are you going to do?” Shigure asked Hatori.

“Operate.”

“What? Here?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, ok then.”

“Ku, I am going to give you an anaesthetic. Ok? Just close your eyes, and get ready to sleep.”

I did as he said, and the last thing I heard before I shut down was Shigure, asking Hatori if he always carried such things around with him. I smiled, and then was out of it.

*

Ku lay on the floor in the lounge, looking pale and small. As Hatori quickly began to work around her, doing his best, Shigure flitted around in the background. Hatori finally said what was going on, and told Shigure that Ku was in fact pregnant, and at current moment bleeding internally from a fall, that had probably killed the developing foetus.

Shigure listened to all this, with shock registering on his face. “Who was the father?”

“Who do you think?” Hatori said sarcastically.

He worked well into the night, doing his best for his cousin. When he at last sat up, he was utterly exhausted, and he yawned deeply, before turning to Shigure. “I’ve done all I can. The foetus is dead. It was less than a month old.”

Shigure nodded his understanding.

“Can I borrow your couch for the night?”

Shigure nodded again, and as Hatori settled onto the couch for the night, Shigure crept closer to Kuro, and stroked her cheek gently, before stretching himself out beside her, his arms around her. He then closed his eyes, and fell into an emotionally exhausted sleep.

25 - Chapter 21

I groaned, feeling the pain flowing through me. I turned my head slightly, and saw Gure lying asleep beside me, his hair falling into his eyes. I gently and slowly lifted my hand and brushed it out of his face, and he smiled a little and shifted closer to me. I winced in pain at the pressure he put on my stomach.

Something touched my shoulder, and I looked up, seeing Hatori. He looked at me, smiling in a worried way. He soon told me what had happened.

I did not care.

“Ku, don't you have anything to say?”

“I am glad. I didn't want it. At least it never had to live knowing that.”

He looked at me, pain showing on his face, “One day you will look back on this is sorrow.”

“Maybe, one day.”

I turned my head once more to look at Shigure, a sad smile playing across my face. He would feel the pain more than I. I heard Hatori walking away, and sighed. I closed my eyes once more, and fell into a shallow sleep, filled with thoughts and dreams.

I woke again later on, well into the next day. And found Shigure no longer lying next to me. I tried to move, and gently eased myself into a sitting position. Rolling onto my knees I sat, poised, as if about to crawl, before pushing myself up, using the sofa for support. Finally on my feet, I felt light headed, and held on to the arm of the sofa, to stop myself from keeling over. I tentatively walked a few steps, and

finding this simple, I walked over to the kitchen, holding on to various items of furniture as I went.

Finding the kitchen empty, I proceeded through to Shigure's study. He was sitting at his desk, working studiously, for a change. He didn't hear me approach, and so jumped when I placed my hand on his shoulders.

He swivelled around on his swivel chair, knocking me off my feet and onto his lap. Here he held me, and I held him, embracing deep into both our souls. He said nothing, and neither did I. We didn't need to; we understood each other as it was. I hoped I had not hurt him. But I did not need to apologise.

Instead I felt tears rolling down my face, and landing on him, leaving a wet patch on the top of his shoulder. He pulled me away from him, and held me at arms length, before lifting a hand, to wipe a tear from my face.

He held me like that, and leant forward to hold me close to him once more. Whatever happened, we would get through this together. Not that I cared.

"I love you, my Ice Maiden," he said.

I smiled though my tears. He understood me perfectly.

I spent the day asleep, lying under heavy covers on my bed, and sleeping off the pain that was still ebbing through me. I slept into the night, and when I did wake, I fell asleep once again.

I gradually emerged from my room the next morning, and when I managed to get down the stairs I found Hatori had come around to check on me. He leant on the counter in the kitchen, whilst I made us both a cup of tea, and some toast. As we ate, we talked, and time was spent quickly.

Hatori left shortly before lunch, and I went to my piano, and began to compose. I had had enough of

painting for a while. As I played I didn't realise that Shigure was in the room, and when I stopped playing and scribbling, he spoke, "Are you feeling better?"

"Yes. Tori said it would bruise, and still be sore for a while. But I shouldn't get anymore scars from it."

He smiled. "Do you need any more?"

"No, don't think so. I'm sure I have enough."

"Akito phoned earlier, I think Ha'ri told him you were ill. He wanted to know how you were. And he hoped you would get better soon."

"I doubt that."

Shigure looked troubled. So I walked over to him, and put my arms around his neck, "I much prefer it when you smile," he smiled, but the troubled look stayed in his eyes. I tried to think nothing of it, and it soon left my memory. He kissed me gently, before pulling my arms away and walking off, due to the phone ringing. I heard him answer, and before long he called my name.

I walked towards him, and took the phone off him, "Hello?"

"Hi Ku! It's Kyoka! Long time no see!"

"shoot?! Kyoka?! Is that really you?"

"Yep, sure is!"

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Ummmm...talking to you, I was wondering if you wanted to meet up.”

“Sure! You dog! I can't believe we only just got in touch. When? Where?”

“Ummmm...tomorrow...morning. About ten-ish? In the coffee shop in town?”

“Yeah, sure great! See you then.”

“Uhuh.”

W both rang off, and I turned to Shigure, who was looking at me, bewildered at the shouting and swearing he had just heard.

“Who was that?”

“It was Kyoka. I haven't heard from her for ages.”

“Kyoka?! As in Tori's sister, Kyoka?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

I punched him playfully, and he fell over, falling through a door as he did so. “Look who's breaking the house now.”

26 - Chapter 22

I walked into the coffee shop, and instantly saw Kyoka. I mean, it was hard not to, what with her bright green hair and all. And her clothes. Well, lets just say that wearing a bright purple top with green wedge shoes and baggy jeans isn't exactly hard to miss. I smiled to myself and walked over to her, thinking about what opposites she and her brother, Hatori were.

As I pulled the chair out, and sat down opposite her, I smiled. The younger girl had always been close friends with me, from when I used to spend such a lot of time with Hatori, Shigure and Aaya, normally at the house in which she and Hatori lived. We had not seen each other for such a long time; it was good to meet again.

“So, it's the girl who lived, and then lived, and then lived again, eh?”

“If you're referring to how my brother treated me, I have your brother to thank that I still live.”

“Hmmm...don't tell him that, I don't want him getting big-headed, unlike certain cousins one could mention?”

I laughed, “ who? Gure or Aaya?”

“Or both?”

We spent an enjoyable morning together in town, and as we parted, after lunch, we were both happy. I was on my way out of town, happily nursing the thought that I needed to do something with my horse, as I hadn't ridden him for a while. Well I was going to ride him, and I would have, had I not walked straight into someone who I didn't expect to see. Or rather, two people I didn't expect to see.

“Aren't you meant to be in school?” I asked, suspiciously.

“Ummmm...maybe?!” Haru answered. It was so typical of him to do something like that. Randomly leave school. But it wasn't like her at all.

“What are you guys doing out of it then?”

“Uh, nothing much.”

“Are you lost?”

“Uh, maybe.”

“Where were you on your way to?”

“To...ummmmm...I dunno. Can we come back with you?”

“Uh, sure why not. Gooley shouldn't mind too much.”

“Gooley?”

“Oops. Slip of the tongue. I mean Gure. Ahem.” I tried to cover up my mistake. Stupid name. It was all Nari's fault. She had started that name. It had just sort of stuck.

As we walked slowly towards the woods, and the path to the house, I looked at the girl with Haru, and thought how she had changed. Her name was Cho, and she too was one of my cousins, as well as Haru's supposed girlfriend. She was shy and spoke little, only when she needed to. I had often helped her with her art, and had watched her dance, not that she knew it.

We walked through the woods in silence, and I appreciated the sounds of the wood. How I loved being at one with nature. As we got nearer to the house, I thought of what Shigure's reactions to these two would be. I knew that the main house would be worrying about their absence, and the school had probably phoned. But there would be an excuse. There always was.

27 - Chapter 23

Shigure nearly had heart failure when he saw who I had bought home. It wasn't that he had anything against either of them; its just he wasn't expecting company. I quickly got him to be a bit more polite, by giving him a sharp kick. We were soon sat down enjoying a pleasant drink, and I was doing my best to keep Shigure under a bit of restraint. God, I really did need to buy him a lead. That way, when he was bad, I could pull on it, and choke him. Heh.

Shigure soon got bored of our company, and Haru went to look at my scooter, and see if he could fix the puncture that it had acquired. So Cho and I were left alone. I needed her help with something, and asked her to follow me up to my bathroom. When we reached it, I walked over to the cupboard, and pulled out a sachet of hair dye. Bright pink/red hair-dye.

“Will you help me?” I asked mischievously.

She laughed, and soon guessed what I was planning, “Yup! Why not?”

When we emerged from the bathroom, two hours later we found Haru sitting on the floor in the lounge watching TV. He didn't even turn around. I left Cho with him and walked in the direction of Shigure's study, entering without knocking. He was lying across the desk, fast asleep, his glasses sitting askance on his face.

I walked over to him and put his glasses on me, so that I could see properly. We didn't actually have the same prescription, but it was near enough the same. He still didn't move, even though I was right next to him, and not being particularly quiet, so I blew into his ear. Seeing that this had no effect, I resorted to what would most perplex him, yet most amuse me.

I left the room and walked into the kitchen, where I reached into the freezer and pulled out a block of ice. Holding it lightly in my hands, which nearly froze off in the process, I made my way back to his study. He was still asleep. As I tiptoed over to him, I thanked nobody in particular that his top was slightly separated from the back of his neck. I then made a lunge at him and dropped the block of ice down the

back of his top. I have never seen him move so fast. He jumped up, squealing and whining, making such a loud noise that he soon attracted Haru and Cho, who stood and laughed. I was nearly rolling on the floor, I was laughing so hard, the tears springing to my eyes.

We didn't notice Yuki, or Kyo come home (Tohru was at work) and I was only when I heard Kyo shouting that I realised they were there to, "WHAT THE frack ARE YOU DOING HERE?! AND YOU?! AND WHAT ON EARTH HAVE YOU DONE TO YOUR HAIR?!" all eyes turned to me at this point, and the four males looked so shocked it again sent me off into a fit of the giggles, "AND WHY ON EARTH WERE YOU SCREAMING?! WE COULD HEAR YOU FROM THE DAMN TOWN!!!"

"Kuro put ice down my back," Shigure whined.

"Only because you were asleep."

"So? You didn't need to put ice down my back. You could've let me sleep."

"I wanted your attention, and it was the quickest way of getting it."

"So?" I could see a grand sulk coming along. He was pouting already as he spoke, so I walked over to him and out my arms around him.

"I'm sorry, alright?"

"ARGH...YOU GUYS ARE SO...SICK. I'M GOING TO BED."

"Kyo, its only 4 o'clock," Cho kindly pointed out.

“4 o'clock? Damnit, we need to get home!” exclaimed Haru.

“But we're gonna get lost again.”

“BUT IT'S SO EASY TO FIND.”

“I'll take you,” Yuki suggested quietly.

Haru simpered, and Cho looked at him sternly.

They all finally left, well, apart from Kyo, who went...somewhere, and Shigure and I seemed to have the house to ourselves. He soon disappeared though, and I was looking for him for ages, calling his name, but to no effect.

Giving up, and exhausted by my adventures of the day, I decided to retire to my room, at least until supper time. I walked in, and turned, shutting the door behind me. When I again turned around I jumped, for Shigure was standing right there, in front of me.

“There you are.”

“Heh, yes, I have been waiting for you. Hehehe.”

I looked suspiciously into his eyes, “What?!” I looked over his figure, starting with his feet, and letting my eyes wander playfully up his body. He stood squirming. Finally my eyes reached his face, and I again erupted with laughter...he had been using my hair things, and not only had he somehow arranged his hair into little plaits...he had also managed to find a tiny bit of pink dye himself, and had died a little of his hair with it, making it seem like he had pink highlights. He looked like such a prat.

“I can't wait until Aaya and Hatori see THIS!”

28 - Chapter 24

I ran to find a camera, and hurriedly took loads of pictures, to keep as future mementoes. I then helped him to undo all the little plaits, and laughed at him when he started to moan that I was pulling his hair. We were sitting like that when Yuki returned, with Tohru. As Yuki walked past my room, he looked in quickly, and then walked on, muttering under his breath something that sounded like 'chimpanzees'.

We went back downstairs, and Shigure was about to ask Tohru what she wanted for dinner, when he turned to me, and spoke quickly, "LESSGOOUTFORDINNER?"

"Um, what was that?"

"Lets go out for dinner!"

"Ok, why not."

"We need to change."

"Hmm...ok. And I'll tell Yuki we're going." As I ran up the stairs to my room, Gure went into his, and ten minutes later, we had both arrived on the porch, both changed into fancy clothes, with Shigure wearing a suit, and me in a tulle dress, that was dark green/blue. We walked out of the house, and climbed into the cab waiting for us, that whisked us off into the town, and to the posh restaurant. As we walked in, I felt eyes turning to stare at us. Most of the other clients in the restaurant were either old or middle-aged, and I soon realised we were the youngest there.

We walked over to our table, and Shigure made sure I was seated, before he himself sat down. We looked at the menu, and Shigure ordered a bottle of wine. I scanned the menu. It was mostly fish. Which I didn't eat. Oh dear.

I finally found something non-fishy, and ordered some miso soup, and a type of rice, whilst Gure ordered some sort of Sushi. Disgusting man. We sat and waited for our food, laughing and talking, and occasionally sipping wine. The food was good, and the company was excellent. We ate, and were just waiting for coffee when Gure started to talk. "Ku, there's something I've been meaning to ask you."

I looked at him expectantly. I was hoping he would hurry up, I needed the toilet.

"I wanted to ask you, well, I was wondering, well, um. Will you marry me?"

I looked at him blankly.

He took a deep breath, before starting again.

"Will you marry me?"

I was shocked, and pleased. But so shocked.

And before I knew it, my mouth opened and I began to speak.

"Yes."

He looked at me, surprised. And I laughed, a nervous laugh.

We finished the meal, and left the restaurant together, deciding to walk home. We held hands on the walk through the woods, but decided to keep it a secret. A lovers' secret. Between my love and I.

That night we made love passionately, and became so deeply in love, we were nearly drowning in it. We spent days planning our secret wedding, and it came about within a month.

It was a beautiful summer's day, and we were getting married in the country. It was small, as it was still a secret, and the only people who would be there were Kyoka, Nari, Hatori, Aaya, and of course, Shigure.

Kyoka and Nari were my bridesmaids, but both were wearing their own clothes. I was wearing a strapless cream gown. The bodice of it was fitted, and swathes of cream material ran horizontally around my body. A skirt flowed out from it, into a long train. I wore no veil, but threaded white roses and ivy in a wreath into my hair that I wore down, and I held a bouquet of white roses and flowing ivy.

Shigure stood at the other end of the path that made for the aisle, and as I, Nari and Kyoka walked down it, towards him and Hatori, Aaya and the minister, I smiled at my family. I reached them, and took Shigure's hand in my own, holding onto it for my life's worth.

The minister began the ceremony, and it was all well on the way, and we had started our vows, Shigure having already said, "I do," when it was nearly my turn to say this, when I noticed that Hatori and Aaya had started to walk away. We continued, but I was bewildered. I had just said "I do," and the minister had pronounced us man and wife, when I heard a blood-curdling scream.

I turned slowly, in slow motion it seemed to me, in the direction of the sound, and saw a young face, contorted in rage. Akito. And then, everything speeded up, and moved so fast. Hatori and Aaya running towards him, and pushing him to the ground, me screaming at them not to hurt him, and something hurtling through the air towards me. And then choking, and gasping for breath, it hit me, and I fell, landing against my husband. Gasping for a few hurtful breaths, I lifted my brown eyes to his, and spoke, just loud enough for him to hear,

"I love you," and the words died on my lips.

Shigure caught her as she fell against him, and watched in horror as blood spread across her innocent cream dress, right from where the knife hit her. He was only distantly aware of Nari's screams, and Kyoka trying to help him. He lowered her to the ground. And knelt over it. He then lifted her up, and cradled her to his arms. Sobbing, loudly.

29 - Chapter 26

I pushed against the thick blanket that was suffocating me, holding back my breath. My head was aching, and my heart barely beating. Echoing through my soul was the beep of a machine, the beep of my life. I was barely conscious, yet enough so to identify them. The three men who had most changed my life, well, in a way.

They had no idea I was awake, and only when I gave an involuntary shudder did they rush to my side.

The lone figure on the hospital bed shuddered, and Shigure and Hatori rushed to her side. Akito stood back, with no feeling. He could not remember the feeling he had had at the ceremony, but he now had a new ache, one that struck deep into his heart. Never before had he felt like this, and whilst Hatori and Shigure busied themselves around her, he walked out of the room, and out to the waiting car.

I looked up, through the eyes that I could barely open, and into his face. I tried to move my hand, but I didn't have the strength. My face contorted with pain and fear, I tried to speak.

Hatori spoke, "She's trying to speak. I need to go and sort something, I'll be back in a minute."

Shigure could just nod, too occupied with fighting his own emotions. As Hatori walked to the door, he turned, hesitating, "She might_" he trailed off, no wanting to finish the sentence. Sighing, he left,

saddened by the look of desperation on his friend's face, the look on the death the other's.

I could see him, vaguely, and I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to tell him so much. He had sat down on a chair beside the bed, and had put his hand over the top of mine, his head resting on the bed. He seemed so sad. I tried to speak, and he heard a little noise, and looked at me.

"Don't speak," he told me.

But I wanted to, I needed to. I had to tell him. I tried again, and this time a horribly rasping voice emitted from me, "l...l" I gasped, shocked by such a sound. "I wanted, needed, must. I must tell you,"

"Sh,"

"Am I dying?" I whispered.

He looked shocked, and tears sprang to his eyes.

"Tell me."

A ghost of a smile danced across his face, and he looked at me tenderly, "What answer do you want?"

That was answer enough. "Tell them all that I love them."

"I will. I promise I will."

"I would have always loved you."

"I know. And I will always love you. I told you that just now."

"Don't leave me."

"I won't. I will never leave you." A tear slid down his cheek, and another mirrored it on my own face.

I closed my eyes, fighting back pain, and sadness. "I forgive him."

He began to cry harder. "I'll make sure he knows."

Shigure couldn't stand the pain, the anguish. He felt as if his heart was breaking. He never thought he'd have to watch her die. He'd never thought about it really. And here they were, her dying, fighting over her last breaths in order to quell his own fears.

"Are you scared?" he asked her.

"Afraid to die?" she replied.

“Yes.”

“I'm terrified.”

I spoke the truth, knowing that it wasn't what he wanted to hear, but knowing that he would respect me for it.

“I love you.” I told him.

“I know, now hush. I know what you want to say, you don't need to tell me, it hurts enough already.”

I smiled softly.

He gathered her into his arms and hugged her whilst the tears begun to fall, faster now, and more furious. He now wished it would end. He held her tight to him, and they were sitting like that when Hatori peered into the room. He didn't enter, but instead took a seat outside.

It was a warm summer's day, and the four of us had been in the park, Hatori, Aaya, Gure and I. We had just eaten a picnic, and Tori and I were watching as Aaya and Gure played Frisbee. We must have all been about seventeen. I lay in the sun, and closed my eyes, letting the warmth heat my dreams.

And then he had collapsed next to me, and I had opened my eyes momentarily to see this sweaty,

smelly guy, lying next to me, panting from heat. He had his eyes closed, and his tongue out, but when he had noticed me looking at him, he had opened one eye, and rolled onto his back, spreading his arms out wide to the sun.

Hari and Aaya had gone to buy and ice cream, so we were left lying there, and next thing I knew we were kissing, our first kiss. The first time in my life when I had felt truly happy.

And then she was gone. He knew it, yet the machines didn't. Her whole body had become limp in his arms, and she began to lose her warmth. He laid her back down on the bed, and set her out like an angel. Her air was fanned out around her head, framing it. She looked so serene, so free of pain.

And he hated himself, for he felt relieved, knowing that she was gone. Wouldn't his life be easier now?

He walked over to the window, and looked out, noting the wind and the heavy rain that reflected his feelings. Leaning his head against the cool glass, he let the tears flow freely, and began to note the anguish that had been weighing in his heart.

And then the machine noticed she was gone, and began to beep, fast and furious. He hit his fist on the glass, and let his hand slide down it. Doctors and nurses began to rush in, Hatori amongst them, and they began to speak of how they could save her.

So he spoke, "Leave her."

They all looked at her, yet Hatori knew what he spoke was truth.

"Leave her, let her be. She's happier now. She's going to a place where she'll never be sad."

And he just left the hospital.

He walked through the town, in the rain. He walked through the forest. And then, he got home, and everywhere he looked, he could see her. In her room, he could still smell her, the soft scent of her body. He could feel her hair, and smell it, as it flew around the room behind her.

Shigure could sense her, and hear her music, her voice, her song. Her laughter still echoed in his study, and her happiness still shone in the walls. He sat, and cried.

“Don't be sad,” someone whispered, “I said I'd never leave you.”

And through his tears he smiled.