

# The Ghosts of Sohma House

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*Just changed the name. It's still Haruka Sohma, the spirit seer, running around, talking to ghosts, trying not to look insane...occasionally dying...you know, the usual high school stuff + ghosts.*

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## 0. Prologue

(This is my first story, so please be nice! Actually, this will be about the first thing that I submit, so...I don't mind constructive criticism, but please don't point out every single possible problem and not really say how I could possibly change it.

Also, the majority of the story is intended to be more light-hearted than this, but I'm trying to keep it like the main character sees it, and before the main story, she really did see it something like this.

Enjoy!)

Haruka Sohma almost still remembered. Barely. In the back of her mind, mistaken for a realistic dream from when she was about five years old, she remembered her orange-haired sister. She remembered the monster that her mother rejected, the monster that seemed almost to divide the family between the parents and the children. She remembered her sister, but only as a dream.

More than the dream, she remembered waking up in her house, with her parents smiling strangely, as though nothing bad had happened at all. Haruka couldn't quite accept that; the dream seemed far too realistic to be anything but reality. She confessed her dream to her parents, partially out of hope brought on the myth that telling people about your dreams keeps them from coming true. She couldn't allow herself to think that her parents were so cruel that when they had a daughter who sometimes turned into a cat, they practically threw her onto the streets.

Her parents listened, looked at Haruka strangely, and dismissed the dream as just that - a dream. Nothing more. Not even a possibility. They said that if they did have a daughter like that, they'd hold her closely and give her all the care and positive attention that she needed.

Haruka didn't think she believed them, because the dream was just too real. It couldn't possibly have been inspired by absolutely nothing.

A few months later, Haruka fell ill. Her parents took her to the doctor - a doctor in the Sohma family, who only worked for the Sohma family, named Hatori. Having been as young as she was, she was almost scared of him at first, but when he helped her recover from being sick, she knew that he wasn't so bad.

The strangest thing about Hatori was that when she saw him, Haruka immediately thought of the dream about her sister. No person even vaguely like him ever appeared in her memories of the dream, but, oddly enough, whenever she saw him, all that she could think about was the

dream and the mysteries behind it.

Haruka, as a small child, truly believed that there was something strange about her family. Hatori made her think of a dream about a sister, and, though she forgot about the incident within a few years, she did remember seeing a girl who strangely resembled the sister from her dream in Hatori's house.

As soon as the girl saw Haruka looking at her, her eyes widened with fear for the split second between when Haruka saw her and when she ducked away and then made a certain amount of noise running away.

Haruka never really thought about the girl after that. A few times, a wistful idea came into her head that the girl was the sister that Haruka had dreamed about, and that the girl was going to join the family, but soon enough, Haruka forgot completely about the girl. She always remembered the dream, but never the girl. Even when Hatori told her, years later, that she could find a good friend in an orange-haired Sohma girl, Haruka thought only of the dream, and not of the girl, and when she met the very same girl, she thought only of Hatori's words and the dream.

(It gets less depressing and strange later, I promise! It's a Fruits Basket fanfic, and what's Fruits Basket without the angst? And really, it'll end up being a fairly happy story, but the whole thing is triggered by angsty pasts, so...it might sound a little depressing for a little while, but it really will be more cheerful later! I swear it will! Just be a little patient!)

# 1. Chapter 1

(If you can't tell, I tend to exaggerate when I give final dates. I just want to make sure, so that if something horrible happens and it doesn't get up for a really long time, at least you're not expecting it for a really long time. I'm just a little pessimistic that way.

Anyway, here's the first chapter. It wasn't originally planned to be half-flashback, but it did, and I'm partially too lazy to change it and partially liking the humor of that particular flashback a little more. And yes, it is a fairly long chapter, but I guess it's mostly in descriptions. It wouldn't be so long if it was an actual manga, but that just sounds like too much effort.

Also, I would like to point out that I have no idea where my ideas for this came from. In other words, Haruka's mother is not vaguely based off of my own, and I have absolutely no problems with her. Well, that's an exaggeration, but they're most definitely not these problems anyway.

Enjoy! I thought more than enough about this for me to care about it!)

## Chapter 1

Haruka Sohma stepped outside her house and sneezed. The day was hardly cold, but the sun was bright and she was still half-asleep. The first day's the hardest, she thought to herself as she turned and began walking down the sidewalk to her new school. Here's hoping that high school doesn't suck as much as middle school.

The high school was officially known as Kaibara High School, but in the Sohma family, it was known as Sohma High; it had once been "ruled" by the "prince" Yuki Sohma, and about five more Sohmas went there at some point in time, too. Of course, all that was long-past history; Yuki Sohma was at least fifteen years dead, and the Sohmas that he associated with passed away, too, from a year before him to ten years after his death.

Haruka yawned. Sohma High must be some crazy place, she thought. We Sohmas don't really seem very normal, and if one of us was a student body president that we still remember today, then this school almost definitely has some problem or another.

One way or another, she figured, something won't go right today. I know an omen when I see one, she reasoned, looking down at her shirt.

Haruka firmly believed that her father was either stupid or crazy (or maybe just ignorant), and her mother was at least as stupid or crazy (probably crazy, or a combination of both). Her mother bought Haruka's high school clothes about halfway through her middle school years. Somehow, she predicted Haruka's size perfectly, and the clothes fit amazingly well.

Her mother obsessively washed those uniforms. Every Sunday night was Wash Haruka's High School Uniforms Day. Just like Saturday was Wash Haruka's Middle School Uniforms Day, and Friday was Wash Haruka's Elementary School Clothes Day. Amazingly, each and every one of those traditions remained even with Haruka beginning high school. Only Sunday truly mattered, though; that's when her mother did what made Haruka's uniform shirt so different.

Her mother last washed Haruka's shirts on the last possible day before school, and brought her baby brother Noburu with her, expecting him to be the best possible laundry assistant at eighteen months old.

He wasn't. He ripped the collar off of the shirts and tried to eat them. He actually did eat some parts of some of them, but the results...well, it might be best to leave it saying that Haruka was glad that her mother took care of that part of the fiasco.

Haruka was still left with each and every one of the uniforms that her mother bought so long in advance without the sailor collar that Noburu ripped off.

The thing about sailor collars (or at least the ones that Kaibara High used) is that they had incredibly low cuts before the collar is added. The collar solved that problem, but with it being removed, nobody in their right mind would wear that to school to save their life, for a very long list of reasons, beginning with the fact that it probably would, somehow or another, not prove very successful in saving a person's life.

Naturally, Haruka was furious when she tried to put one on. She screamed at her mother loudly enough for the neighbors to knock on their door and ask them strenuously politely to please keep the noise down, or they would call the police.

Haruka's mother insisted that if Haruka should be mad at anyone, it was most definitely Noburu. This was most definitely her mother's insanity; Noburu had never even seen anyone fold clothes, and even if he had, Haruka sincerely doubted that any child, let alone a normal one like Noburu, would fold clothes perfectly after seeing his mother do it once.

Her mother proved to be completely unable to help. She absolutely refused to buy new clothes for Haruka, because "You shouldn't buy something that you already have the exact same thing of already." She also refused to sew them back together, as she hadn't done anything to harm the shirts (or so she said), and furthermore, she did not know how to sew. Also, it was a "waste of money" to take it to the clothing repair shop and have it fixed there. The only person who should fix them, according to Haruka's mother, was Noburu, because he ruined them, so he may as well put them back together, and if Haruka refused to make Noburu fix her shirts, then nobody else should do the job other than Haruka, because she was the only other person who could possibly renew her shirts.

If only she had an allowance, Haruka would have taken the shirts to the repair shop herself, but her parents were such penny-pinchers that she hadn't a cent in her own name; all of it was to her parents, and all of it was paid by the Sohma Family Main House, for some reason that even her parents wouldn't tell (probably because they didn't know it themselves).

Thus, Haruka saw no option other than repairing the shirts for herself. She made many attempts with many different supposed solutions, but only her final solution to the problem worked.

#### Supposed Solution Number One:

Her parents had a sewing machine, and those were supposed to sew in straight lines without much guidance, so Haruka dug theirs out and, since her brother had only eaten off parts of one or two of the collars, most could be repaired, and most was all she needed to survive high school. And if they weren't, then maybe it would show her mother reason and she'd have enough so that she actually could.

The First Problem with the First Proposed Solution: Noburu wasn't the only one who ruined shirt collars; Haruka, in her blind rage at her mother's idiocy/insanity, had torn most of the intact collars to pieces.

The Second Problem with the First Idea: Haruka found only black thread. This didn't really pose too much of a problem at first, but it definitely worsened most of the other problems.

The Third Problem: Haruka actually tried to use a sewing machine without any previous knowledge of how it worked. Somehow, the sewing machine actually tore both the one intact collar and the shirt to shreds.

The Fourth Problem: Haruka forgot that she needed to sew between the front and back halves of her school uniform, and not sew the back half to the front half to the collar. She tried to cut the front and back apart, but that also made the front separate from the collar. In frustration, she accidentally tore the front half of the shirt in half, and the shirt was now wide open. When she tried to fix that, not only did the shirt then have a long black line bisecting the front, but also the cloth had to be overlapped for Haruka to be able to sew it. Her shirt became too small horizontally, and the collar didn't fit the giant V of the neck.

The Fifth Problem: Haruka discovered a slight problem with her lead foot. She sewed too fast, couldn't stop, and ended up having a black line spiraling uselessly down her shirt. She cursed her parents' choice in thread color and took out the seamripper to remove the thread. She discovered that the seamripper only worked on seams, not useless threads, when it tore a fairly short line that only vaguely followed the spiral down. She cursed very loudly and added even more loudly, "Noburu-kun, please, never, ever repeat that word! Please forget that your older sister ever said that!" because he no doubt did hear her say it, and the word wasn't one that a child of his youth should know. After deciding that she'd do five good deeds to make up for her fowl language, she tried to cut the thread and pull it out normally, but when the black thread was pulled, the blue ones in the uniform cloth followed, warping the shirt's shape so horribly that she wished that she'd never even

thought of using the sewing machine.

### Supposed Solution Number Two:

Using the sewing machine without using the sewing machine: sewing the shirts together the old-fashioned way, by hand, with thread and needle, and no machine of any kind. If there was no other advantage, then at least Haruka wouldn't need overlap, and therefore, size would probably not warped too badly for her to at least fix it well enough to plea to whoever might be able to help her get a new shirt.

Problem Number One with Solution Number Two: She still only had black thread. By now, each and every one of the collars was in multiple pieces, so the first that she tried to repair had a black spiderweb crisscrossing it. Her mother saw it and cried out in horror and proclaimed (quite loudly, and directly into Haruka's ear) that she wouldn't allow her daughter to be seen in such wretched refuse! (or something like that.) Haruka pointed out that she would need money for white thread to be seen in anything else, and her mother hesitantly gave her just enough money to buy the thread (with a very small amount a leniency from the cashier). She arrived home uncomfortably close to sunset, and had to give up on the concept of repairing the shirts overnight. Fortunately, she had one more day to find a solution.

The Second Problem: Time. It took her from about five in the morning to lunch at noon for her to sew one collar back into one piece. She figured that she shouldn't think about the other shirts, that she should only focus on having enough clothes for her to survive school long enough to beg for a better shirt and fix the rest later. This didn't prove to be much of a problem but might have caused enough pressure for her to rush into the other problems.

The Third Problem: Either the sewing machine used a little less thread for length or Haruka's spool of white thread was smaller than the spool of black thread that she tried to use for the machine. She ran out of white thread as she finished her first shirt, and had to use some of the black thread to sew the collar to an intact and usable shirt.

The Fourth Problem: Haruka didn't sew the collar on correctly. She sewed it on such that the black thread showed, and, with it, the seam along which her brother had removed the collar. Her mother saw it and shrieked, "I will not allow my daughter to be seen even by her own mother in such huddled masses from your teeming shore!" Haruka slowly stood up, walked around her mother, and ran to her father, begging him to agree with her that her mother was completely insane. He countered, saying that her mind was only on the book she was reading. It was about some Italian immigrants going to America and reading a poem that was engraved below a statue. "Huddled masses", "teeming shore", and even "wretched refuse" were all phrases in the poem, but her mother had mixed different phrases from different lines. "She's still crazy," Haruka pouted to her father. "And you still have a right to believe that," her father agreed. "But that doesn't change the fact that she isn't." Haruka stormed back to her room and carefully pulled out the black thread, carefully cutting it at every loop this time. It was probably a waste of thread, but Haruka figured that there wasn't anything else she could do.

The Fifth Problem: She tried to sew it slightly differently, as though she were sewing it inside-out with the collar inside, thinking that it could fold out and work. The problem came up when the collar refused to stay folded neatly on her chest and instead stuck up or just stayed folded in.

The Sixth Problem: Haruka tried ironing it down. Noburu crawled into the room and lifted the end opposite the iron as it heated, and the hot iron tipped over onto Haruka's foot. She cursed several times in every single language that she knew, using the most fowl words and at some point even claiming that she would devour the iron's soul. She decided that she would have to do about ninety-five good deeds to make up for those curses, and that added to her original five totaled up to a hundred good deeds to do. Holding ice to her foot, Haruka tried to think of what good deeds she could do to pay her one hundred off. She couldn't think of three, and while she supposed that she could do those enough times to enough people over enough times to total a hundred, she wasn't sure if doing the same good deed thirty-three times counted all thirty-three times, and she didn't want to have to constantly be on the lookout for the right opportunities to come along, so she completely ditched the concept of making up for cursing with good deeds, along with all ideas of repairing her uniforms with needle and thread. Time flew too fast, and the sun was gradually reaching the point where it was going to start falling to the point where it was sort of considered to be sinking.

Supposed Solution Number Three:

Some veterinarians used things that looked and worked kind of like staples instead of stitches for certain kinds of cuts and stuff on dogs, right?

Problem Number One and Only: Her house only had one stapler in it. It was barely large enough to put a single staple into her clothes. And it was out of staples.

Supposed Solution Number Four:

In America, it's said that duct tape makes the world go round, so why can't it fix her uniforms?

Problem: No duct tape. Her parents wouldn't let her borrow any money for duct tape. Her mother told her that the reason was because she wouldn't allow her daughter to be seen "wearing anything that might possibly resemble the tired, the poor, tempest-tost to me, that would no doubt be created by your trying something so insanely idiotic." The two words seemed very familiar to Haruka. Oh, that's right, she remembered, those are the two words that I use to describe her.

Supposed Solution Number Five:

Clear tape?

Problem: It didn't stick well enough.

Haruka was exhausted. School started in about twelve hours, and if she was smart, she'd spend those eating supper, making sure everything was ready for the first day, and sleeping. She stood in her room by the closed door and was about to start pounding her head into it when it hit her -- the door, that is. Her mother opened the door and it hit her in the forehead. Haruka sank her throbbing head into her hands.

"Owww," she moaned in pain.

"Huh?" Her mother hadn't expected Haruka to be waiting so close to the door. "Oh, I'm sorry, Haruka-san..." Haruka's mother was definitely insane. She didn't know a soul in the universe after herself whose mother called her name with -san.

"Thank you for knocking, Kaa-san," Haruka hissed sarcastically through gritted teeth.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know you were..." her mother paused. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to think of some way to wear an actual school uniform to school tomorrow," Haruka sort of lied. She would have been doing that if she hadn't run out of ideas.

"Well, I'm not going to buy the same thing twice," her mother reminded Haruka. "And besides, the same exact thing would happen again, anyway. Why bother getting the same exact thing, when the same exact problem will happen again?"

Haruka paused at her mother's words. "Okaa-san," she said, regaining her posture, "there just might be some chance for you to actually be sane. So, please, may I borrow enough money for a...new school uniform?" She tried to make it sound more like it was a new style.

"No, they'll just be ripped apart again," her mother huffed.

"No, they're completely different from these ones," Haruka persuaded. "I'm not sure that Noburu-kun would do anything to these, and even if he did, I'd still be...decent."

That convinced Haruka's mother. Haruka was free to go and get herself some intact school uniforms, even if they wouldn't really be the right ones. Amazingly, when she came down the stairs in the morning and greeted her mother, she didn't even seem to notice the difference. She just sat at the table, sipping her coffee. She looked up and said, "Oh, you're off already? Have fun, and don't forget to make some friends! Make good impressions on your teachers!"

Haruka's mother never realized that Haruka was wearing the shirt for the boys' uniform.

The skirt was the same, but Haruka noted that she would want to try to get it black instead of blue, in the future. The shirt was blue with a grayish-silverish piping and a tie of the same color, and Haruka had a feeling that the shirt itself would get enough hassle, without her wearing different colors. She only hoped that they'd accept it, because her mother was right that one time: her brother would rip the girls uniform to shreds again if she got new ones, and the same exact thing would just repeat. She'd have to make it clear that it was the boys' uniform or no uniform. Or a completely different school, but her parents would hardly accept that.

Now, Haruka was strolling to her new school, although slightly nervously. She never did like the first day of school, because of the restrictions that her parents had in place. That was another reason as to why her parents were insane, stupid, or ignorant: they had already decided that she would be a doctor for the Sohma family exclusively (a decision made when

Hatori was still alive to tell them that Haruka was hardly capable of the position, and even more encouraged now that he couldn't tell them that), and that in the field of medicine, imagination was, if anything, a hinderance, an inconvenience, a weakness. They also decided that the best way to keep an imagination from growing was to completely cut it off from anything artistic. That included writing, drawing, and music.

With that in mind, Haruka was forbidden from any kind of music except the occasional Beethoven or Bach or some other conductor of great concertos. Furthermore, she was not allowed to draw or write, and that could be done even with a simple piece of paper and pencil. Haruka was usually lacking in classes for not being prepared, when it wasn't even her fault. She did exceptionally well for having been completely unnequipped, but she still didn't get the straight A's that her parents wanted. Haruka had a strange feeling that if she wasn't a straight-A-minus-having-stupid-parents student, her grades would be completely below what her parents wanted, and they might just fall to child abuse. Naturally, for reasons such as those, Haruka did her very best to keep her grades up.

Haruka neared the front gate of the school and sighed. The school definitely seemed quite intact, but it most certainly didn't look to be its best. There was a splash of graffiti on the front gates, which looked as though they were once painted vibrantly white but now were more of a really light gray. The school itself wasn't in such great condition either; Haruka thought that she saw a broken window on the second floor.

There was a girl leaning on the front of the gates, and the first thing that Haruka saw in her was her short orange hair. After that, Haruka saw that the girl was wearing a surgeon-like mask over her mouth and nose and a long skirt that almost reached the ground. She seemed to be about in her second year, but Haruka was more surprised at her being at school; her accessory style was very exclusive to gang members, and most of them skipped school entirely.

The girl looked up as Haruka approached. Her mask wrinkled a little in what Haruka guessed was a smile, and Haruka, deciding to be at least somewhat social, smiled nervously back--until she saw the cat at the girl's ankles.

It seemed impossibly out of place. No animal was generally allowed on school grounds, and Haruka wouldn't doubt that the rule would apply just outside the school gates as much as inside them. Also, most people with that girl's style had the teachers' most careful eyes watching them. They would have noticed the cat, and they would have been harder on her case for having a cat anywhere nearby.

The girl's smile faded with Haruka's, and she asked, "Is something wrong?"

Haruka looked up at the girl, surprised. "You mean you can't tell it's there?" The cat was the exact same color as the girl's hair, and it was rubbing its face all over the girl's ankles.

"Can't tell what's there?" the girl asked, trying to follow Haruka's gaze but apparently failing.

Haruka frowned but decided it best for her reputation that she didn't ask any further. "No, it's nothing. Never mind, forget I said anything," she sighed and kept walking into

the school grounds.

The girl with the cat looked at Haruka's back as though she had two heads, but ended up shrugging and following Haruka through the entrance gates. Haruka found it strange, though, that this complete stranger was following her like a great friend; maybe she had no other friends and decided that Haruka, being the first person to smile at her, was her best chance? Haruka somehow doubted that. She wanted to find out what the girl wanted from her, and she figured that the best way to do that was to ask her to her face, so she turned around to ask. Haruka barely managed to open her mouth when someone ran into her from behind, knocking her over with her attacker landing on top of her.

Oh shoot! Haruka thought desperately.

## 2. Chapter 2

(Chapter 2. Not much to say, but Anita is a representation of my friend Werecat13. Thus, basically, I'm pretty sure that Anita is Werecat13's character. Basically. I think.

Please enjoy Chapter 2! It's a little angsty(er), but it's also starting to introduce some of the more major characters.)

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Oh shoot! Haruka thought desperately as she hit the ground under someone else's weight. This is really bad! What will Okaa-san say when she sees me all dirty from being toppled over by some idiot?

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" a female voice whined from on top of Haruka. "I really, really, didn't mean that, I swear someone pushed me! I'm so sorry, can I ever make up for it?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess," Haruka responded awkwardly and fairly breathlessly.

"Really, I'm sorry, if there's anything I can do..." the girl babbled on, but Haruka hardly listened; her attention was driven away by a silver mouse or rat (she wasn't really good at recognizing the differences between the two) that scampered up to her face and now stood there, staring right at her.

She could have sworn it smiled at her. It even seemed to wink at her before she heard the girl who had fallen on her say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I guess I should just get off of you now, I'm sorry, I really am, it just slipped my mind..." and so she rambled.

The weight lifted off Haruka's back, and she stood up, tried to flick off as much dirt from her shirt as possible, and looked at the girl who fell onto her.

The girl had fairly long silver hair with the front of it pulled to the back in a ponytail, which she was now nervously and repeatedly pushing behind her ear, and lavender eyes. She looked to be Haruka's age, just starting high school, and wore the uniform as normally as Haruka wished she could.

Haruka interrupted the girl's apologies with, "Don't worry. I'm fine, my uniform's clean, no harm done."

The girl seemed even more worried about this. "No, I guess not, but what if..." She bit her lip and turned away.

Haruka laughed lightly. "Look, we could 'What if' everything forever, and we'd still not answer all the questions. It's okay, I don't mind."

"No, it's not okay," the girl insisted anxiously. "There are so many terrible things that could have happened, and then..." she trailed off uncertainly.

"Really, there's nothing wrong," Haruka insisted. "Those terrible things that could have happened didn't, and all that matters is what did, and nothing horrible came from what happened. So calm down and don't think about what didn't happen, because it isn't relevant, and thinking about it won't do anyone any good." Haruka only just realized that she seemed to have some good advice, especially for just trying to get the girl to stop apologizing pointlessly.

The girl stopped to ponder this piece of advice for a moment, then smiled and looked up at Haruka for a split second before she fell to her apologetic state. "Oh, I'm so sorry, I was so rude, I just crashed into you and I didn't even introduce myself, I'm such an idiot for forgetting that, oh, I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I really didn't mean to forget like that, I just--"

"You really don't need to apologize like that," Haruka pointed out. "I know you're sorry, but you only need to say it once. If you need to say it again, then the person you're apologizing to is probably an idiot for needing a constant reminder of your regret. Now," she added, "are you going to tell me your name or are you just going to apologize?"

"Oh, I'm so--" She interrupted herself, smiled, and responded, "So--Oh, I just can't help saying it. Um, my name is Nanami Sohma..."

Haruka blinked and stared at Nanami. "You're a Sohma, too? Must be a really big family...oh, before I forget," she added, "my name's Haruka. Sohma, but you probably already guessed that..."

Nanami's eyes lit up. "Oh, you're Haruka? It's nice to finally meet you-- your reputation precedes you."

"Really?" Haruka hadn't known that. She wasn't exactly social, so she didn't know too much about anything, but that also made it pretty hard for her to be very popular.

"Yes--I mean, you are the most likely person to take Hatori's place," Nanami pointed out. "Well, actually, half of that is just because you're about the only one with such specific goals..."

Oh, Haruka thought disappointedly. That's why. She really hated the decision that her

parents made for her. They decided that she'd be the family's doctor even before she was born. She didn't think her parents were even expecting her when they said that their daughter would take Hatori's place, but they thought that she'd be able to actually learn something under his guidance before he died when they decided on that.

"Oh, I'm not really the most likely person, am I?" she asked.

"Well, of the people who've said that they're going to take his place," Nanami admitted. "And you're actually not such a horrible candidate anyway, I think. I mean, I'm not in charge of it, I just hear a little bit of side conversations and gossip about it. From what I can tell, the only thing standing in your way is that everyone says that you're never prepared..."

"There's a reason for that," Haruka admitted coolly. "I'd rather leave it saying that the problem's caused by the insane idiots who set the goal."

Nanami tilted her head slightly in confusion, but never responded--the gang girl who followed Haruka onto the school grounds came forward and asked, "So, Nanami, what do you think of high school so far?"

Nanami returned her head to its normal position, but grinned pathetically in response to the question. "I've only been here for about half an hour and I've already been pushed into someone, and I've already been scolded and I've already learned a lesson," she summarized meekly. "I guess it's pretty good, but I'm not sure I have the energy for it."

The orange-haired girl laughed loudly. "Oh, it's not that tiring."

"Yeah, but how much of last year did you skip?" Nanami asked.

"Hmm, now that you mention it..."

"So you had it easy. I don't. I'm actually trying to pass," she pointed out sheepishly.

"I had it easy?" the girl with the orange cat asked disbelievingly. "All that effort I spent in my gang, and I had it easy?"

"Well, your school life was easy..."

The girl huffed through her mask. "Do you have any idea what they thought of me for that?"

"Uhhh...well, that was your decision, right?"

"Yeah, I guess it was. If I'd actually cared about school, then I would have stayed in school and I would have quit my gang or something. Actually, I probably wouldn't even have started a gang if I really cared about school..." she added thoughtfully.

"Anita-san," a voice from behind Haruka began, "what are you doing?"

Haruka turned around and saw the speaker. She was a third-year girl at the school with the normal uniform and a knee-length skirt that almost met the end of her dark brown hair. Her facial expression was severe and aimed above her small reading glasses at the gang girl.

The orange-haired girl sighed and rolled her eyes. "I'm just trying to be social, Kats. You act as though I just threatened to pull out my lead pipe." She leaned against the wall.

The third-year girl turned her gaze to Haruka. "I assume you to be Haruka Sohma-san?" she asked.

"Uh, yes, that's me," Haruka responded awkwardly. "I'm not that popular, am I?"

The girl nodded and added, "I'm Katsuo Sohma. She probably hasn't introduced herself yet, so I'll tell you that she"--Katsuo nodded to the orange-haired girl--"is Anita. And that's Nanami," she finished, gesturing toward Nanami. "We're all Sohmas. Isn't it interesting how we're all from the same family but you've never heard of any one of us?" Katsuo asked casually, as though she was trying to make a joke, but her face remained stern, and her attempt was hardly successful.

"Um...yeah, it's weird..." Haruka agreed awkwardly.

"It really is a big family," Katsuo went on. "The main house is supposed to have well over fifty people, and there's probably about a hundred fifty people outside the main house, too." If Haruka didn't know it, she'd think that the third-year student was bragging about her family to some incredibly low-class, my-only-family-is-my-brother-and-sister kind of person. The only thing keeping her from this idea was that she came from the same family.

"I mean, really," Katsuo continued, "almost all of the family lives outside the main house, but I think that you're the only person I know who lives & outside;..."

Oh, Haruka thought. That's why. She thinks that I basically am low-class because she's in the main house and I'm not.

"Kats," Anita warned sharply.

Katsuo turned to Anita and asked her, "What? I'm just talking to her."

"Oh, so that means that you don't get a scolding but I do?" Anita questioned.

"No offense Anita-san," Katsuo retorted, "but I think that your situation is very considerably different from mine. I mean, I don't know why you try to go on with this. If I were you, I'd be glad that she wasn't considered to be my--"

"That's not why you'd scold me," Anita shot back. "You would scold me because you'd be paranoid that I'd let something slip, and here you are, practically telling it to her face."

Haruka felt very out-of-place now, and also fairly curious as to what they were talking about, but

the argument seemed to be over if she should know this or not, and the answer seemed to be no, so she didn't ask.

"Oh, Anita-san," Katsuo began, "you just don't get it. Isn't it so much more likely for her to hear about this from her dear old si--"

"Kats-chan," Nanami ventured to interrupt.

Katsuo turned to Nanami. "What?" she demanded.

Nanami flinched, but took a breath and continued, "If you keep talking like that, then you'll be the one to tell her, and Ani-chan won't even have a chance to talk to her about it."

"So?" Katsuo challenged. "Can't we just er--"

Anita seemed to fake-cough loudly several times, but they turned into real coughs that effectively distracted Katsuo from whatever she was saying when she rushed to her side to help her out.

Nanami seemed torn between being relieved that Katsuo didn't end up saying anything and worried for Anita.

A moment later, Anita stopped coughing, sighed, and managed to mutter, "Damn allergies." Nanami's face showed nothing but relief at this point.

The bell rang, and all the people who had gathered in the courtyard-like area (whose numbers increased after Anita's almost choking) hurried to their homeroom classes and parents left through the front gate.

Katsuo was the first to turn around and head for the school building; she didn't even say goodbye.

Nanami stepped forward awkwardly and said, "Um, I think we should go..."

Haruka nodded as Nanami trotted into the building. Haruka was about to follow her when Anita called to her, "Haruka-chan, can we talk for a moment?"

After a moment's hesitation, Haruka went back to talk to Anita.

"Listen," Anita began quietly, "I've heard some things about your parents, and I want to know something. They're treating you properly, right?" She wore a very serious face--if Haruka wasn't hearing her words for herself, she'd think that Anita was talking about someone who died or something.

"Uh, yeah," Haruka answered uncertainly. "What did you hear about them?"

Anita opened her mouth, then closed it and shook her head. "I can't tell you that. It would put a lot of hard work to waste, and despite how much I hate the goal that the work was

made for, it's against my code to do anything that makes anyone's work ineffective."

Haruka was confused and would have asked what she meant, but she understood that she had already gotten the best answer that she could get, so she asked, "Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?"

After a moment's hesitation, Anita answered, "Yeah, I'd like to know if you really agree with them and want to take Hatori's place."

Haruka shrugged and gave a false neutral answer: "I don't know what my goal is, but I guess that I wouldn't say no to being a doctor anyway. Although, really," she added, "I really, really, hate their decision. They made it without my opinion whatsoever. I guess I don't really like my parents too much," she admitted. "But I'm perfectly fine living with them!" she added, slightly worried as to what Anita's reaction would be.

Anita shook her head with an amused look in her eyes. "No, I wouldn't do that unless they were actually doing something to you. From what I've heard, they're the kind of people who might have you working pretty hard and taking all the money you earn for themselves."

Anita said all this while looking somewhere on the ground behind Haruka, and wearing a pained and angry expression.

"Do you know something I don't about my parents?" Haruka asked, confused.

Anita looked up, almost seeming slightly hopeful about something, but the expression passed in an instant, and she was looking at the ground again. "No...I guess not."

I guess? Haruka thought. What kind of answer is that?

A neutral one, Haruka responded to her own question. Just like the one you gave to her. And if it's anything like yours, then it's probably a lie.

I must have some really serious mental problems, a third voice in Haruka's mind chimed in. Maybe my parents dropped me on my head when I was young or something like that. They're definitely capable of doing that...

Anita looked up at Haruka and interrupted her argument with herself with, "Hey, shouldn't you be heading to class now?"

"Oh, right," mumbled Haruka. "Class..."

She turned around and walked into the school building, but on her way, she noticed a gathering of about six people somewhere vaguely nearby the entrance of the school, all with mixed outfits, with some in the school uniform and others in other apparel. The gathering blocked the way into the school, and also had Haruka confused as to why there was anyone still here who wasn't in school uniform.

Haruka opened her mouth to tell the group to please let her through, but before she even took the actual breath, every single eye in the group was looking directly at her.

Haruka instinctively slammed her mouth closed at all of the attention and stood rigidly, but then soothed herself to relax, take a deep breath, and begin, "W--"

"Oh, you are the girl whom Hatori was talking about all those years back?" a flamboyant voice cried out from somewhere in the group. Haruka soon saw the speaker: a man(?) with long silver hair and wearing at least two layers of dresses, crying out with majestic motions and conspicuous courage.

Haruka, confused by the man's strange appearance, could hardly even get a sound out before she stopped it to reconsider her words, but was thinking, Who are you, why are you here in street clothes, what do you know about Hatori, and can I please get through to my school now?

The silver-haired man laughed out loud. "Oh, all that would be such a story, and if you really want to get to your classes, then you'll completely ignore me and head on!"

"B--" Haruka began before she was interrupted.

The man shushed her before she could get a single word out. "Not so loud; the living might hear you?"

WHAT?

"Oh, come on," a disgruntled male voice pushed from as far from the man with the dresses as he could be while still being in the crowd. Haruka saw him an instant later; a boy, wearing the school uniform and probably in his first year at the school, with hair, strangely enough, the same color as Anita's. "Don't you even know that we're dead?"

~~~~~

(Should I stop ending it like this?)

### 3. Chapter 3

(I'm going to make a standard disclaimer pretty soon, because not all of the characters are really mine.

Anita basically belongs to Werecat13.

Anita will not be the last character that isn't quite mine, but mentioning names would be spoiling, so I will not mention any.

Here's chapter three, please enjoy, and I like comments.)

~~~~~

#### Chapter 3

"Don't you even know that we're dead?" the orange-haired boy asked pointedly.

Haruka stopped. Her head buzzed with questions that she could possibly ask, and she wanted to ask each and every one of them, but that would mean talking to a dead person, and that would make her look insane. Or rather, it would make her look as insane as she undoubtedly was.

I must be insane, she decided. My parents are insane, so it's only natural that I am too, right? I'm insane. It's the only reasonable explanation... She rambled on mentally, turned around, and started heading out of the school grounds.

"Hey!" Anita called after her. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know," Haruka responded quietly. "Some mental institution or some other place that's more willing to house a crazy girl like me..." I'm so freaking insane it's not even funny. Dead people? If I didn't know better I'd think I was smoking something...

"You're not smoking anything," another male voice insisted, probably following Haruka, but she was too tired to look up and see who it was. It was probably one of the "ghosts." "Nor are you insane."

Haruka was about to respond, "Please, go away and leave me alone. I just realized that I'm insane, so please don't bother my heavily laden mind with the concept of insanity," but the ghost responded before she even opened her mouth.

"You're not insane. You're just a little bit different in ways that others don't even know exist."

Haruka looked up at the ghost. He was a high school student, a year older than the orange-haired one, with gray hair that was long and a little uneven in the front but short in the back, and his eyes were a deep purple that Haruka probably could have looked at all day without protest. Somehow, this completely convinced her that there was nothing wrong with her; but that only lasted for a brief moment, for she soon realized that there had to be something wrong with her, whether it was insanity or something completely different.

Well, if I'm not insane, she thought, figuring that he'd hear her that way, then what am I?

The ghost smiled, and Haruka couldn't help smiling with him. "Well, I'm not sure how official the name is," he began his answer, "but I think most people would call you a spirit seer."

I'm a spirit seer, Haruka thought dreamily as she fell into an oddly purple romantic pool of great visions of incomprehensible grandeur as a grand warrior against the vengefully evil specters of the long-deceased. A moment later, though, she realized that the image was not a premonition, but she was instead standing in the middle of the sidewalk looking into the eyes of the ghost.

She was suddenly struck by how ghostly he seemed, being very pale and having hair that almost seemed white, gracefully gliding in an almost eerie manner whenever he walked, and in the incredible beauty of his lavender eyes. He also seemed to radiate a bit of light, which was likely entirely because he was a ghost, but Haruka had a feeling that he had all of the other characteristics even in life.

Haruka sighed, and almost tried to convey another message to the ghost, but before she could, a voice called to her, cutting through her thoughts.

"Haruka-san!" Haruka heard Anita call from somewhere behind her. "Are you cutting class or something?"

Haruka turned around and looked at the orange-haired Sohma. "No," she began, desperately trying to think of an excuse.

"Then what are you doing?" Anita asked, looking at Haruka quizzically.

"Uh," Haruka mumbled, stalling, before she thought of an excuse that would at least be better than "I was running away because I thought I was insane but not I don't because I looked into the eyes of a very pretty ghost." Thinking about it, she almost wondered why looking into the ghost's eyes made her feel so much better and less insane, before she

realized that she really needed to think a little more about her excuse. "Um, I was a little overwhelmed by the school and...Katsuo," she half-lied in response. Katsuo really did seem like a jerk and generally unpleasant and possibly scary when put up to it. "You know, I just needed a little stroll to feel the wind on my face to clear my mind..."

Anita kept her questioning expression, but called back, "Well, you might want to be getting over here to class soon. I haven't been here for the first day before, but another bell just rang, so I assume that means that you're late."

Haruka silently cursed to herself, but nodded and trotted back to the school gates. The ghost followed.

Why are you following me anyway? she asked.

"Well, I started to follow you because, well," he fumbled slightly, "I didn't want you to skip school thinking that you're insane, and I'm still following you because I need to get back to the school anyway."

Why do you need to go back to the school?

Out of the corner of her eye, Haruka saw the ghost frown slightly. "Well, I guess you could say that I have a successor, and, well, I follow her to see if her life comes out better than mine."

And she goes to this school?

"Yes, she does. I think she's in your class," he added thoughtfully. "She's definitely your age."

I'll keep an eye out for her, then, Haruka promised. Who knows? Maybe we'll be friends.

Haruka almost thought that something about this ghost was familiar. She'd probably think of it as soon as she saw this person.

Haruka ran into the school and up to her homeroom class. The teacher looked up from the schedules she was passing out to the class when Haruka opened the door, and pointed out tartly, "You're late."

Haruka bowed her head in apology. "I'm sorry. Something came up, and I really had to do it right then."

The teacher raised an eyebrow in question. "You're not that late..."

"Yes, well," Haruka faltered, and never finished her answer.

The teacher sighed, shrugged, and asked, "So are you Haruka Sohma?"

Haruka nodded.

The teacher pointed to an empty seat. "Go ahead and have a seat."

Haruka sat in the indicated seat, which was the one next to the window, taking a schedule from the teacher on her way.

The teacher went on about school life and the schedule and a few other things that Haruka already knew from reading the school's handbook, but having already read them, she stared idly out the window instead.

So I can see ghosts, she thought to herself. Does that mean that I could tell if people are possessed? Can ghosts possess people, or do they just follow them around? Is there even a specific name for that? I wonder if someone can teach me all of this, but if they could, would they be dead? That would be kind of amusing, wouldn't it? My second teacher would be dead. Oh, but I'd need an excuse to go out like that, because Kaa-san would probably kill me if she knew that I was going out to learn about seeing ghosts...

Before she knew it, homeroom was over, and Haruka went to all of her other classes. She hardly paid any attention to a single one of them, mostly because most of the teachers were basically going on about things that were already stated in the handbook. Instead, she kept staring out the window (which she somehow ended up seated next to in every class), thinking about her newfound ability and what plans she should make in accordance with them.

By the end of the shortened school day, Haruka figured that she shouldn't tell her parents about this to save her life (because it probably wouldn't), and that she would only keep an eye out for a teacher, instead of actively searching for one, and that if she did find one, that she could disguise it as a job in a supermarket or something similar. Her parents probably wouldn't question any job that she said she had, as long as they were getting more money for it, but it would be best if she could be able to tell them honestly that she worked somewhere that they would approve of.

When the final bell rang, Haruka stood up and stretched. For some reason, deep thought always seemed to make everything in her body need stretching, even if she was walking as she did it.

As she stretched her legs a little, Nanami came forward, so Haruka looked up. "Can I help you?" she asked.

Nanami looked uncertain. "Well, I was just wondering...what did Anita say to you after I left?"

"Huh?" Haruka asked, standing straight again. "Not much, really. She just wanted to know if my parents were treating me well. I don't know why she's so interested, or why this came to mind, but..." she shrugged. "She probably has her reasons, and I have a feeling that she won't tell me what they are."

Nanami relaxed. "Okay, thank you." She turned, and was about to leave, but instead turned back and asked, "Um...what do you know about Hatori?"

Haruka was slightly surprised, and her expression showed it. "Uh, not much...he was a doctor, and...well, he was a doctor," she finished awkwardly. "He only worked for the Sohma family,

and he lived in the Main House, so I guess he was a little...favored."

"Is that all you know?" Nanami asked uncertainly. "You don't know anything else? Do you remember him doing anything to help you?"

"Um..." Haruka hardly knew how to answer this question. It seemed very strange and irrelevant, but if Nanami really wanted to know... "He gave me a shot when I was sick?"

Nanami truly relaxed now. "Okay. Thank you. That makes me feel a lot better." She turned and actually left the classroom this time.

Haruka stood there, staring after Nanami, thinking, Wow, this family really has problems...

"Tell me about it," a familiar voice responded from behind Haruka.

She jumped, and turned around to see the orange-haired ghost from in front of the door.

"Really," he went on. "It's a big family, but every single one of us has more problems than anyone I know outside of the family."

What kind of problems? Haruka asked.

The ghost's eyes darkened. "I'm not sure you want to know."

"Now, now," another voice chided from behind Haruka--probably from the doorway. "That's no way to answer a question."

Haruka turned around to see the speaker. He was, indeed, standing in the doorway, and most definitely a ghost. He had black hair that was only long enough to be shaped along his neck and dressed in a traditional Japanese fashion, and he seemed to be in his late twenties.

"What do you want me to tell her?" the orange-haired ghost retorted heatedly.

"The truth," the ghost in the doorway responded nonchalantly. "What else? She asked a good question, so give her a good answer."

"Why would she even care about our problems?" the orange-haired ghost shot back.

I'm still here, Haruka reminded him, feeling left out.

The ghost turned to Haruka. "Yes, I know, and I'm constantly reminded because you keep asking stupid questions!" He turned around, put his foot on the windowsill, and jumped out--even though the classroom was on the second floor.

Haruka paused, about to tell him not to jump, but then remembered that he was a ghost, and also that he had already jumped by the time she began to think it.

She sighed, shrugged and turned around to leave.

"Are you leaving already?" the new ghost asked.

What else can I do here? Haruka asked. You have better things to do than answer my stupid questions. I don't know a thing about this family, and I'm sure there's a good reason for that, so you don't have to tell me.

The ghost looked slightly puzzled, or maybe surprised, then smiled warmly and distantly. "Maybe that's why he ran away. You really do seem a lot like her."

Haruka had no idea what the ghost was talking about, but suddenly wished that she hadn't said that. She really just wanted to go home, because the day had seemed incredibly long for actually being a short day, but she didn't want to be rude, and now a ghost thought that she was like someone else and now has the wrong impression.

Haruka sighed, and suddenly realized something. Um, I'm sorry, but I never heard anyone's name...

The ghost's smile turned into a considerably more cheerful one. "Oh, yes, I had forgotten all about that. My name is Shigure Sohma, and that was Kyo, who's also a Sohma."

Sohma? Haruka asked, half-dumbfounded. I met about half a dozen people today, and they're all Sohmas?

"Well, yes, we all are," responded Shigure. "And it really is a big family. Over a hundred and fifty in my day, and I don't doubt that the number has grown. Oh, and you haven't even met all of the Sohmas in this school," he added. "Come to think of it, I think you only met about half of them..."

How big is this family?

"It's big enough to have a person leading it that acts more like a king than a family head," Shigure responded. "Well, that's been the case for a fairly long time, and I can't say that we always have the best leadership, but..." He shrugged.

Why do you say that? Haruka asked.

Shigure closed his eyes to think, then opened them and responded, "Well, let's just say that he was a very violent person, and he might have been bipolar, too. He probably was," he corrected.

If he was such a horrible leader that way, Haruka wondered, then why was he the head of the family?

"That's a fairly long story," Shigure responded slightly awkwardly, "and it's based on that thing that I was going to tell you earlier, but you declined."

Haruka hesitated, about to protest, then shrugged and started moving toward the door before another ghost appeared in the doorway, the ghostly ghost with gray hair and purple eyes.

"Are you leaving already?" he asked from behind Shigure.

Haruka smiled at him. I really should, all things considered. My parents won't want me to stay out for too much longer than I already am.

"Well, can I walk you home?" he asked politely. "I've passed by it before, and it's on the way to where I'm going anyway."

Haruka blushed. Oh, um, sure...

Shigure looked at Haruka with a slight smile and a slightly raised eyebrow. "Well, you two have fun walking," he said. "Try not to get into any trouble..."

Haruka saw the pale ghost shoot a glare at Shigure before looking back to Haruka and watching her approach.

The two of them left the building, and kept walking toward the gate until a flamboyant voice from behind them cried, "Yuki, where are you going, my sweet brother?"

Haruka saw the ghost next to her stop in a cringe with a horrified and furious expression, then slowly turn around to face the speaker and respond, ice-cold but calm, "Go away. I'm avoiding you."

"Yuki, are you walking our dear friend Haruka home?" Haruka had by now turned around and saw that the speaker was the first ghost to talk to her, the male one with long white hair. "Does she even know your name? How rude you are!"

The ghost beside Haruka (Yuki?) glared pointedly at the long-haired ghost (did he say he was his brother?). "Nii-san, I was just going to do that."

"You seemed quite silent to me," Apparently-Yuki's brother responded cheerfully. He was coming forward now in a combination between running, skipping, prancing, and frolicking. Haruka wasn't sure what on earth was this person's problem. "May I follow?"

"No." Apparently-Yuki was very severe and certain of his answer. "You'll embarrass us both."

"Now, Yuki, what on earth could I possibly say to embarrass one so dignified as yourself?"

"Well, you've already done that with that story, and I don't doubt that your other high school escapades were even worse."

"What story? Oh, you mean that one on the class trip? Oh, I remember that so well, everyone was so upset when those students--"

"That's why I want you somewhere else."

Haruka sighed, standing still in the school gates. Are you coming or do I have to go home by

myself?

Apparently-Yuki turned to face her and was about to say something when Anita called Haruka from just outside the gates.

Haruka shrugged and turned to answer Anita, who was now coming to meet Haruka. "Can I help you?"

"Do you want me to walk you home?" Anita asked politely.

"Um..." Haruka instinctively glanced toward Yuki(?), but Anita probably didn't even know he ever lived.

Anita smiled. "You don't have to worry about being seen with me. I won't go close enough for your parents to see me."

"Um," Haruka floundered.

Yuki(?) nodded to her, smiling. "I don't mind, you should decide."

Haruka wasn't really certain that she wanted the gang member with her, but she instead decided that she should make as many friends in the Sohma family as possible so that she might be able to figure out what this big problem is, so she shrugged and answered, "Sure, I guess..."

Anita smiled and asked, "Well, your parents aren't going to be happy if you disappear, so I guess we should get going."

Haruka agreed, and the two of them turned and left the school grounds with Yuki(?) following. Anita was silent, and Haruka didn't feel very talkative either (except maybe if Anita would tell what the Sohma problem was, but that wouldn't happen, so she was silent instead). Not long after they left the school grounds, Yuki(?) broke the silence, but only in Haruka's ears.

"Ayame's right," Yuki(?) began. "I really should have introduced myself."

I assume that this Ayame person is your brother? Haruka checked.

"Yes, he is," Yuki(?) responded. "But as I was saying, my name is Yuki Sohma."

That makes... Haruka tried to count the Sohmas that she met that day. ...Three living Sohmas and three dead ones, all met in one day. Add that to my family, and I know ten people, all of whom are Sohmas.

Yuki laughed. "It is a big family, and I guess we aren't such a social one."

Haruka sighed. Was your life this lonely?

"At first," Yuki responded slowly. "But then I met someone, and she really helped me out. I

guess I was your age then," he added. "Maybe you'll meet someone like her someday."

You knew more people than your immediate family, though, right?

"Well, yes, but that doesn't mean I saw them often enough to really know them well, and I really didn't go out much as a child..."

Is that why you're so pale? Haruka teased.

"Well, it might be," Yuki admitted laughingly.

Haruka smiled and looked up at the sky. You were still more social than I was. Really, I hardly knew anyone's name when I was young, and that hasn't really changed as much as I'd like it to.

"I know," Yuki told her. "The girl that I mentioned before, she's a Sohma, and she's heard about you, so I know basically what you're going through."

Haruka grinned. So does every Sohma know everything about me when even my parents don't know all this?

Yuki laughed. "Remember how big this family is? It's probably a little too big for everyone to know your problems. But you are pretty well-known within the family, especially the Main House, and there are reasons for that." He threw a swift glance at Anita, so fast that Haruka almost missed it.

Does it have anything to do with Anita? Haruka asked.

Yuki opened his mouth to answer, but before he could, Haruka felt fur against her ankle, and looked down in time to see an orange cat brushing itself against her ankles--and, in doing so, tripping her.

Haruka fell, screaming out a strange cry of distress as she fell.

Anita turned to Haruka, and somehow managed to catch her even though Haruka was almost on the ground.

Whoa! Haruka thought, being held about with her face less than a foot from the ground from around her waist. She's got some sharp reflexes!

The cat, purring loudly, walked up Haruka's back to her face and sat in front of her, licking its paw and brushing it over its head. Once or twice, it looked up from its grooming to look at Haruka, and she could have sworn it smiled at her. Anita was about to pull Haruka up when the cat stood up, walked to Haruka's face, and licked her forehead.

Haruka couldn't help adding to her previous thought, Reflexes as sharp as a cat's...

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(Chapter five should be submitted soon enough)

## 4. Chapter 4

(I'd appologize for taking so long in writing this, but it's not worth it. I think that you should not complain that it took a while but that you should be very incredibly grateful for my actually writing this. After all, it was quite a lot of effort and time, which I should have spent planning a party and figuring out what to tell people. I would also like to point out that I'm feeling quite ill, and my birthday is tomorrow. Be grateful to me for considering you people enough to actually take up some of my prescious time writing this story.

Anita Sohma basically belongs to Werecat13, and no other characters representing realy people have been introduced, and thus I don't need to say a thing about them.

And in case you didn't figure it out yourself, the words that are italic are thoughts or emphasized words, what's "in quotations" is speach, bold letters probably won't be used, but are probably incredible emphasis if they ever are, underlined words are only now being instigated as indicators of words that aren't actually a part of the story, and the long series of ~ things indicate the beginning and end of the actual chapter.

Be happy and please comment and maybe someday I'll post some fanart of this stuff, or at least put the next chapter up sooner.)

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### Chapter 4

The next day, Haruka left for school like a normal school girl--except, of course, that she was still wearing the boys's uniform shirt. Otherwise, she departed normally, arriving at school about ten minutes early. With nothing better to do, she decided that her best option would be to wait outside the gates so she could at least get some fresh air.

The day before, Anita had walked her home, except for the last hundred meters or so. At that distance, she left Haruka on her own, and turned around to go back in the direction of the school.

Yuki followed her all the way, though. Actually, he didn't leave until after dinner, and Haruka guessed that was only because the other ghosts might worry...although what

they'd worry about, Haruka couldn't even begin to guess, seeing as he was a ghost. If nothing else, Haruka guessed that they could worry that he'd decide to stay at her house or something and they'd never see him again--or, at least, that's what Haruka figured. She still hardly knew what exactly it meant to be a ghost.

Haruka leaned on the wall by the gates and waited, breathing in the cool morning air. She always had found that incredibly refreshing, and that was the same even now. It somehow made her think of the dream she had when she was about four or five years old. That was her favorite dream, her dream about having a sister with orange hair, and now she recalled it, trying to remember why the morning air made her think of her dream sister.

In her dream, she had a sister who was one year older than her. Haruka followed her sister everywhere she went, because her sister was a great person that Haruka wanted to be like as much as possible; in fact, given the choice, Haruka figured that she'd actually bleach her hair in the hopes that it would turn the same shade of bright orange that her sister's hair naturally grew into. The only thing that she wasn't as certain that she'd want that her sister had was the curse.

Haruka never really understood the curse, mostly because she didn't know of any possible way for her to do anything that would put the curse into effect. Well, she did, but she did it only once and effectively learned her lesson and never dared even consider doing it ever again if it was at all possible.

Part of the reason that she was so uncertain about that the dream wasn't real was because it was too detailed; the details of the dream made it seem impossible that she could have dreamed all that in one night--or over several, for that matter.

One of these mysterious details was when Haruka made the curse relevant; she was fairly young in the dream at the time (also, the dream's sense of time seemed too warped and long to be overnight), probably a little younger than three years old. She had a sudden wondering as to why her sister wore a certain bracelet, to the point where she actually pulled it off. However, Haruka's dream was a lot more vague around this point, almost as though someone willed her to forget it entirely...

...Haruka shook her head to clear it of her dream. All that was past, even if it had actually happened; furthermore, there was probably a reason as to why she had forgotten that detail, or why that detail was erased, or whatever it was that could actually make her forget what happened at that point. The only thing that she did remember was that, after that day, she made a reconstruction of her sister's bracelet and told anyone who knew of her sister's curse that she was cursed, too, because she was so into what her sister did that whatever happened to her sister was relevant to her.

Haruka leaned her head back on the wall and sighed. Her other main reason for believing the reality of the dream was that she actually had the replicated bracelet, and hardly ever took it off. By that time, she was so used to it being on her wrist that she could hardly stand being without it; whenever she did, she couldn't help wringing her wrists to imitate the feeling of having the bracelet on it.

"Hey," an incredibly familiar voice broke through Haruka's thoughts.

She opened her eyes to see Anita leaning her face into Haruka's.

"I didn't know that you were such an early-bird," Anita continued. "You're here pretty early."

"Really?" Haruka asked. It felt more like school had only five more minutes before it started. She wondered vaguely what time it was and dimly cursed herself for not wearing a watch.

"Yeah," Anita continued. "We still have at least fifteen minutes until school starts."

Fifteen?! Haruka thought, surprised. I thought I was only ten minutes early!

"Your clocks are off," another familiar voice, this one male, answered.

Haruka jumped and looked up to see Kyo hanging over Anita's shoulder.

"Is something wrong?" Anita asked, apparently noticing Haruka's little start.

"Huh?" Haruka asked. "Oh, no," she continued slowly, "I was just, ah, a little cold..."

"Oh, yes, you're so convincing," Kyo pointed out sarcastically. "I believe your lie with every fiber of my being."

Haruka would have shot a glare at him, but Anita couldn't see or hear him, but she could see Haruka. She settled with blinking slowly in his direction, which was close enough to Anita's that she didn't notice.

Anita seemed to take Haruka's excuse easily enough that she didn't question it, but instead continued the conversation, "Well, why are you here so early?"

"Oh, um, I guess my clocks are kind of fast or something, so I didn't know that I was this early..." Finally, Haruka had a chance to tell the truth. "Is there any reason why you're here early?"

"Eh," Anita began nonchalantly, "I just always wake up early, and today I got bored pretty soon so I figured that I might as well head off to school."

The conversation ended there, but it seemed to only start fading away at that point. It might have survived if only the orange cat hadn't distracted Haruka.

It wrapped itself around Anita's ankles, purring loudly enough for Haruka to hear it faintly, and still miraculously not disturbing anything on Anita, and Haruka wondered again as to why that was, when she finally realized it, but still asked Kyo to be certain.

That cat's a ghost, isn't it?

Kyo paused before responding, "Basically. There's probably a better word for it but I guess you could call it a ghost."

Haruka felt triumphant. She had seen her first non-human ghost and identified it without assistance. For some reason, this felt something like a great accomplishment.

The silence continued awkwardly, until it was broken by a loud and cheerful call of, "Anita, why are you here so early? And who's your friend?"

Anita sighed and called back, "I should ask you the same exact question, Akemi. Why are you here so early?"

"Oh, my parents needed me out of the house because they were going to clean the whole place," Presumably-Akemi responded. "You?"

Haruka now saw the speaker, skipping/galloping/running toward them along the sidewalk. Her hair was fairly long and blonde with brown at the ends and was flowing along behind her from two ponytails coming out of the side of her head. Her face was cracked in two by a huge smile spreading from one ear to the other and back again.

Since the girl was approaching at the speed that she used, Anita answered more quietly, "I'm here already because I felt like it and I have nothing better to do anyway." Haruka noticed the difference between this and what Haruka heard.

Apparently-Akemi stopped next to Anita and looked at Haruka. "Who are you?" she asked brightly.

"Uh," Haruka stammered, caught by surprise.

" &lsquo;Uh&rsquo;? That&rsquo;s a strange name..."

"Huh? No, that&rsquo;s not it," Haruka added hurriedly. "My name&rsquo;s Haruka Sohma."

Akemi(?) jumped with joy. "You&rsquo;re another Sohma? Wow, there really are a lot of us! We should make a club, with a secret handshake, and secret codenames, and--"

"Akemi, you should at least introduce yourself before you put people into your plans for the great Sohma Cult," Anita interrupted tartly.

"Oh, right! My name is Akemi Sohma," Akemi finally introduced herself. "And that&rsquo;s my cousin, Anita Sohma--"

"She knows me," Anita pointed out icily.

"Oh, Anita, stop being such a party-pooper," Akemi half-whined.

"I might if you stop being such an obnoxious brat!" Anita half-shouted.

This conversation had apparently drowned out another, because just as Anita finished saying that, Haruka heard another voice, this one male but otherwise not unlike Akemi&rsquo;s, whining, "Waaaaaaah, somebody, Kyo&rsquo;s hurting me!"

Haruka looked past the arguing Anita and Akemi to see Kyo twisting his fists into the skull of a young boy who seemed to be at least a year younger than him. The younger boy had short blonde hair that started to poke out of a sailor-style hat of a color that was similar but not the same as the main color on the girls' uniform shirt that he wore.

How strange he is, Haruka thought, wearing the girls' uniform like that...

It took her a full minute to remember that she was wearing the boys' uniform "like that."

Haruka sighed. I hate my mother.

"Oh, look!" the boy exclaimed as Kyo released him. "It's a girl that I haven't met before! Hello, new girl, what's your name?"

I'm not new, Haruka denied, having already decided that the boy was a ghost because of how he knew Kyo.

"Well, I still don't know you, and I still want to know your name," the blonde boy pointed out.

Haruka sighed internally. My name's Haruka Sohma. And before you say anything, she added pointedly, yes, I know that the family is really big. I'm finding that out now myself.

"Well, now that I think about it," the boy responded, "I guess that the family's really pretty big..."

Okay, Haruka reminded him, I told you my name, now you tell me yours.

"Oh, yeah, my name's Momiji," he chirped back. "Oh, and I'm a Sohma too, but I guess you sort of knew that already..."

"So you're Haruka Sohma?" Akemi turned to Haruka again to ask. "You know, I've really heard a lot about you. You're really popular in the Main House!"

"Really?" Haruka asked somewhat sarcastically. "I've heard about those same few words several times now from about three or four people within the past day or two, and I haven't even seen the front of the Main House."

"Oh, I guess you wouldn't have," Akemi added thoughtfully. "I mean, the only people allowed in the Main House are--oh, wait," she added. "Uh, we're..."

Anita interrupted, "The only people allowed to go into the Main House are born there."

"Really?" Momiji asked thoughtfully. "I don't remember that rule...although I guess that not a lot of people have been going into the Main House recently, so I might just have not been paying attention..."

"Idiot," Kyo grumbled. "That was a lie. She doesn't want Haruka to know."

"Oh," Momiji sounded. "Sorry," he added, realizing that Haruka heard that. "I'd forgotten that."

"Forgotten what? That your family has a curse?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess," Momiji sounded somewhat disheartened. "But doesn't that mean that she knows that now that you said it?"

"What?"

"You just said that I forgot that the family has a curse, so she knows now."

"Aaaaagh! What is wrong with you?" Kyo cried out in rage, grabbing Momiji's head between his fists and twisted them. "You don't tell her that I told her that we cursed! I swear every time you open your mouth, it pisses me off!"

"Waaaaaaaaaah! Somebody, Kyo's hurting me!" Momiji whined loudly.

Haruka choked out a single loud laugh, then immediately changed her sounds to a loud coughing in an attempt to keep her sane appearance.

"Hey!" Anita exclaimed. "Are you okay?"

At that moment, Haruka's coughs became real, and she coughed hard, desperately gasping for breath between coughs.

Finally, she stopped coughing and sighed, "Ow..."

"Yeah, are you okay?" Akemi asked.

"Not really," Haruka choked out. "But I guess I'm alive..."

"Well, you can tell us that, so I guess you're okay..." Akemi's logic seemed slightly lacking, but Haruka still agreed; her throat still hurt slightly, but she was otherwise fine.

Silence took over again. Haruka was the only person to hear what broke it; Kyo asked, "So, how long until school starts again, anyway?"

Why? Are you getting your education now, too? Haruka asked half-teasingly. "Isn't it a little late for that now?"

"No, it's just that I'm getting a little bored," Kyo denied. "And don't go giving me crap because I died."

How did you die, anyway? Haruka wondered, really as just a passing thought, but Kyo apparently heard her. Did you get mad and commit suicide or something?

"NO!" Kyo protested. "Do I look like I freaking killed myself?"

I wouldn't know the difference, Haruka pointed out. I don't know anyone who commit suicide.

"Well, I didn't!" Kyo enforced. "That damn dog acted stupid again."

In case you don't know, I haven't the slightest clue who you're talking about.

Kyo sighed. "Shigure. He's a damn fool, and he got us both killed!"

Really...?

"Yeah! He ignored his deadlines again, and his editor went crazy and burned the house down! Maybe we'd still be alive now if he wasn't such a lazy idiot!"

Editor? Haruka asked interestedly. So he was a writer? What kind of books did he write?

Kyo looked slightly surprised for a moment before his face darkened. "You don't want to know."

Haruka was uncertain. Really? Why don't I want to know?

Kyo stared at Haruka with a disgusted expression. "You really don't."

Okay... Haruka still wasn't so sure, but she figured that Kyo wouldn't tell her anyway.

"Um, I think he wrote horror stories," Momiji chimed in.

Really? Then why didn't I want to know?

"Because that was only once," Kyo answered darkly. "He usually wrote something completely different."

Haruka wondered vaguely what Shigure wrote about before she made a mental note to ask him when she saw him again.

Haruka heard someone sneeze and looked up to see two people walking forward; one seeming to be the ghost Shigure, who looked to be the one who sneezed, and the other being a person whom Haruka didn't recognize, who had black hair the fell unevenly into his eyes and reached about the top of his boys' school uniform.

Anita seemed to notice Haruka's shift in attention and looked up, too. She saw the living boy approaching and called out, "Saburo, come and join our party! We're having a lot of fun standing around out here before school for no particular reason!" Her voice was normal, but her intention was almost definitely a sarcastic one.

"No, I just realized that Akemi went out early," Saburo(?) explained. "And we all know that

she'd get into horrible trouble if I just let her go out without someone to watch her. No offense Anita," he added, "but I'm not so certain that you're entirely capable of watching her thoroughly enough. You know how she is."

Anita grinned and nodded. "Yeah, you have a point. So are you going to join the party or not?"

Saburo(?) turned to Haruka first. "Anita, you don't usually associate with anyone, but I somehow have the feeling that you and this girl started the party."

"Uh, I guess," Anita answered uncertainly.

Saburo(?) smiled. "I assume that this is the ever-popular Haruka Sohma?"

Haruka paused for a moment before nodding. "Every time I meet someone else, I'm reminded how popular I am and how big my family is."

"You're right," the boy answered Haruka's unasked question. "I'm a Sohma, too. Saburo Sohma, to be specific." He bowed courteously. "It's good to finally meet you."

Haruka had been fairly certain that Saburo was a Sohma, but she wasn't entirely certain, and was even more surprised when he answered her question even before she worded it in her mind. Maybe he can hear my thoughts? she wondered half to herself and half as a test to see if he could.

"No, he can't," answered Shigure. "Actually, if he were able to know what you were thinking like we do, he wouldn't be alive. Well, all things considered, I don't think he would have been born."

Why's that? Haruka asked.

"Well..." Shigure began and ended. He didn't say anything else.

Haruka noticed a fairly large black dog sitting at Saburo's feet and wondered vaguely if it had anything to do with it. Then she remembered the orange cat at Anita's ankles and realized that the dog was probably a ghost, too.

Really, what is the whole thing going on with this family? Haruka had to ask. Everyone I've met so far seems to be in on some big secret, and nobody's saying what it is, but it always seems relevant, because every other conversation ends with someone cutting someone else off.

"My dear Haruka," Shigure began, "haven't you realized that there's a reason that you don't know this secret?"

Yes, I have, Haruka retorted, but like I said, everyone keeps slipping up, and if they can slip up, then I think that this secret is too relevant for me to know that it exists without being told what it is.

"Hmm..." Shigure said thoughtfully.

Haruka looked up at the sound of approaching footsteps to see two familiar people coming forward: Nanami and the ever-ghostly Yuki.

Akemi looked up at the same time and called out, "Hey, Nani! Come and join the party! Everyone's having a blast!"

"Oh, yes!" Anita added sarcastically. "We were having such a wonderful time, doing normal party things--you know, we were hanging around, and being completely silent! It is such the best!"

"We were talking and having fun a moment ago," Akemi retorted.

"Yuki!" Shigure called. "Come and help us to decide on something!"

"What is it?" Yuki asked more quietly than Shigure, somehow already among the ghosts and people.

"We need to decide if we can tell Haruka our little secret," Shigure explained.

"She already knows that we're cursed," Momiji blurted.

Kyo turned his head around and faced Momiji with an expression of pure loathing and hissed, "She might not have if you hadn't said anything!"

Kyo, Haruka chided, don't kill Momiji because you did something stupid.

"She's right," Yuki added coolly. "Don't take your frustration at your stupidity out on other people, stupid cat."

"For the last time, I'm not a stupid cat anymore, you damn rat!" Kyo spat back, his hair seeming to stand on end.

"Well, if you're not a stupid cat anymore, then surely I am no longer a damn rat?" Yuki pointed out without a single hair out of place.

Kyo yelled something back, and Yuki retorted calmly, and this repeated several times, but Haruka didn't pay so much attention, because Anita had made another stab at conversation and asked, "So, Haruka, do you have any siblings?"

The air seemed to tense among all the others--even the ghosts seemed slightly on-edge, and Akemi finally stopped bouncing on her heels.

"Um, no," Haruka responded honestly and slightly bewilderedly. Even if she still wore the replicated bracelet from her dream sister, that might just ruin her public sanity. "Why? And why is everyone so serious about it?"

Anita nodded, frowning slightly in confusion. "It's a long story," she answered vaguely.

She waited a moment, and Haruka was about to return to her ghost conversation when she asked, "Is that bracelet supposed to mean something?"

The other Sohmas' eyes darted to Haruka's wrist and widened at the sight of it before they looked Haruka in the eye with a questioning and perhaps fearful expression.

"Um," Haruka began awkwardly, before she decided to answer similarly. "It's a long story. But," she added, smiling slyly, "I'll tell you it if you tell me what's up with this whole sister thing."

She instantly cursed herself. Sister? she asked herself. SISTER? Do you really think something of this? You don't! Why did you say sister instead of sibling?

A moment later, she stopped cursing herself for that and redirected her attention. "I'll tell you if you tell me? I can't tell them that! I'd look completely insane--I mean, just because my parents can't tell me why I have it doesn't mean that it really has to do with the dream!

She continued complaining to herself for not thinking enough, while the other Sohmas exchanged serious, surprised and questioning looks.

They're seriously considering it! Haruka thought, panicking. What will I do if they actually tell me what's up with the family? Oh no, I really shouldn't have said anything!

"What's going on here?" a serious voice demanded. Haruka looked up and saw Katsuo standing in a very grave and harsh stance. "Did someone say anything stupid?"

~~~~~

(End of chapter. Now comment or slowly walk away or scream at my stupidity or whatever you want to do in response. The whole screaming at stupidity thing is rather unwanted, and I would prefer the slowly walking away, but I don't really care. Do whatever floats your boat, weasel, kitchen sink, or whatever else you might be trying to keep afloat.)

## 5. Chapter 5

(Mwahaha! Just as I promised, another chapter before the end of the month! But man, I can't find the freaking time and energy and motivation and PLOT! So if the plot seems to be slowly dying, that's why.

I don't own Fruits Basket, any of its characters, blah blah blah, but the OCs are mine.

I don't own Anita. She is Werecat13's.

Maybe in this world everyone seems kind of...prone to death. Sorry about that. But if they weren't, the plot would have died before it was born.

Please enjoy. I'm not in a tolerant enough mood for flames, so nobody even think of them.)

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### Chapter 5

Katsuo looked quite fearsome as she repeated her question: "Did anyone say something stupid?" She looked around the group until her gaze fell on Haruka and burned like a drop of water on a stove.

"Um," Akemi stalled, "I don't know..."

Katsuo turned to Akemi with the same burning glare, lessened so slightly that Haruka barely saw the difference. "I'm not surprised. You never know anything. Although I suppose that you usually know when someone says something more idiotic than what you say," she added relentlessly.

Akemi looked like she was about to cry.

Anita jumped to her defense. "Katsuo! Stop blaming Akemi!"

"Well, she is stupid," Katsuo argued back, glaring now at Anita. "I thought that you'd

know that fairly well by now."

Saburo cleared his throat. "Katsuo, calm down and let us explain."

Katsuo snapped her face toward Saburo now and glared at him twice as maliciously. "Saburo," she growled with a voice of pure fury. "What do you mean? There shouldn't be any explaining. Either someone did something stupid and we need to correct it, or nobody did anything to change anything and there's nothing to worry about."

"Katsuo, you shouldn't decide that it's always the same," Saburo lectured. "Just let me explain." He glanced at Haruka with something like uncertainty. "But maybe we should discuss this somewhere else."

Katsuo raised her eyebrows and asked in the same tone, "Oh, really...?"

Saburo nodded. "It seems quite complicated, and I would rather that we all have some say in this decision before we do anything rash. You should be the first to know about this, being as great an advisor and leader that you are," he added, almost testing something.

Katsuo only frowned. "Flattery will get you nowhere, Saburo. I thought you knew that and what I think about people who try it for no reason."

Saburo grinned mischievously. "Only too well, my dear friend."

Katsuo grinned similarly. "Of course, sweetie."

Saburo's smile lost its tang and almost seemed happy. "Do you really mean that?"

Akemi glared at Katsuo and Saburo alternately through puffy eyes.

Katsuo's smile didn't even fade--it just ended. "No. You should know that better than anyone." She turned to Haruka. "You are dismissed. Please proceed now."

Having nothing better to do, Haruka shrugged, turned around, and walked onto the school grounds. She had spent so much time outside that if she delayed at all, she might be late for class.

Nobody followed her to class. When she reached her homeroom, she sat quietly by the window and stared out of it, thinking about the discussions that needed to be held. The ghosts needed to decide whether or not to tell her about this curse thing, and the living Sohmas were deciding if they should tell her what the story is behind the importance of siblings.

The sibling thing is probably somehow related to the curse, Haruka figured, so if either of them decides to tell me that, then I know what's going on. But it really would be better if I heard it from the living Sohmas...

The bell rang to mark the beginning of the class, and Haruka heard an alarmed yelp from outside, followed by rushed footsteps. A second later, Nanami appeared in the doorway, panting and apologizing, "Oh no, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to be late, there was

something really important that I needed to do, I'm so sorry that I'm late..."

The teacher looked up from her notes and frowned. "Nanami, what could possibly be more important than your school education?" She shrugged, not waiting for an answer, and added, "No, there's a lot of things that are more important, but I usually do not tolerate them. However," she added, "it is the first full day of school, and you really do seem to regret it, so I'll let it pass this time."

Nanami sighed, smiled in relief, and walked over to her desk, where she flopped down in exhaustion. She looked over in Haruka's direction, caught her eye, and smiled weakly.

The rest of the day was a blur. As she gathered her things to leave her last classroom, Haruka wondered vaguely how low her grades would drop this year if she kept staring into space for all of her classes. She was amazed that none of her teachers had yet even mentioned anything about her uniform--actually, nobody had even seemed to notice.

"Haruka," the teacher's voice called quietly.

Of course, Haruka thought, and she walked up to the teacher's desk with the very few things that her parents allowed her.

"Haruka, is there something wrong in your family?" the teacher asked softly.

"Uh, no, not really..." Other than the insane parents, no...

The teacher frowned. "Well, then, is there any particular reason as to why you're wearing the boys' uniform?"

I hate it when I'm right. "Um, well, my normal uniform got torn up in the dryer, and my mom wouldn't pay for a new one or for repairs, so..."

The teacher carefully raised a single eyebrow. "So you borrowed your older brother's shirt?"

"No, I don't have any br--" Haruka suddenly remembered her younger brother, and thus her dishonesty to the other Sohmas when they asked about siblings. "Well, yes, I have a brother, but he's about two years old," she amended.

"Then why are you wearing the wrong uniform?"

Haruka sighed. "My mother wouldn't pay for my other shirts to be fixed or replaced because she wasn't going to buy the same thing twice, but she would pay for something different like this."

The teacher now had both eyebrows raised. "Really? Doesn't your mother know that cross-dressing is the beginning of failure?"

"Probably not," Haruka admitted. "Or she's just putting too much faith in me..."

"Haruka, don't say that like you're a horrible person," the teacher scolded. "I've seen your record, and your only problems have nothing to do with intelligence--all of them seem to be related to how prepared you are. I'd like to help you with that problem, but you don't look very hopeful in being so unprepared that you had to wear the wrong gender's uniform!"

"It's not quite like that," Haruka denied quietly. The teacher was about to say something back, but Haruka shook her head and told her, "No, I don't really want to talk about it right now. I should probably be heading home soon." She turned and left before the teacher could stop her.

Haruka stopped just outside the classroom door, where she sighed heavily and leaned on the wall, suddenly exhausted.

Day two, she began in a mental diary. I've finally been asked about the uniform. And I've hinted at my mother's insanity. This whole high school thing seems so tiring already...

"We've decided," Yuki's voice told her from very close--far too close for comfort--and interrupted her thoughts so violently that she cried out with alarm.

The teacher, still within earshot (although the whole school was probably within earshot of Haruka's scream), poked her head around the door and asked, "Is something wrong Haruka?"

"N-n-no," Haruka answered shakily. "I-I, uh, just forgot th-that I have, uh, uh, uh--a dentist appointment! A-and if I don't hurry up, th-then I'll be late for it! Uh, yeah, that's it..."

She turned and started trotting down the hallway. Yuki, I have no idea what you're talking about, but you nearly gave me a heart attack!

"Oh, I'm really sorry about that," Yuki apologized sincerely. "I was talking about this morning, when we tried to figure out whether or not to tell you the curse."

Really? Haruka asked, now less terrified and more interested and excited. What did you decide?

Yuki was about to answer before they were entirely surrounded by the other ghosts, Shigure and Kyo and Momiji, all asking what was wrong.

Uh, nothing really, Haruka responded awkwardly. Yuki just kind of...jerked me out of my thoughts, and...yeah...

Shigure turned to Yuki. "And just how did you tear her from her thoughts?"

Yuki glared somewhat as he retorted, "I just talked to her when she wasn't really expecting it."

"Really?" Shigure asked, suspecting something.

"Yes, all I did was talk to her."

Shigure pouted. "You really need to learn how to be more romantic."

"Oh, yeah, like that damn Yuki needs to learn something else to get the girls going," Kyo spat. "He had a fan club in life, and look at it now! Sure, he's kind of dead, and yeah, there are only about five girls left, but they're still in the same little cult."

That was true. Haruka had reason to believe that the girl sitting next to her had been pushing a broche at her and telling her how wonderful the great Prince Yuki Sohma was and what great benefits she'd get from joining his fan club.

Shigure laughed heartily. "Yes, they most certainly are persistent! Why, I do believe that just the other day, they practically had Saburo drawn in, hook line and sinker! I don't know if they've had any male members before, but I'm incredibly surprised that they don't yet!"

Momiji laughed childishly. "Yup! Akemi fell for the offer today--now she's decided that she's going to be their representative at the culture festival and everywhere else."

"Damn it! Why are we talking about this?" Kyo demanded.

"Kyo, you started it," Momiji pointed out.

"Yes, you did," Shigure agreed. "And let's be honest, Yuki most certainly is a great person worthy of respect even in death!"

"I'm right here," Yuki reminded coldly.

"Yes, I know that, Yuki," Shigure continued boldly. "For I know the beautiful air that radiates from you, and it is only so strong today that I don't think I could not notice it!"

"Shut up!" Kyo snapped. "Why is everyone going on and on and on, 'Yuki is so great, Yuki is so handsome, Yuki is so wonderful'--well I've had it! I'm going to prove how pathetic he is right here and right now, in a fight to the death!"

"Kyo, you're already dead," Momiji pointed out, cheerful despite his comment being about death.

"Then I'll--um--you know what I mean!!" Kyo retorted hotly. "I'm going to fight him until he gives up! And then I'll have finally beaten him!"

Yuki sighed. "What makes you think that another battle would end any differently than it always does? And besides, you interrupted what I was telling Haruka."

Haruka suddenly remembered that he hadn't even told her what they had decided. She wondered vaguely how the topic changed so much.

"Oh, yes, you said you were saying something about the curse, right?" Shigure reviewed. "Well then, go on, Yuki. It's impolite to keep a lady waiting!"

"Hey!" Kyo interrupted. "What about--"

"Kyo, don't you think we should leave Yuki alone for this one?" Shigure asked, smiling mischievously.

"No, I think he should--"

"Kyo, you really are nosy," Momiji commented. "You already know what Yuki's going to say, but you still want to stick around and hear what he'll say to Haruka."

"Hmm, is Kyo studying this ideal pair of lovers to learn something useful?" Shigure asked impishly.

"What? NO!" Kyo denied.

"Maybe he's thinking of Anita," Momiji wondered aloud.

"NO!" Kyo repeated. "Who the hell would fall in love with a crazy Yankee like her? And I'm DEAD! She's ALIVE! It doesn't work that way!"

"Forbidden loves are the greatest loves," Shigure taunted.

"Do I look like that kind of--?!" Kyo's demand was interrupted.

"Maybe we should just go now," Yuki said to Haruka.

Uh, sure, Haruka agreed.

"Hey!" Kyo protested. "You're not going anywhere until you fight--"

Shigure reached over to hold Kyo back. "Oh, go on," he insisted. "Ignore the idiot rambling on of naught but war and hate, my dear lovers of true passion!"

"What are you babbling on about now?" Yuki asked coolly.

Shigure's eyes glistened with distant thoughts as he replied poetically distantly, "Can you honestly deny the wonderful feeling spinning round and round, swirling the snow in the great snow-capped mountains of your unforgiving heart?"

Yuki frowned. "Shigure, please stop trying to be a novelist."

"But I am a novelist!" Shigure protested.

"Not anymore," Yuki retorted. "And besides, it's more unfortunate that your novels aren't banned than that you died young."

Weren't we doing something? Haruka asked, feeling left out.

"Yes, we were," Yuki answered, turning around and walking down the stairs as Kyo yelled insults after him. Haruka paused for a second before turning and following.

"I'm sorry, we seem to have been distracted," Yuki began, walking slowly toward the school gates with Haruka at his side. "We've decided about telling you the curse."

What did you decide? Haruka asked, too interested to wait for him to tell her.

Yuki smiled kindly. "We've decided that it would be best if we tell you our curse if you don't tell anyone else."

Haruka sighed with relief. Thank you very much! I owe you so much for this.

Yuki's smile faded for a second and fell entirely to some distant expression that Haruka didn't think she could read--maybe loss or something similar to it.

What's wrong? Haruka asked, alarmed at his dismay. Did I say something stupid? Oh, I did, didn't I? I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to...

Yuki smiled again and almost seemed to laugh lightly. "No, it's not that, it's just...you really remind me of someone," he confessed. He shook his head and his face changed entirely and he added, "It's a long story. I'll tell you some other time. Right now I still have to tell you about the curse."

Haruka shrugged and prompted, Yes, do tell.

Yuki sighed and began, "So, there's the curse. It's been in the Sohma family for many generations. In exact terms, the curse means that thirteen members of the family are possessed by the vengeful spirit one of the twelve animals of the zodiac or the cat from zodiac legend."

Okay, Haruka stated. So then, what exactly makes this a curse?

"Directly," Yuki answered, "it means that if someone with the curse is hugged by a member of the opposite sex, or if their bodies come under a great deal of stress or fatigue, then they'll transform into the animal that possesses them. The only exception is that, for whatever reason, if a cursed Sohma hugs a cursed member of the opposite sex, then neither of them will transform."

"And there are a lot more problems with being cursed," Yuki went on. "Aside from a limited love-life, not a lot of cursed Sohmas have very favorable family relations. A lot of problems come with the curse, so we try our best to keep it a secret. Actually," he added, "probably the only reason Shigure agreed to let me tell you is because, well, he's a little psychotic," he admitted, "but more so because it won't affect us in any negative way now that we're dead. Just don't mention it to any of the living Sohmas, because they'll want to know why you know about it."

That was the plan, Haruka pointed out.

"Damn rat!" Kyo's rather distinct and enraged voice echoed from the school entrance and crescendoed as he charged forward.

Haruka turned around to look at him just in time to see a brief flash of him before he bowled her over.

Unfortunately, Haruka's instincts took over, and she screamed out loud as she fell to the ground under the oddly heavy weight of the ghost.

Kyo yelled angrily and shouted at Yuki, "This is your fault! I don't know why, but something must have happened that you did that made me crash into her!"

"Even you couldn't have messed it up if you hadn't gone crashing around like the stupid cat that you are," Yuki retorted coolly.

"Why you--"

Haruka gasped for breath, rather loudly, trapped under Kyo's mysterious weight.

Yuki kicked Kyo over so that he fell off of Haruka's stomach. Kyo protested loudly. "What was that for?"

Haruka inhaled deeply, sat up, and panted for a few moments as Yuki explained, "If I hadn't, then Haruka would probably end up like we did."

Kyo spat. "More like how you did, Mr. Asthma Attack."

"Have you forgotten that the autopsy showed that you died from suffocation in the smoke instead of being burned alive? You should have remembered that."

"Hey, at least I died in a blaze of glory! You just walked through one of your sissy gardens and the pollen killed you because you have that sissy little lung problem!"

"Oh, yes, and sitting around moping on the roof until you hear someone scream and end up trapped in a burning building is so much manlier..."

Haruka coughed, half needing to and half to remind them how uncomfortable it was to be listening to them throwing insults at each other based on how they died. Any living person would probably feel the same.

At that moment, Anita ran around one of the building's corners and called, "Haruka! Are you okay over there? I thought I heard you scream."

Haruka, still out of breath and coughing, choked on her cough and found herself quite incapable of breathing.

~~~~~

(I seem to really hate my original characters. I think I know someone who can agree with that. Wait, no, she can't, because I never finished that story. Maybe I should some day...but I don't really like that one so much...really, it seems so silly now...)

## 6. Chapter 6

(Chapter six. Kinda self-explanatory. More people show up, but not so many of them actually get their names in, because I like ending chapters in something like suspense. Well, not really, but if I got that far, they'd each be at least five thousand words apiece. Admittedly, they're four thousand apiece now, but another thousand would probably push it too far.

I don't own Fruits Basket, any of its characters, blah blah blah, but the OCs are mine.

I don't own Anita. She is Werecat13's.

Enjoy/go away.)

~~~~~

### Chapter 6

Haruka was suddenly aware that she was conscious and so groggy that she could describe how she felt as "dead". It was a very strange feeling. She opened her eyes groggily to see that she was lying face-down in the school courtyard. There seemed enough light that the sun wasn't down yet, but she couldn't actually see it because of the school walls.

"Oh...what happened?" she moaned to herself.

"Well," Yuki's voice tried to explain from somewhere next to her, "basically, you choked and passed out...well, it was a bit worse than that..."

Haruka somehow managed to lift her head enough to look to see him frowning worriedly. "How so?" She suddenly remembered the whole ghost issue and gasped. "Nobody heard that, did they?"

Yuki's frown deepened. "No, that would be pretty hard for most people..."

"So that means I can actually talk to you now?"

"You could before, too," Yuki pointed out, "but now only ghosts will hear you."

"Why's that?" Haruka asked, trying to sit up, with considerably less effort than she thought due to the odd sensation of being lighter than she expected.

Yuki looked away. "Well..."

"What?" At that moment, she remembered that she had just woken up from apparently blacking out or something. "Wait, really, what happened?"

Yuki looked uncomfortable and started pacing. "Well, what do you remember?"

"Uh..." Haruka dug through her memory. "You and Kyo were fighting, and then Kyo knocked me over...he ended up sitting on me, and I couldn't really breathe, and then he got off of me, and then...I saw Anita.... Oh shoot, did she see me just black out like that?"

Yuki, if anything looked even more uncomfortable.

"Wait," Haruka added, "I don't think Anita would just leave me there, she'd probably take me home or somewhere. So why am I here and where did Anita go?"

"Well, you fainted, and then..." Yuki avoided Haruka's gaze. "Well, I'm not sure you'd understand right now. You don't know enough yet."

"What don't I know enough about?" Haruka asked.

"Your ability," Yuki answered, still avoiding her eyes, but at least looking in her general direction now. "You know, you don't know enough about why you can see us."

Haruka frowned. "It's getting dark. I need to go home. Can you explain a little faster or save it for later?"

Yuki shook his head. "It doesn't matter. You can go wherever you want tonight and it won't really change anything."

"But my parents would probably be mad at me even if I got home even this instant," Haruka protested.

Yuki thought for a second, then told her calmly, "They think you're already home and weren't really noticeably late. Well, technically, you are there," he added thoughtfully. "It's kind of hard to explain."

"What?" Haruka was now so confused that if he told her that she wasn't standing on the grass, she wouldn't know whether to believe him or not. Of course, as she thought of that phrasing, she instinctively looked down to make sure she was standing on the grass, but what she saw only increased her confusion.

The grass was coming through her feet. It was like she was standing on it, but none of it was flattened down, and the tops of the blades of grass seemed to be coming up through her shoes.

"What?!" she repeated before she looked up at Yuki. "Yuki, what the hell is going on? Why is the grass coming through my feet?"

"Oh, that?" Shigure's voice came from the gates. "You get used to that."

Haruka looked over and saw him standing in the gate with someone else next to him, but she couldn't really see who he was due to the lack of light.

"What?" was all she could say. She suddenly wondered that if someone asked what her name was she'd say "What?" Everything was so confusing at that moment, she felt a little faint and rather less coherent than she should have been.

"Being a spirit, you kind of get used to things just going through you," Shigure answered as though he was explaining something like addition.

"Wha--spirit?" Haruka almost asked what he said, but she finally seemed to remember how to say anything but "what" halfway through the word. She seemed to be getting fainter and fainter.

"Yes," Shigure answered cheerfully.

"Y-you mean like you?" Haruka despaired. Does that mean I've died? When did I die? I don't remember dying! I can't die yet!

"Yup!"

"U-u-uh, u-um, c-could you explain th-that a little b-bit more...uh..." Haruka surprised herself, being coherent enough to politely ask him to explain, even if she was stammering.

"I wouldn't know," Shigure admitted. "I was just hanging around in the staircase, trying to hold back Kyo, and then I figured that Yuki would have explained everything by then so he could take care of him, and not long later I heard Yuki screaming for everyone to come over.

"And he still hasn't explained everything. He just told me to go get H&ari, and I was about to ask when he seemed ready to kill me, so I kind of ran off," Shigure went on. "Speaking of, Yuki, why don't you explain exactly what did happen? The doctor should know what happened to his patient before he can do anything."

Yuki sighed. "Shigure, could you please come over here so I don't have to yell across the school to talk to you?"

"Um," Haruka cut in, "Maybe we should go over there? I can't see anything, and there might be some street lamps or something out there..."

Yuki turned to her with a kind-hearted smile on his face. "Why, of course we can."

"Yuki, are you coming here or are we going there?" Shigure called over.

"What does it look like?" Yuki retorted.

"I don't know, it's too dark in there for me to see," Shigure pointed out.

"Well, you'll see us in a second," Yuki told him.

"Okay," Shigure answered contently.

Haruka followed Yuki out of the school gate, and she was right--it was considerably brighter off the school grounds than on them. She looked up at the person that she had seen from inside

the school grounds and immediately recognized him.

Hatori Sohma hadn't aged a day since she last saw him. Of course, the last time she saw him, he was probably about fifty, and the next day she'd heard from her parents that he'd died in a car accident or something.

He immediately looked at her and began politely, "Hello, Haruka."

"Uh, hi," Haruka replied, suddenly wondering what on earth happened that meant that Hatori needed to come.

Yuki began, "I know you two know each other, so I'll just explain what happened today."

"How do you know that they've already met?" Shigure asked, acting or actually appalled. "Yuki, I didn't know that you were a stalker!"

"I'm not!" Yuki snapped. "You're the one who told me that!"

"Oh, I guess you're right..." Shigure remembered. "Well, anyway, what were you saying?"

Yuki sighed. "I was explaining what happened that means that Haruka is now a spirit like us. But I don't really understand all of it, so that's why I wanted you to get Hatori."

"Go on..." Shigure urged.

"Could you please not interrupt me?" Yuki asked sharply before sighing again and continuing. "This morning, we were talking to Haruka, and the conversation happened to turn to the curse. We decided to discuss it throughout the day, and by the end of school, we had decided to tell Haruka what it was.

"I was explaining the problems related to the curse when a certain someone," Yuki emphasized, glaring at Shigure, "decided to let the stupid cat go and try and fail again at beating me or whatever he goes on about. And of course, the stupid cat went and fell over Haruka instead, and he's apparently a fat cat too, because she couldn't breathe. Then he gets off, and she's coughing, and who should come around the corner other than Anita. Haruka choked on her cough and couldn't breathe, so she passed out."

Hatori by now had raised his eyebrows. "And how did you handle that?"

Yuki turned to Hatori to explain specifically. "I wasn't really sure what to do, but I thought that maybe I could have Kagura use Haruka's body long enough that there wouldn't be so much confusion. I sent the stupid cat with her, because he follows Anita, so he would probably know more about how Haruka should behave than anyone else, and so he could advise Kagura. I had Momiji go with them, too, because there was nothing better for him to be doing, and I sent Shigure to go get you."

Hatori nodded approvingly.

"Wait," Haruka interrupted. "Who's Kagura? And did you just say that she's using my body?"

"Yes, she is," Yuki answered. "But it had to be done. Otherwise, your parents either wouldn't know how you were or they'd know you were unconscious in the hospital. Would you really want that?"

"Uh..." Haruka wasn't certain whether that would be a good thing or not. It would definitely get her a day or more away from her parents, but they probably wouldn't know where she was, and she probably wouldn't hear the end of it from her parents when it was over. "I guess not..."

"It's only a temporary solution anyway," Yuki went on. "We need to get you back into your body before your parents realize the difference."

Haruka personally doubted that her mother would notice, or that her father would really care, but it still wouldn't really bother them. Nonetheless, Haruka did feel that she probably should get back to her body or whatever, because there still was a possibility that something could go wrong with someone else in her body. She nodded. "But...how do we do that?"

"Well, we have to get you back to your body," Yuki explained, "and then you just have to get into it. I think," he added, looking at Hatori uncertainly.

"Yes, something like that," Hatori agreed.

"Okay," Haruka said, "So I just need to go back to my house and meet this Kagura person and get my body back?" It felt really weird to be talking about things that she wouldn't have believed not long ago and actually meaning it.

"I think so," Yuki confirmed.

"Then if you'll excuse me," Haruka said, turning to go home, "I'd like to take care of that as soon as possible."

When she turned, though, she saw the Momiji was running toward them and waving with a worried look on his face. "Hey!" he called out.

What now? Haruka asked, half to herself and half to the ghost/spirit Sohmas, forgetting that they didn't seem to be able to hear her thoughts in this state.

"Haruka!" Momiji went on, approaching a good deal faster than Haruka would have thought possible. "It's terrible, it's terrible!"

The bottom of Haruka's stomach lurched. "What happened?" she asked fearfully, imagining all the bad things that could possibly have happened: Kagura, in Haruka's body, could have been run over by a car; Haruka's parents might have met Anita; her mother could have been arrested or something...although she thought about that again and realized that was probably one of the better things that could have happened.

"Haruka, it's terrible!" Momiji repeated. "It's terribly awfully horribly terrible!"

Her fear, for some reason, was starting to fade now; his repetition somehow made her think that he might have been joking or exaggeration. However, she still couldn't help asking again, "What's wrong?"

"It's terribly terribly horribly terrible!"

Haruka paused a bit, hoping for him to explain, before she sighed, annoyed and with all fear gone, and asked, "So what happened?"

"Oh no Haruka, you don't want to know what terrible horrible awful--"

"Yes, I do!" Haruka snapped.

"Oh," Momiji said, as though she just had to say that and he'd say it. Then he immediately took up his worried expression again and went on, "But it's still horrible! It's terrible! It should never have happened to you!"

"What shouldn't have happened to me?" Haruka fumed.

"It's too terrible to tell!" Momiji moaned. "You'll have to go home and see it for yourself!"

Haruka sighed irately and ran toward where her home was, going a lot faster than she really thought she should have. Must be a ghost thing, she figured as she kept on running.

About halfway home, she realized that Yuki was running next to her. "You should at least say goodbye before you run off like that," he scolded gently.

"Hey," Haruka objected, "if someone was repeatedly telling you how horrible something is at your house without saying what exactly it is, then you'd be pretty quick to run, too."

"Terrible," Yuki corrected.

"Huh?" Haruka asked.

"Terrible," Yuki repeated. "Not horrible. Terrible."

Haruka thought for a second before she laughed quietly. "Well, yeah, I guess. But he called it horrible at some point."

"I don't think so," Yuki argued. "He called it horribly terrible, but I'm not so sure about just plain horrible."

"Oh, you know what I mean," Haruka said before she returned her attention to the sidewalk ahead of her. She was a lot further than she thought she was or could be. I guess I haven't gotten used to this whole ghost thing, she figured. Which is just as well, because I shouldn't be like this for too long, anyway...

Just as she finished these thoughts, she turned the corner and saw where her house stood--or used to. Now all that was left were ashes and charcoal and other burnt things.

Haruka was absolutely paralyzed at the sight of it. "Wh-what?" she managed to get out. "What happened here?"

Out of the corner of her eye, Haruka saw Yuki shake his head, presumably to say he didn't know.

She stared at it a moment longer before she really thought of anything, and when she did, she started panicking, thinking of her younger brother. "N-Noburu," she mumbled. "Where's Noburu? What happened to Noburu? A-and Dad," she added. "What about Dad? Where's my family?"

Yuki shook his head again.

Haruka realized that she had no idea what happened to her family, and that nobody else knew--but she wouldn't accept that. She scoured her mind to think, before she remembered Momiji.

She turned around to run back to the school when she saw that Momiji was already coming, and that he was almost there already.

"I told you it was terrible!" Momiji reminded her.

"Where's my family?" Haruka repeated.

"Oh," Momiji began, "I guess someone called the hospital, because there were ambulances, and a fire truck, and then everyone was taken off to the hospital..."

"Which one?" Haruka asked hurriedly.

"Uh, I don't know," Momiji admitted. "Probably the one closest to here..."

Haruka started trying to think of where the hospitals were in the town when she realized that she didn't know. "Wh-where is it? The hospital--where is it?"

"Um..." Momiji looked at Yuki, looking for an answer.

"I don't know," Yuki told him. "I just went to Hatori."

"Uh..." Momiji looked at Haruka helplessly. "I don't really know either. I mean, I guess I remember seeing one somewhere, but I can't remember where it was."

"I remember that, too..." Yuki added. "Where would we both go to that we would see it from?"

"Uh, the Main House," Momiji began. "And...school..."

"I guess you went to Shigure's house a few times, too, right?"

"Yeah, I used to visit Tohru all the time. Maybe it was somewhere near there?"

"No," Yuki murmured, thinking, before his face lit up. "Tohru! It was near where she worked!"

"Hey, yeah, that's it!"

"Where?" Haruka's chest was gradually filling with panic, and at these words, it disappeared for a second before coming back even worse than before.

"Oh, it's right this way!" Momiji answered before turning and running. Yuki was already ahead of him, having gone before he said anything, and Haruka sprinted to catch up with and follow him.

Everything around her blurred as she focused on Yuki and following him. She was so concentrated on seeing her brother as soon as possible that she didn't even really realize that they were just running straight through buildings, passing through rooms of people eating dinner, in the bathroom, reading, writing, studying...

Before she knew it, Haruka was running across a busy street alongside Yuki, running straight through the cars without being phased in the slightest, toward a building with automatic glass doors that didn't open for them; they just ran through the doors and into the hospital lobby, where they skidded to a halt in unison and tried to figure out the next step.

The lobby was full of other people, some better off than others, but none of them seemed able to tell anyone how Haruka's family was, much less a pair of ghosts--or so it seemed, until someone did talk to them.

"So, Yuki," an unfamiliar male voice began, "this is the wonderful Haruka I've been hearing so much about, right?"

Haruka looked around for the speaker and saw him; a boy about her age, wearing street clothes in green and khaki colors and cargo styles, with brown hair framing his smug expression.

Yuki sighed, annoyed, and asked, "Hiro, what are you doing here?"

"Why should I answer when I don't know why you're here?"

"Why do you think?" Yuki snapped.

"Because your girlfriend wants to be here?" Hiro (assuming that was his name) taunted.

Haruka's panic grew and mingled with annoyance. If she hadn't just become a ghost a little while ago, she might have been able to back up and make some kind of observation, but a bad mood is a bad mood, and it rather spoiled any patience that she could possibly have had. She reached for his collar, somehow actually grabbed it, and growled into his face, "Shut up and take me to my brother."

Hiro seemed a little surprised, but not particularly offended or scared. "My, I guess you are Haruka. You just had to say so."

He turned and strolled casually through a door. Haruka followed, walking briskly enough that she passed by him in half a dozen steps, then stopped and ordered, "Take me there faster."

Hiro stopped, too, huffed, looked away defiantly, and began, "If you're just going to order me around like some pampered little brat, then why should I even do anything for you? Here I am, offering kindly to take you where you want to go even after you handled me roughly, and all you can do is order me to go faster. Why should I do this for you, anyway, when I'm not getting anything in return?"

Haruka almost lunged at him, but instead controlled herself at the last possible second and tripped from a stationary position, and would have fallen on her face if Yuki hadn't caught her around the waist while she was still basically vertical and if she hadn't reacted for herself.

"Hiro, stop fooling around and get us there," Yuki snapped uncharacteristically. Haruka only just realized how short his temper had been for the past...however long it had been since she became a ghost.

Hiro sighed and went on through the hall, almost trotting this time. Yuki helped Haruka straighten herself before they followed; Hiro noticed that they were coming and broke into a run that wasn't really slow but wasn't particularly fast, either. Yuki and Haruka broke into sprints and caught up before he turned the corner.

Hiro kept the same pace for the whole walk, which seemed to take at least a year, and Haruka didn't particularly notice anything around her until he turned on his heel to face them and stopped, hands on hips.

"Do you want to get back to your body and be alive again, or do you want to see your family first?" he asked gruffly.

Something about the way he said it wouldn't let Haruka shake the feeling of a role-playing game. However, she restrained herself from giving him some comedic remark, and instead thought for a moment before answering, "I'd rather go back to my body."

Hiro frowned, seriously instead of critically. "Okay, you asked for it." He turned to the door he was next to and walked through it. Haruka followed with Yuki right behind.

Haruka looked at the interior and wondered, Am I really that popular? Anita was sitting on the edge of a chair next to the hospital bed, hovering above the patient--which, of course, was Haruka; oddly, that wasn't quite such a strange thing as Haruka would have thought. There were other people there, too: Kyo was standing behind Anita; and standing on Haruka's other side was Nanami; Akemi stood next to Nanami, closer to the foot of the bed; Saburo stood on Akemi's other side, his arm around her shoulder.

The strange thing was that there were other people that Haruka didn't recognize; a girl

with long, dark brown hair stood next to Kyo, worriedly holding her hands to her mouth; two other girls with orange hair, one probably in middle school with a shy expression that made her look a bit younger, the other about Haruka's age; a woman in stylish, form-complimenting clothes with long silver hair running down her back; another girl Haruka's age with light brown hair that shaped carefully around her face in curls and bangs; and a little girl, probably not six years old, with black hair and a green oriental-style dress.

A few heads turned; Kyo, the worried girl next to him, the younger orange-haired girl. Haruka counted the people; only three people noticed her and Yuki's entrance, and she knew the names of only four people, but she didn't know six of them. She really didn't like how this day was coming out.

The girl next to Kyo tensed. "I-I'm sorry," she whimpered. "I did everything I c-could, I don't know why..."

Panic rose again. "Wh-what happened?"

"I, I-I-I, I, uh, oh," the brunette girl stammered.

"It's not working!" Kyo explained furiously.

"W-wait," Haruka couldn't think of any way in which this day was going right. "W-what's not working?"

"I, I can't," the brunette girl managed to get out, "I can't move your body. Nobody can."

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(Comments for the writer?)

## 7. Chapter 7

(I added a "previously" section to the top, because it's just too troublesome to have to match up lines and...all that. And besides, I like it that way. You don't have to read it if you don't want to.

I don't own Fruits Basket. I think that's Funimations or someone's.

Anita is Werecat13's.

All other original characters are mine.

Italics are thoughts; a series of these ~ mark the beginning and end of the chapter.

Enjoy/go away)

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Previously:

Haruka Sohma fainted due to a breathing issue brought about by Kyo. She woke up as a ghost, but couldn't really think much about it before Momiji came bearing news of a terrible something that happened that shouldn't have happened to Haruka. After a speeding run, she found her house burned to the ground and heard that her family was in the hospital. She sprinted there through houses and streets and cars to the right hospital, where she met a sarcastic and critical Sohma ghost named Hiro. Hiro, after far too much argument, brought her to the room where her body was, where ten people were gathered, of which she only knew four by name. One of the girls that she didn't recognize stammered to her that she couldn't move the body.

Chapter 7-

Haruka froze with panic for what she so dearly wished was the last time that day. "Wh-what?" she managed to choke out.

"I, I-I, I did all I could," the girl stuttered, near tears. "B-b-but nobody can get it to move."

"D-does that mean..." Haruka was almost scared to say it. "D-does it mean th-that I can't..."

Fortunately, she didn't have to finish the sentence. "I-I don't know," the brunette girl whimpered, shaking her head. "I just know that, that it's probably not very likely..."

"Hey, nobody said she was gonna die just because someone else couldn't make her move," Kyo pointed out loudly. "You're not her, but maybe she'll be able to use her body!"

Haruka's breath caught. Her mind was working fast; it made sense that just because this girl couldn't use Haruka's body didn't mean that Haruka couldn't use it, but it also made sense that if the girl couldn't use it, then Haruka couldn't use it, and that would mean...would it mean that Haruka was dead? She almost didn't want to try using her body again, out of fear that it wouldn't work and she'd really be dead.

Hiro huffed. "Oh, stop being dramatic. It's so annoying. Man, I hate people who just go on and on about how bad it could be, before they even realize that the worst-case scenario is usually about the least likely possibility. They don't even realize that if they shut up and do it, then it probably won't come out so bad."

Haruka felt some hope spark up with these words. It couldn't be that bad, could it? After all, what were the chances that she would actually not be alive again?

"Hey!" Hiro snapped at her. "Just go and do it!"

Haruka was ripped back to reality. The chances of living seemed much slimmer again.

Nonetheless, she would definitely be dead if she never went back to her body. She took a deep breath and walked over to the bed. She hovered over her still face, and let out the breath when she realized a fairly major problem. "Uh...how do I do this?"

Kyo nearly fell over. The girl next to him looked slightly less worried now since her expression was slightly watered-down with surprise. The young orange-haired girl didn't really react. Hiro cringed and mumbled something under his breath about how pathetic that was. Yuki's face almost took up a slight smile, perhaps relieved for something vaguely comedic after such a serious day. Everybody else in the room, though now particularly lively, was apparently alive enough to not hear anything.

"Well," the girl next to Kyo began, "you just kind of...match your position..."

Haruka thought about this for a second. "You mean that I just have to, like, lay down in my body?"

"Pretty much," the brunette answered, almost smiling faintly.

Haruka nodded intensely, but it still didn't feel very comfortable. Everybody was looking at her, and it sounded a little too much like what some weird anime fan would write in her epic fan-fiction love story plus ghosts. Except that, if it was like that, then somehow some male ghost person would need to end up kissing her. If the author decided to be picky, then it would have to be Yuki for one reason or another.

She sighed and told herself, Oh, come on, it's not that! Where on earth did that come

from? It's not true, anyway.

She sat on the bed. Just lie down and act like you're going to sleep, she told herself. Maybe the only reason nobody else could use it was because they couldn't match your way of lying down comfortably.

Haruka took another deep breath, readjusted herself so that she'd fall into her body, and lay down.

Her angle wasn't right; her feet were hanging off the side of the bed. She shifted herself to fit her body.

The moment her physical head met her spirit's, all of the day's events seemed to be washed away with a tsunami-worthy tidal wave of drowsiness. She rolled over and fell asleep, too tired to even notice the sheets moving with her.

She never imagined sleep so deep as that one. She didn't wake up until much, much later, and her first thought was something like, I fell asleep as a ghost? I guess that means that ghosts need sleep?

Haruka yawned widely and rolled over, excusing her previous thought with, Was that actually real? Oh, come on, since when could you see ghosts, let alone become one? I'm sure you'll wake up and see that the alarm clock says I slept in because I forgot to set it again for the beginning of school, and then you'll be running out the door with a piece of toast in your mouth, wearing your overly-washed school uniform...

Of course, she added, who said that it's even time for school to start? You probably have the whole weekend ahead of you, and you don't even need to open your eyes at any point in time today, or until you have to go to the bathroom or get really hungry or something.

She yawned again. Well, if I'm this tired, then it must be summer. I wouldn't have been up late enough to be this tired if school was in...

She then deemed her current position uncomfortable and rolled over again. You see? If you were a ghost, then the sheets wouldn't have moved with that! It didn't happen!

Haruka took a deep breath, grateful for the extra day of sleep, when she realized that something smelled a bit differently. She opened her eyes to see what it was and saw that she was in a hospital bed, and that the smell came from a small vase with a few flowers of some sort in it.

She sat up. Or...maybe it did happen...

She looked around a bit more. To her other side, Anita was dozing off in the chair next to her. And what is she doing? she wondered. She's always there. She's following me like an overprotective...sister? She sat up a bit straighter and looked at the foot of the bed, where she saw an orange cat purring away quietly. Hospitals don't allow pets, she pointed out to herself. It's a ghost.

The whole thing reminded her of her Sister Dream. The thought occurred to her, probably not for the first time, that Anita was the sister from her dreams. She dismissed it. That was just a dream...even if... She glanced at her wrist, more so at the purple-and-white bracelet on it. That's not evidence, she told herself. That's a coincidence. They might rhyme, but they're not the same thing.

She looked up and realized that most of the other people who were in the room when she was last awake were still there, mostly unconscious or close to it in various chairs. Saburo seemed to be almost dozing with Akemi's head in his lap. A short ways away from them was the girl with the silver hair had the little girl curled up in her lap, and next to her was the other orange-haired girl in another chair. Nanami seemed to be deeply dozing next to Anita. Haruka couldn't help feeling that someone else had left by now.

She yawned again. I guess being a ghost really drains you, she figured.

Haruka figured that, since nobody was really awake enough to talk to and they all looked so tired that they needed the rest, she'd be best off just going back to sleep for a while. She fell back, pulled the sheets up, rolled over, and stared at the flowers for a little while before she fell asleep again.

She fell into a dream. Yuki was in it, and he seemed really distant and blurry. He was trying to tell her something, and she was trying to figure out what he was saying.

Finally, his voice seemed to reach her ears, distant and faint, but she could figure out basically what he was saying.

"...you'd understand this, because...Hatori didn't...explain last night...basically, you won't...see us or...to us, except maybe...dreams, but not...long. You should...see us by the end of the week...think you heard that, so I...say it again..."

Haruka woke up at that. If her dream was real, she wouldn't be able to see Yuki for a while, or any other ghosts, for...he said a week, right? She'd probably be pretty lonely in the mean--

"Haruka!" She looked to her left to see that Anita was awake now, and apparently rather grateful that she was awake. "You're awake!" Haruka's hypothesis was correct.

"So?" Haruka's voice cracked. She thought about it for a moment, then realized that it shouldn't surprise her; she hadn't used it for...a while. "I was awake a little earlier..."

Anita smiled with tired relief. "I think the nurse said something like that. I was too tired to really notice."

Akemi yawned squeakily, stretched a little, and rolled over...off of Saburo's lap. She squawked as she hit the floor.

Saburo woke up, as did everyone else; the silver-haired woman and the orange-haired girl just

jerked their heads up with a quiet gasping noise, but Nanami yelled and the little five-ish-year-old girl squeaked.

The silver-haired woman frowned slightly. "So, you're finally awake," she commented coldly. Somehow, Haruka had a feeling her abnormally cool voice was one of the warmer temperatures that she could get it to. "Can we go home now?"

"No," Anita answered immediately, looked up at her from Akemi on the floor, who was now whining into Saburo's shoulder. "I want to stay."

The woman sighed. "Come on, you've been here over two nights, and you've barely slept over either of them. You should go home to get some sleep, if nothing else. You can come back again every morning if you really want, but you're not staying overnight anymore."

"No," Anita repeated. "You can go home if you really want to, but I am going to stay with my"--she seemed to change her sentence at the last second--"family member."

Haruka suddenly remembered her revelation from earlier. If she was about to say "sister", then...

"You have to go to school sometime," the woman persisted. "You know what Katsuo will do if you fail."

Haruka fake-coughed, trying to point out that she was still there.

The woman looked at her harshly. "Yes, I know you're here," she snapped before she turned back to Anita. "And you can't get off by saying that you wouldn't go to school anyway. It's probably true, but you know that Katsuo will make any excuse to keep you--" She just stopped and glared more. She never finished that sentence.

A crackling silence filled the air. Anita glared at the woman, and the woman kept glaring back. Finally, Anita sighed and turned to Haruka, forcing herself to smile. "I'm sorry, but I haven't introduced you them everyone. That," she began, nodding a glare at the silver-haired woman, "is Hitomi."

"Charmed," Hitomi said to Haruka icily. Haruka didn't think that anyone would not be able to tell that she really didn't mean it.

"Sohma?" Haruka asked, rather certain that she already knew the answer.

Hitomi laughed in a slightly insane manner; she seemed happy, but it was almost scary for some reason, like she was laughing at someone's death or something. "Of course, my dear. I don't think there's a soul in this room that isn't."

Haruka nodded, pretending that Hitomi had said that like a normal person.

Anita went on. "Our little princess," she gestured to the little girl, "is Cho.

Cho bowed her head slightly and blushed. "Um, hi," she said in an understandably small voice.

Haruka smiled kindly at her.

Before Anita could continue, the other girl interrupted her. "I don't need anyone else to introduce me," she began tartly. "My na--"

The orange-haired girl was interrupted by a rhythmic knock on the door. Akemi answered, following the rhythm, "Who's there?"

Anita sighed. "Akemi, you should know already. There's only one person who would knock like that. And please don't encourage him."

"Yes, you should know who it is," a male voice answered flamboyantly through the door. "It is I, the greatest seamstress known to Sohma House!"

"Don't you have to be a girl to be a seamstress?" Anita asked herself quietly.

"Oh, well then, come on in!" Akemi told the visitor, apparently unaware of Anita's comment.

Anita looked panicked. "No! No, don't come in!" she called, but the doorknob was already turning.

There was a pause, and then the door flew open, and the visitor announced, "Why, hello, my dear, dear family!" Haruka saw him and saw that he was probably in his late twenties or maybe early thirties, with hair such a light brown that it might have been thought of as dark blonde instead, which fell all the way down his back to the point where he probably had to take care not to sit on it. He was posing grandly in his...well, it looked like an old-fashioned dress--as in female attire fit for the medieval ages. "I have been sent from the great Queen Katsuo I as a messenger to ask why the"--censored--"ing hell you all haven't come home in two days!" The strangest part was how cheerful he was as he said this.

Akemi gasped. "Naoki! Cho's in the room!"

Naoki(?) gasped, too. "Oh dear, I forgot all about that! Oh dear, Cho, please do pretend that you've never heard Uncle Naoki say that word!"

Cho tilted her head. "Which one, "--censored--"ing or hell?"

Anita and Nanami looked horrified, while Saburo and most everyone else seemed more so annoyed at...well, probably Naoki. Naoki and Akemi, however, seemed entirely indifferent.

"Well, now that you mention it," Naoki answered cheerfully, "forget both of them."

Cho smiled and said, "Okay."

Anita's jaw dropped to the floor.

Haruka coughed, trying to bring the topic back to its beginning. "Were you saying something?"

"Huh? Oh, why yes, yes I was," Naoki answered without missing a beat. "The great Queen Katsuo I would like to know--"

"Yes!" Anita interrupted. "We know!"

"--why the dirty-word-ing dirty-word you haven't come home for two days!" Naoki ignored her and kept going.

"Oh, like she doesn't know!" Anita erupted, standing up and taking on a fighting stance. "I mean, gee, it couldn't possibly because she's my--" She choked her word, and stood there with a look of panic at her own words on her face, with everybody looking at her with similar expressions. She looked around the room, let her fists fall, and growled, "I should have guessed. Setting me up like that." She sighed, obviously trying very hard to control her anger, and almost managing to make herself look only incredibly irritated. Haruka admired her self-restraint.

Anita's head snapped back up. "Just tell her that she already knows why I'm still here. And make sure she hasn't forgotten that little deal that we mentioned earlier," she added.

Naoki's eyebrows rose slightly. "Well, I suppose that would be worthwhile. But you're paying for my medical bills if she doesn't like it."

Anita sighed, now looking only mildly irritated. "That would be a very small price to pay," she told him, "for the chance to be able to actually say it."

Naoki grinned. "I don't know, the company only anything for injuries I get on-set. You'd be entirely on your own, and I don't think Katsuo would exactly help, either."

"Nonetheless," Anita went on, now most entirely relaxed in a rather tired way, "I'd give anything just to be able to say the word anywhere near her."

Naoki's smile was heartfelt. "I think most of us would. This secret is just so hard to keep..." He turned to Haruka. "I'm sorry, we're talking about you like you're not in the room. And I suppose I haven't introduced myself. Well, maybe I have," he added, looking up with his hand on his chin as though he was actually thinking. He snapped his attention back to Haruka. "No, I don't think I did. Oh well, it never hurts to do a job twice to make sure it's right!"

He turned on his heel and left the room.

A full minute of silence followed. Haruka could have sworn she heard a cricket chirp.

Like just before he entered before, the doorknob twisted, and the door came forward just enough that someone could push it open if they wanted to.

Haruka might have enjoyed the proceeding moment of silence more if she hadn't been so confused and overwhelmed by his performance.

If Haruka had to guess, he kicked the door open. It most certainly opened very quickly, and he seemed to have needed his hand(s) free to throw confetti and sparkles.

He posed in the doorway, wearing what looked like a dress to be worn to a wedding. "Fear not, young lady!" he declared gallantly, "It is I, the great professional seamstress and minor-role actress, Naoki Sohma!" He made a noise with his lips that seemed to have been very much practiced, and sounded very much like a one-tone trumpet fanfare, especially for having been made without any kind of instrument.

Anita had her head in her hand. Nanami looked on in awe. Saburo rolled his eyes. Hitomi sighed, rolling her eyes. The orange-haired girl (whose name still hadn't been mentioned) was leaning against the wall, her head tilted back and her eyes closed, probably exasperated. Cho stared on, wide-eyed and probably rather confused. Akemi broke out into applause, complete with whistling and calling, "Encore!" but stopped ten seconds later when she realized that nobody else agreed with her.

Silence. A tumbleweed would have rolled by in the hallway if they weren't in a hospital.

More silence.

The rapid squeaking of a wheeled object being rolled by at high speeds, being carried along by many running footsteps and female voices yelling, "Don't you die on me, Tohru!" "Your electric signals say that you're too young to die!"

Seconds later, through the doorway, Haruka could see a stretcher being carted along the hallway at high speeds by a doctor of some sort, along with another few professionals trying to keep up with I.V.-type things, and a pair of women running along beside the stretcher with the nurses, yelling encouragement at a seemingly unconscious peer of theirs.

The hospital equivalent of a tumbleweed, in Haruka's opinion.

More silence followed, until a nurse came by and said kindly, "Excuse me sir, but would you mind please not throwing sparkles in the hospital? Some patients have asthma, and things like that have been known to cause some breathing problems with them..."

Naoki turned to her and smiled charmingly. "Why, I'm so sorry, I didn't realize, and it absolutely had to be done. I will not do it again, I promise, and I am sincerely sorry that I had to do it here of all places."

The nurse blushed and looked down. "Well, just don't let me catch you doing it again," she said in what she probably hoped was a strong and forceful voice, but really came out so weak that she immediately clutched her hand to her mouth and ran away.

Naoki sighed and turned back to the room. "Now, as I was saying..."

Silence.

Anita was looking through the doorway intently. Finally, after a nervous look at Haruka, she stood up slowly and went to the doorway.

Naoki noticed her approach and asked, his face serious again, "Oh, are you going home now?"

Anita shook her head. "No, there's someone else here that I need to visit. I should be back soon." She walked right past Naoki.

Haruka realized that her mouth was hanging open. She closed it.

Naoki looked at her directly now. "Well, I personally have no reason to stay, so I suppose I shall be going now." He turned and left without a single word. Any doubts in Haruka's mind that Naoki didn't know her name vanished. He didn't seem the type to skip out on asking her name just because the conversation was getting a little awkward.

Hitomi stood up, too. "Well, I guess if Anita went somewhere else, then I have no reason to stay, either, other than that I'm her ride." She sighed. "Tell her to call me if she really actually needs a ride or something. She probably won't. Cho, Yoko," she added to the little girl and, presumably, the orange-haired girl, before she turned back to Haruka and added, "By the way, this is Yoko. We're going," she went on to the girls. "Same with you three," she added to Saburo, Akemi, and Nanami.

The only protest from any of them was from Akemi. "Aw, can we at least come back later so I can give her a Get Better Soon card?"

Hitomi sighed. "Fine. If you have to. But later."

Akemi looked pleased at this and stood up, brushed her skirt off, and practically skipped out the door, followed by Saburo and Nanami. Yoko was already out the door.

Cho stood there for a second, uncertain, before she went up to Haruka's bedside and said into her ear, "Get better soon, Big Sis." She turned and ran-skipped out the door.

As soon as Cho was out the door, Hitomi nodded curtly to Haruka and closed it.

Haruka sighed. She was completely alone. Every living human in the room was gone, and now she could get some peace and quiet.

Well, I'm glad that's over, she began, mostly to her ghost friends. When she didn't hear an answer she asked, Hey? Where are you guys?

Then she remembered her dream. Yuki was saying something like how she wouldn't be able to hear or see them for a while. She'd be out of contact with the ghosts.

At that point, it sunk in. There would be no unknown family that she had only just met trying to talk to her about sisters and secrets. There would be no mother and father, coming to see if she was alive, because even if they would have normally, they were in the hospital now. There would be no Sohma ghosts to be heard yelling at each other, "Stupid cat," "Damn rat!" "Stupid

cat," "Damn rat!" No ghosts to talk to about the family curse that she barely understood.

For the first time in a long time, the loneliness really sunk in, and Haruka was entirely alone.

She sighed. Well, I haven't felt this in a while, she thought to herself. Then she grimaced. This is going to be a very long day...

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