Absolute Ouran

by Artemis_Day

Summary

It's not often you get a package in the mail that's as big as you are. Less often would you get more than one, and NEVER would you find six human males inside. Unless of course you're Haruhi Fujioka.
A Prologue (of sorts)

07.10.11

A PROLOGUE OF SORTS

The first thing you should know about me is that I am not a morning person.

I know as you read further entries, you'll probably start scratching your heads, thinking, 'Wait, how could she not be a morning person, I'd think an overachiever like her would want to get up bright and early to study and blah blah blah…' Well, the truth is the truth, and the truth is, I hate getting up early in the morning. If I could somehow go to school at midnight, come home at 7 am, and sleep from Noon to evening, I would in a heartbeat.

Sadly, I can't, and so every morning, my alarm clock rings that shrieking ring. It signals the end of another peaceful night's sleep and the beginning of a new day which I will not begin to enjoy until around 45 minutes after getting up, once I've splashed some water on my face and had a good breakfast.

Anyway, I should probably tell you a little about myself, though if you're reading this, I'm assuming you've already taken a look at my profile. I'll keep it short.

My name is Haruhi Fujioka. I am 17 years old and I dream of becoming a lawyer someday like my mother. According to some, I look like a boy with my short hair and very unfeminine clothing choices, but then, gender roles were never my biggest concern.

As of two days ago, I am on summer break. An entire month of no school, which means no 6 o' clock alarms every morning, which means a very happy me.

In fact, I'm in such a good mood that I've already finished almost half of my summer homework. Today I'll put the finishing touches on my Foreign Language paper, and then get started on my math homework.

What do I do for fun, you ask? Well, studying is fun for me. My friend, Kasumi, thinks I should find other hobbies, but I don't see why it's such a big deal. It's not like I'm always studying. I like to read and watch a little Court TV too, but I digress.

I just realized I've been rambling for the past several paragraphs and that I should probably get to the point of all this. It's kind of hard to explain. In theory, it should be pretty simple: I'm creating a record of the events that occurred last year and how I got to where I am now. I even have an outline of the story right here next to my laptop. It starts with this prologue (of sorts), then goes into the day it all started, and how I had to adjust to the six new presences in my life. How difficult sleeping arrangements became and how they practically had a duel to the death over who'd get to sleep in my room; how their total naivety to the outside world got them arrested TWICE; how they literally almost destroyed my school's gymnasium; how they turned my quiet life into a giant, chaotic mess; how at times I wanted to pull my hair out and scream at them to just go away and leave me alone; how they gradually began to understand just why I was so angry with them all the time; how they protected me when I was in danger; how I somehow began to see them as friends, maybe even family…

And now I'm rambling again. Have to work on that.
Anyway, all of that seemed so simple last week when it suddenly occurred to me to write it down. I brainstormed for a few days over what to say, how to say it, etc. I wrote my outline, I got all my really hard homework out of the way, and on top of all that, my dad will be working late every night for the next week, providing ample time for me to write without being disturbed.

So why does it suddenly feel so hard? I guess because I'd forgotten just how deeply the events of last summer affected me. This isn't something I can just put on a document file and then let sit in my hard drive until however long it takes for such things to become obsolete.

That's why I started this blog, even though I doubt anyone will believe that I'm telling the truth. I certainly wouldn't if it hadn't happened to me. It doesn't matter, though, whether you believe me or not. I just can't keep it to myself anymore. I've been hiding the truth from even my father for so long. I feel like if I don't have something to remind me that it was real, I'll stop believing myself. I'll decide it was nothing more than the crazy dream of a seemingly sensible sixteen year old Me. Afterwards, I'll put it from my mind and slowly, but surely, forget.

I can't let that happen.

It's been an year this very day, July 10th, 2011. It took some time, but I've finally come to terms with everything that happened those three months. Now it's time for me to tell my story.

A story full of awkwardness, embarrassment, insanity, hugs, laughs, and tears. And it all started because of a botched address…

*Posted by Haruhi at 9:27 pm 0 comments*
How It All Began

07.11.11

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Before I begin, I'd just like to announce that as of 37 minutes ago, I have completed all my summer homework. That's a weight off my shoulders, let me tell you. This, of course, means I'll have more time to work on this blog, which I'm sure the 3 people who commented and the 3 people who subscribed are happy to hear.

Alright, before I start rambling again, I'll just get to the story.

Deep breath now…

Okay… so as I'm sure you remember from the first post, I do not like waking up early in the morning. Not one bit.

It all started on the third day of summer break last year. Since summer had only just started, I wasn't used to the change in schedule yet, so I ended up setting my alarm by mistake the night before.

Which means I ended up rudely awakened at 6:00 in the morning for no reason at all. That's another thing you should know about me, when I wake up in the morning, no matter what time it is, I simply cannot go back to sleep. Not until it's nighttime again, annoyingly enough.

As you can imagine, I was not particularly happy about this turn of events, but I knew laying there would get me nowhere, and so, with an annoyed sigh, I was up.

I felt better after a nice breakfast. Since I was only cooking for one, it didn't take long to whip something up.

Oh yeah, that's something I forgot to mention: My dad had gotten a job out of town about a week prior to all this. I'd been planning on going to his friend, Misuzu's, pension in Karuizawa for the summer, but a surprise and brutal hurricane put an end to those plans. It's kind of hard to have guests when you're pension's half destroyed by a fallen tree (don't worry, he was insured). So, I was home alone for the next few months. It didn't bother me, I knew how to take care of myself and I had money from my old part time job that covered what Dad's weekly deposits into our account couldn't.

Now that we've got that out of the way, back to the story.

I finished eating around twenty minutes later and figured I'd get started on my homework. I plopped down on the couch with my history textbook and my notebook and pen, content to spend my afternoon taking notes for an essay on the historical and cultural impact of the Meiji Era.

That's when the doorbell rang and my life changed forever.

…that was really cliché wasn't it?

Whatever.

Anyway, when I heard the ringing, I didn't think much of it. Not even when I walked to the door and opened it to find a man in a blue jump suit holding a clipboard in front of his face.
"Fujioka Haruhi?" He read off my name in a bored, robotic tone.

"Yes," I answered. By now, I'd figured my dad had just sent me another care package. I got one from him once a week around this time, though usually on Wednesday rather than Tuesday. That was a little strange.

"Sign here please," he said, handing me the clipboard.

I took it and neatly signed my name, during which time he signaled for another man to bring in the package. Or should I say, packages.

It was around this time I began to suspect that this wasn't a care package from my dad. He normally didn't send six all at once.

And they usually aren't all bigger than I am.

I almost dropped the clipboard. The two men wheeled the giant crates one after another into my (admittedly rather small) apartment, then the first guy wordlessly took the clipboard from my and walked to the door. This action finally brought me to my senses. I bolted outside and called after them.

"Wait a minute!" I cried out. "These can't be for me, you must have the wrong address!"

The delivery men glanced at each other briefly, before the one with the clipboard addressed me.

"You are Fujioka Haruhi, right?"

I nodded.

The man held up the clipboard again for me to see.

"And this is your address here, right?"

I read the address written on the paper, examining every letter and number. It was indeed mine. I couldn't say anything, but the look on my face must've spoken for me, as the man bid me goodbye and walked off with his partner. Before I knew it, they were gone, and I was stuck with six human sized crates with God only knows what inside and no idea what to do with them.

It was useless just standing outside staring into space, so I went inside and shut the door. Leaning with my back against it, I studied the crates one by one. Their sizes varied a bit. When I said before that they were all taller than me, what I should have said was all but one were taller, and the one that wasn't was only a head or so shorter anyway.

Other than their unusual size, they were pretty average looking wooden crates. As I moved closer though, I found that each of one had a logo stamped on one side. In bright red ink, an image of a rose in bloom, with a single word written below in fancy font English letters:

OURAN.

Now, I'm sure some of you are wondering, 'What the heck is Ouran?'

Well, join the club.

That's right, even after all the dealings I've had with them (which you'll hear all about in later posts), I still have absolutely no idea just what exactly they do. My only guess is…
Well, you'll see in the minute.

Now, where was I…? Oh right, I'd just found the logo.

I got out my laptop and did a Google search for the word. To my surprise, I got with no results. Even after trying several other search engines, I continued coming up empty handed. That arose quite a suspicion in me. Every company had a website, one that didn't… well there had to be something fishy about it.

I was starting to feel a bit anxious at this point. If I couldn't find the company this way, the only other way was to open one of the crates and see if there were any papers that might have a phone number. I swallowed.

Now, I'm generally a very rational individual. I don't read fantasy books and I don't watch anime or anything. I always think things through logically and I don't take flights of fancy or daydream. At this moment, however, I think the oddness of the situation was getting to me. I was imagining all sorts of horrible things that could be in those crates. A cache of weapons, illegal narcotics, poisonous reptiles… well, you get the picture.

I tried not to think too much on it as I went next door and asked my bemused neighbor if I could borrow his crowbar. I returned, instrument in hand, a minute later and set to the task of choosing a crate to open.

That's when I noticed that the lids where all on the sides of the crates, which meant I'd have to lower the box to the ground horizontally or else it's contents would spill out onto the floor once I'd opened it. They looked pretty heavy, but I had no other choice. I picked the one closet to the door and, with a great deal of struggle, slowly ease it onto it's side with the lid facing upwards.

I stared at it for a long minute and took a deep breath. Those scary thoughts started to come back as I gripped the crowbar tight in my hands. I steeled my resolve, telling myself there was no way whatever was in this crate could be weapons or drugs or anything of the sort.

A minute later, the crate cracked open. I pushed the lid off quickly so I wouldn't have any more time to think about what might be in there. With the contents of the crate now completely visible, all my earlier thoughts disappeared in a flash. This is because what I was looking at was something I hadn't even thought of. My jaw dropped to the ground.

A guy.

A naked guy.

An anatomically correct naked guy.

Well, at least it wasn't drugs.

…darn it. My dad just walked in and I don't have dinner ready. I have to stop here, but I'll post again as soon as I can, promise.

Posted by Haruhi at 7:03 pm 0 comments
Okay. Dinner's been cooked, the laundry's done, and Dad's collecting tips at a bar downtown. There is absolutely nothing to distract me from writing this post, not like before (I am really sorry about that, by the way).

So, when we left off, I'd just gotten one of the crates opened and found a naked guy inside.

And no, I did not look there if that's what you're thinking.

Well, okay, I looked one time, but only because I wasn't expecting it. Otherwise, I definitely wouldn't have.

…I let's move on.

I must've sat there for five whole minutes just staring at his face. My head was starting to hurt a little since my mind was having a hard time processing what was in front of me.

I had the obvious thought first, 'What if this is a dead body?'

I considered feeling for a pulse, but my arms didn't seem to be listening. Eventually, my eyes darted away from his face, and I noticed something tucked under his right arm. I leaned a bit closer to get a better look, which was difficult considering I didn't want to get too close to him. I did manage to make out what it was: a booklet.

'What is that for?' I wondered.

I reached an arm out, hesitating several times before finally mustering up the courage to grab the booklet and pull it away from the body. A quick glance at the cover revealed that it was written in Kanji. Considering the english word stamped on a side, this came as a relief. I can read English, but it's just such a pain.

I read the front cover, thinking maybe I'd get some clues, but instead… well, here's what it said:

OURAN CO.

HOSTING COLLECTION

PRINCELY MODEL NO. 082708

USER'S MANUAL

It wasn't very helpful aside from telling me this was thankfully not a human body, just some kind of robot.

However, that just led to other disturbing thoughts. If this was a robot, and it had… proper anatomy, that must mean…

"DAD, WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING?"
Yes, I did actually say that out loud. You would too, don't deny it.

"No, wait," I said after thinking about it more. "What am I thinking? There's no way Dad could have or would have sent this to me. I knew they brought it to the wrong address."

It was the only explanation possible. The only other relatives I have are my mother's parents out in Kyoto and they'd never come to visit (they hate Dad). The only contact we ever had was a card on my birthday with some money in it.

I began flipping through the manual, figuring there'd be a contact number in there somewhere. As I did this, little bits of information regarding my new robot friend would occasionally jump out at me, including:

Height 6'0'…
Safe to have around children…
Fireproof…
Keep indoors during storms…
No danger of pregnancy (I had to pause for a second at that one)…

"Got it," I muttered upon reaching the last page.

The contact phone number was rather odd. It looked like an American phone number rather than a Japanese one. I figured from that that it might be an overseas company.

I grabbed the kitchen phone and dialed the number. Three rings later, a cool female voice speaking perfect, unaccented English appeared on the other end.

"Welcome to the Ouran Corporation's customer service line. For English, press one. For Japanese, press two."

I pressed two.

"Or main goal has always been your satisfaction," the voice continued. "We pride ourselves in our top rate staff and 100 percent customer satisfaction rate…"

Well, I don't think the person meant to get these packages is very satisfied.

"…If your purchase is malfunctioning, or for any other technical questions, please press 1. If you would like to make a purchase, or check an existing order, please press 2. For issues regarding a lost or stolen order, please press 3. For all other inquiries including offers and sales, please press 9."

I pressed 3. It was the closest to what I needed to ask anyway.

"Please hold for the next available representative."

Then came the hold music. I sighed and sat down at the kitchen table, facing away from the living room. I leaned all the way back in my chair, listening to the soft, relaxing tune and waiting… waiting… waiting… waiting…

…

…
Would you like to know how long I waited on hold that day?

38 minutes.

That's right, they kept me waiting 38 whole minutes listening to an endless loop of the world's most annoying flute music. Every time I almost hung up the phone in frustration, I'd remember those crates in my living room, and that kept me waiting… waiting… waiting… you get the idea.

So anyway, 38 minutes later, the evil flute music finally stopped as there was a click on the other end. I sat back up in my seat, fully alert. Two seconds later, I heard a voice.

"Hello, this is the Ouran Corporation Customer Service Representative Line. We are unfortunately away for the time being and not taking any calls. However, an answering system has been set up. To leave a message, please press 1."

I don't know how I managed to place my finger on the number key and press down, I was too busy trying to control my homicidal rage at that particular moment.

"At the tone, please leave your name, number, and a brief message, then press 0."

One beep later, I managed to calm myself enough to open my mouth and speak calmly.

"Hello, my name is Haruhi Fujioka, I uh… I received several packages from your company today that I didn't order. I was hoping someone could come and get them as soon as possible. I had to open one to get this number, but otherwise…"

I stopped here, knowing I should keep it short.

"Well, anyway, you can reach me at (XX) XXXX-XXXX (you didn't think I'd actually post my phone number here, right?). Thanks, and I hope you have a good night."

I pressed 0 and waited to see what would happen next.

"Thank you for your message," the machine said. "Your call is very important to us. Your message will be received and answered as quickly as possible."

I sighed in relief.

"The current wait time for response is 3 months."

At that, I dropped the phone, meaning I could barely hear the voice say 'Goodbye' to me, following by another click and the dial tone.

"3 months…" I muttered to myself in shock. "3 months? They call that first rate service?"

I was so mad I actually kicked the phone into the living room (which thankfully is carpeted).

So now I was stuck with 6 sex robots laying around my house for three whole months. Luckily, my Dad wouldn't be home for four months, so at least I didn't have to worry about him. I thought about putting them in storage, but I didn't have the money for a storage closet and this many crates of this size would probably attract a lot of unnecessary attention.

I glanced over at them again. They were definitely too big to fit in the closet, but I couldn't just leave them in my living room. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair before getting up. I figured that
even if I had no idea what to do with them, I should at least reseal the crate I had opened. I stood up and started for the living room, all the while thinking of ways to reattach the lid, when…

Now, I honestly don't know how to describe what happened next, because I'm not really sure myself. Best I can figure is that while lost in my thoughts, I failed to notice the coffee table right in front of the crate and tripped over it. The next thing I knew, I was laying on top of the robot, and my mouth had somehow landed directly on his. To this day, I still don't know how exactly it happened. If I were more spiritually inclined, I might call it fate or an act of some sadistic God. I'm not however, and so I'm at a loss for how to explain it.

It took me a moment to register what was happening, and when I did, you'd better believe I was off him and across the room in seconds. I breathed heavily and wiped my lips clean. His had been surprisingly warm, which was kind of scary. Shaking, I stood back up and slowly walked back to him. He looked alright, so I knew I hadn't damaged him, I crouched down to get a closer look. That's when I noticed something shocking.

His chest was rising and falling.

My stomach dropped and I imagined if I had a mirror, I'd look rather pale. Somehow, I couldn't bring myself to move as his eyes flickered open and he rose from the crate like a dead person out of a coffin. His eyes, bluer than any I've ever seen on a normal human, found mine and I couldn't look away.

He stared at me for a moment, then he smiled. What happened next, I will never forget.

"Hello," his voice was low and husky. "It's nice to meet you, my beloved."

Then he leaned forward and kissed me. Right on the lips. He didn't try to go further than that, but he didn't let up either. Though my body felt completely frozen, I somehow got it to move. Move quickly, I might add.

"STOP!" I screamed and jumped backwards for the second time.

His previously suave expression faded to make way for bewilderment.

"Is something wrong?" he asked, standing up at full height. "Are you displeased, beloved?"

"Wh-whel-whel-"

As you can tell, I'm a very eloquent speaker.

"What is this?" I finally managed to shout. "Why did you do that? What are you?"

He blinked, stepped forwards and making me avert my eyes from his nudity

"What am I?" he repeated. "I'm a First Generation Ouran Co. Lover Figure, Princely Model Number-

"Yes, yes, I know that," I interrupted with a wave of my hand. "But- But why did you kiss me? How did you even wake up?"

"Didn't you activate me?"

"Activate you… wait."

I got to my feet and grabbed the manual from the floor. The heading of page two read:
ACTIVATION INSTRUCTIONS. I began scanning the page.

"Your Lover Figure comes with sensory preceptors built into the lips. Activate via lip to lip contact. Once your Lover Figure is activated, they cannot be deactivated except by an employee of the Ouran Co. Tech Support department.

WARNING: Please be aware that if you're Love Figure has such contact with anyone else (male or female) their programming will be rewritten and they will no longer accept you as their lover/master."

'Lip to lip contact... oh hell.'

Yup, that's right. Not only have I gotten a group of sex robots in the mail, I'd just accidentally activated one of them. By kissing him. What is wrong with this company?

That's what I was trying to figure when my new 'Lover' wrapped his arms around me from behind and pulled me into his strong grip.

"If you'd like to take this to the bedroom," he whispered in my ear. "I would be happy to oblige."

"Get off me!" I cried, prying myself away from him.

I pressed my back flat against the wall, staring at him. This allowed me to actually take in his appearance for the first time since he'd woken up. He was almost a foot taller than me and though he looked Japanese, his blonde hair and violet eyes gave him a foreign look. He had a nice face and body, and his smile had a certain charm to it. So yes, I'll admit he was handsome, but that certainly didn't mean I would be going along with what he clearly wanted to do with me.

"Look," I said firmly. "There's been a mix-up here. I am not your beloved (choked a little on that word)."

He blinked. "But weren't you the one who activated me?"

For a moment, I didn't answer.

"...yes, but you were sent here by mista-"

"Then it doesn't matter," his voice was surprisingly hard. "Whether I was purchased by you or not, you are registered in my database as my lover, and that, beloved, means I'm yours forever."

He pulled me into a hug again, but this time I didn't fight him. Couldn't fight him. I was far too in shock. This was a hell of a situation I'd gotten myself into, and for 3 whole months, I'd have no way of getting out of it.

Okay, I'm going to stop here now. If I don't, the resulting post will be much, much too long. So, I guess I'll see you tomorrow night.

Assuming you haven't decided I'm completely insane and stopped reading. At this point, I wouldn't blame you.

Posted by Haruhi at 10:08 pm 0 comments
How It All Began Part 3

07.13.11

HOW IT ALL BEGAN PART 3

When we last left my insane, yet honest to God true story, I had just accidentally activated a super advanced sex robot (by kissing him, I still can't get over that) which then proclaimed his eternal love and devotion to me. All before noon.

This was not looking to be a good day.

I eventually pried him off me once again and told him to wait in the living room while I got him something to wear. Having a sex robot in the apartment was bad enough, he didn't need to be naked.

Unfortunately, finding clothes for him proved difficult as my father doesn't own any male clothes apart from an old suit he hasn't worn since my mom's funeral. He's a crossdresser by the way, don't think I mentioned that before, and if you were wondering why my mom's parents don't like him, now you know.

I was going to settle for the suit, which was pretty moth eaten, but then I noticed my new houseguest pulling a couple of clothing bags out of his crate. Why he didn't tell me about that before is anyone's guess.

There were three sets of clothing; each bag was labeled for what occasion each outfit was for. The first one was labeled, 'casual wear'. The second was, 'formal wear and the third read, 'sleep wear (usage optional)'.

No really, that's what it said.

Anyway, I handed him the casual wear and sent him to the bathroom to get changed. When he came out, he was wearing yellow-ish pants, a black shirt and a red jacket. This was infinitely preferable to nudity.

It was then that I realized something.

"Do you have a name?" I asked him.

He blinked. "I'm a First Generation Ouran Co."

"No, that's not what I meant," I interrupted. "I mean do you have an actual name?"

"An actual name?" he repeated, sounding a bit confused.

I nodded. "Yeah, like my name is Haruhi, do you have a name like that?"

He didn't answer verbally, just shook his head.

I gave an annoyed sigh. I wasn't particularly keen on doing any more to make him think he belonged to me. In the end, I figured that when someone from this Ouran company finally shows up, they could just reset him so he'd forget or something.

"Well, I can't just call you 'You' for three months," I said with a forced smile. "So let me think…"
I began to wrack my brain for a good name. I knew a lot of people had names with some sort of meaning behind them, but I wasn't really concerned with that so much as having something to call him by that wasn't so general.

'Keiichi… no, I don't like it. Akira… wait, there's a little boy in the building called Akira, that may not work. Mamoru… definitely not, it doesn't suit him at all.'

"How about 'Tamaki'?" I finally said. Not sure where I got it from, it just came to me.

He smiled at me again. "Do you like that name, beloved?"

"Please stop calling me that," I said in monotone. "My name is Haruhi, okay?"

He gave a nod, his eyes shining in a way that made me wonder if he really was happy and not just programmed to be.

"Okay, I understand, beloved."

My eye began to twitch.

So, me and the newly dubbed 'Tamaki' spent the next hour or so in the living room. I was reading more of his user's manual so I'd have a better idea of what I was dealing with. He would read over my shoulder and answers my questions as best he could, and despite my greatest efforts, he would not stop calling me 'beloved'.

"What does this mean?" I asked, pointing at a section which stated the following:

'Dom/Sub: Non exclusive.'

"Oh that just means I am programmed to take the top role or the bottom role should you unlock my yaoi mode."

I made a face, probably a funny one too, "Your… yaoi mode?"

"That's right," he answered cheerfully. "It can only be unlocked with a password on page 18."

"…okay, thank you," I said while turning the page.

Before anyone asks, no, I never activated the yaoi mode. I don't care for that stuff, and that's the last you will ever hear of it.

Tamaki was quiet when I wasn't asking him anything. He only spoke on his own once, sometime later.

"So when are you going to activate the others?"

"Maybe later," I answered without thinking. Of course, once I realized what he'd just asked, you'd better believe I took it back.

"I mean NO! I'm not activating them!"

He looked perplexed. "Why, are you satisfied with just me?"

I could tell that another love barrage was on it's way, but before I could say anything to stop him, Tamaki'd pulled me into another embrace.
"Because I wouldn't object if that were the case," he whispered.

"I told you to stop doing that!" I cried as I pulled away from him. "For the last time, you do not belong to me. I had no right to activate you nor do I have the right to activate any of the others!"

If I hadn't known any better, I'd have said he looked hurt, but that was ridiculous. Robots are just really advanced computers, they aren't capable of real emotions. Or so I thought…

Anyway, I figured Tamaki would respect my wishes, so I felt fairly comfortable with leaving him alone for a few minutes while I used the bathroom. I only realized how wrong I'd been when I came back and found the previously upright crates all on their sides and open. Tamaki stood before them, crowbar in hand.

"Wha-what did you do?" I shouted at him.

He grinned happily, oblivious to my boiling anger. "I just thought you'd change you mind if you had a look at the others, my beloved."

I was so frustrated, I didn't even bother correcting him again.

"Well, you're wrong, I don't want to look at them," looking at Tamaki had been awkward enough.

He either didn't hear me, or just wasn't listening (in retrospect, it was probably the latter) as he reached over and grabbed my arm, pulling me in front of the first crate. I brought up a hand to keep myself from looking anywhere below the waistline while Tamaki started talking.

"This is the Cool Model Number 222509," he explained, sounding a bit like a car salesman. "He's meant to be a contrast to my personality. He's more cold and domineering, but still loyal and caring. He's also skilled in business and monetary fields."

I glanced at the sleeping robot. Unlike Tamaki, this one had black hair and sharper features. I briefly wondered what color his eyes might be, but that was definitely not something I cared to look into.

Tamaki then guided my to the next crate which, to my surprise, was twice as large as the others, and held two completely identical redheaded robots. These were the 'Mischievous Models' (can't remember the serial numbers). They were programmed to do everything together, including talk, walk and whatever else you can think of. They also had a 'twincest' mode, which I found far more creepy than appealing.

Next was the (not making this up) 'Loli Shota Model'.

Loli Shota… yeah…

When I brought this up to Tamaki, he assured me that the small robot was not meant for copulation, but rather for 'Moe Appeal'. I didn't really know what that meant, but it sounded a hell of a lot better than the first option.

Finally, there was a very large (as in tall, get your minds out of the gutter) dark, spiky haired robot which Tamaki called the 'Strong, Silent Model'. Apparently, both this one and the 'Loli Shota Model' had a vast knowledge of martial arts built into their databases. I only half believed that, the smaller one didn't look built (no pun intended) for strenuous labor, let alone martial arts.

The presentation over, Tamaki gazed at me with bright, starry eyes.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked.
I opened my mouth, then closed it again. I wanted to say no, but something about that look he was giving me made me hesitate. I actually almost wanted to say yes to him. It had to be some sort of robot manipulation technique screwing with my head.

I did wind up putting my foot down, though.

"Tamaki, I'm sorry," I tried not to react when his face fell. "I just can't. They aren't mine and neither are you."

He was silent for a minute, then sighed and gave me a much less happy smile.

"Alright, if that's what you wish, beloved."

We were really going to have to work on this whole name issue.

"Just help me close these back up, okay?"

He nodded, his head and eyes down. I didn't give any reaction even though I suddenly felt a tiny bit bad for some reason. I wasn't about to give in to a robot though, so I kept silent. We were about to close up the 'Cool Model' again, when we both heard a crash.

Thinking back, I have to wonder if it was fate that of all the nights they could've come, this was the one they choose. I'm really not all that inclined to believe in such things, but at times I can't help but wonder...

I knew right away what made the crash, so I didn't react much beyond an annoyed sigh and a shake of my head. You see, there's this group of college dropouts who like to wander the streets making noise and knocking over garbage cans. For the most part, they're completely harmless, so nobody says anything about them and just stays inside when they come around. However, if someone does get in their way, they tend to get violent. I hadn't witnessed it firsthand before tonight, but I'd heard a few stories around the neighborhood.

I could hear them talking loudly even from the second floor (that's another thing, they're extremely obnoxious). I groaned and went to shut the window, but Tamaki stopped me with a hand on my shoulder.

"Is something wrong?"

I turned to face him. "No, I'm fi-"

I stopped when I noticed his expression. For the first time since we'd 'met', he looked completely serious. Like a character in a shonen anime about to do battle with a foe. It was kind of weird.

"Those people down there," he said sharply. "Are they bothering you?"

I blinked, momentarily confused by his sudden change in attitude.

"Well, they're kind of annoying, but they don't really bother anyone, so-"

I stopped when Tamaki suddenly sprinted across the room and out the door, slamming it shut behind him. For a few seconds, I stood rigid, then I raced to the door and pulled it open. I saw Tamaki standing in front of the rowdy gang and felt like smacking my head against the door frame.

"Hey, get out of the way," one of them shouted at Tamaki.

The blonde robot stood his ground and glared at them.
"I will," he said. "If you promise not to come around here anymore. You're bothering my girlfriend."

'Girlfriend?' I asked inwardly, then shrugged in defeat. It was better than 'beloved' by any rate.

The gang snickered to themselves.

"Oh, this that so?" said the one in front, probably the leader. "Well, we happen to like this neighborhood, so your bitch is just gonna have to- HRRGH!"

My jaw dropped, and so did the other guy's. It should be noted that all five of them were about the same size as Tamaki and three times bulkier. So it came as a bit of a shock to everyone when the very lithe Tamaki punched the leader in the face hard enough to send him flying ten feet in the air and into a dumpster.

"Don't you dare talk that way about her!" He shouted.

When I thought about it later, I realized that it shouldn't be hard to believe that, as a robot, Tamaki would be stronger than a regular human. At the time though, all I could feel was shock and awe. The other guys didn't waste time in defending their leader. They all rushed Tamaki, who calmly knocked out two of them. The remaining two stopped and one motioned for the other to step back. This didn't look good.

The gang member suddenly jumped in the air and aimed a high kick at Tamaki's head. The attack succeeded, sending the robot sprawling into a nearby lamp post. Just as the second guy was about to congratulate his friend, Tamaki stood right back up, messy, but unfazed.

As the man charged again, I could only watched in fear, a single thought running through my head.

'If he gets damaged, I'll have to pay for it!'

…don't look at me like that. I'm not selfish, I just didn't see him as anything but a robot at the time. I'd only known him for a few hours, after all.

While I was freaking out about this, I tried to figure out just what I could do to stop the fight. The gang member continued to beat Tamaki up, and Tamaki just kept taking it, refusing to back down even though he couldn't get a hit on the guy. Tamaki may have been strong, but he definitely wasn't a martial artist like his opponent.

That's when it hit me. A martial artist!

I whirled around to look at the crates. The ones holding the 'Strong, Silent Model' and the 'Loli Shota Model' lay undisturbed on the carpeting. I went quickly over to them and kneeled down over the 'Strong, Silent Model'. I hesitated only for a second, remembering that even if they saved Tamaki, I would have no way of turning them off when this was over. Then I heard some more crashes from outside and a cry of, "Why won't you stay done?"

That relieved my doubt and allowed me to quickly kiss the dark haired robot's lips before moving over to the 'Loli Shota Model' and doing the same (I still didn't really believe he could fight, but I figured it was worth the risk).

It worked just like it did with Tamaki. First they started breathing, then their eyes fluttered open, then they sat up and looked deep into my eyes.

"Hi," I said before they could start the lovey dovey stuff. "My name is Haruhi, I am the one who activated you, and now I need you to go and help Tamaki."
I pointed at the door, but they just kept staring at me, confused.

"I need you to help… Princely Model Number 082708, right now!" I elaborated quickly.

Another crash rang out, this seemed to get their attention. The taller one nodded quietly as they stood up, but the 'Loli Shota' gave me an enormous grin.

"Okay, Haru-chan," he said with a child-like voice. "Just leave it to us. We love you!"

'Haru-chan?'

"Yeah," the taller one agreed. His voice was much deeper, a given considering his size.

As they ran out the door, I breathed a sigh of relief. I didn't even care that they'd just gone outside stark naked.

It turned out that the Loli Shota actually was capable of martial arts (in fact, he did most of the work from what I saw). The fight was over in minutes, and I immediately called the three back inside before any neighbors saw them. I wondered why none of them had come outside yet what with all the noise, but I guess it was a blessing in disguise. Who knows what they'd have thought if they saw three guys, two of them naked, run into my apartment.

I locked the door behind me and leaned against it. I didn't even bother fighting when Tamaki pulled me into a hug for the billionth time.

"There now, they won't bother you anymore, beloved," he said soothingly.

"Gee, thanks."

Of course, he completely missed the sarcasm and just hugged me tighter. Meanwhile, my two new guests were thankfully dressing themselves in the provided clothes. The Loli Shota also for some reason came with a stuffed rabbit named which he named, 'Usa-chan'.

"Say Haru-chan," the boy suddenly said. "Since Princely Model Numb- I mean Tama-chan got a name, do we get names too?"

I looked at him and smiled. "Well, it would be easier to talk to you, so sure, you two can have names."

"That's right," Tamaki piped up. "And once we activate the others, they'll get names too."

"Are you still going on about that?" I moaned. "I already told you, I can't wake all of you up."

"But what about them?" Tamaki asked, motioning towards the Strong, Silent Model and the Loli Shota Model.

"I only woke them so they could help you," I argued. "It was an emergency!"

At that moment, I felt a tugging at my sleeve. It was the Loli Shota Model, looking up at me with huge, tearful eyes.

"Haru-chan," his whimpered. "If you don't activate them, they'll be stuck in stasis for a really long time. That would be too sad, they should be able to enjoy life the way we can, don't you think so?"

Damn manipulative robots.
"Look," I said, raising both hands. "For the last time, I cannot activate them. We'll have to close them back up and put them in…"

I trailed off, realizing once again that I still had no place to put any of them. Even with half of them awake and active, the remaining two crates just wouldn't fit anywhere. Tamaki and the other two would have to stay in my dad's room, the closet was still too small, the only option I really had was…

"This is not my day," I groaned as I got up and walked to the crates.

The three awake robots watched in anticipation as I kneeled down before the redheads and quickly pecked one of them on the lips. I sat back up, and watched for a moment as the redhead began moving before turning my attention to the other one… which was also moving.

"Huh?" I said out loud as two pairs of eyes opened and gazed up at me.

They sat up at the exact same time, smiled the exact same way, and spoke with the exact same voice:

"Hello, beloved, it is nice to meet you."

By now sufficiently creeped out, I glanced at Tamaki, who just smiled and shrugged.

"I told you, they do everything together."

Which seems to include activating. Thank Tamaki, I appreciate the advance notice.

That aside, I edged over to the final crate, the one holding the 'Cool Model'. It was a very odd name, I had no idea what it could signify. Tamaki had said this one was suppose to be a contrast to his personality, and so far, Tamaki was loud, cheerful, and kind of an idiot. I wasn't sure whether to feel good or nervous about what this might say about the 'Cool Model'.

For some reason, his user's manual was on top of him rather than tucked under his arm like the other. I paid it no mind and simply pushed the booklet to the floor, where it fell open to a random page.

I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his. All the other times (barring Tamaki), I'd counted to three in order to time how long I kissed each of them. It had worked fine so far, but this time, I only got to two before a hand shot up to my head, keeping me in place as the newly awakened robot kissed back passionately.

In my shock, I made the mistake of opening my mouth to yelp, and the next thing I knew, the 'Cool Model's' tongue had invaded. As I struggled to get away, my eyes found the fallen user's manual, positioned just so I could make out a few key lines of writing:

Please be aware that your Cool Model Lover Figure may become extremely forward upon initial activation…

…now they tell me.

Posted by Haruhi at 9:05 pm 0 comments.
SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

Ugh. Yesterday was a *nightmare*. I don't feel like going too in depth, so I'll just give you the long of the short of it.

Basically, my dad decided to try and cook breakfast for once, almost setting the kitchen on fire and burning his hand in the process. His usual doctor wasn't in, so we had to settle for his very irritable associate who spits when he talks. Then on the way home, we were caught in a massive traffic jam that didn't clear up until past midnight.

So that's why you didn't hear from me yesterday. On with the main story now.

I did eventually get the Cool Model figure to stop molesting my mouth (a good slap in the face may or may not have been involved). Once he and the Mischiefous Models were decent, I got to work finding names for them.

The Cool Model wound up being the easiest. He was completely nonchalant about the whole thing and just pointed at the first name he saw when I went online to a baby name site.

"Kyoya, that will be my name."

I gave a shrug, though his bored tone surprised me a bit. With that out of the way, I did a search for good twin names. Once again, the robots chose for themselves; the one on the left became Hikaru and the one on the right, Kaoru.

The Loli Shota and the Wild type were the most difficult. Well, actually finding names wasn't the hard part; the Wild type became Takashi and the Loli Shota was named Mitsukuni. The problem came about a half hour later when Mitsukuni suddenly announced that we were to call him 'Hunny' from now and that Takashi wanted to be called 'Mori' (he just nodded in agreement). I was confused, but accepted it. That's when I realized they were still calling each other Mitsukuni and Takashi, but from then on if anyone else did, they simply wouldn't respond until we gave in and used their nicknames.

I asked Tamaki about their behavior and he explained that the two robots were meant to be a pair, though unlike the twins, this only extended to Mori agreeing with what Hunny said and Hunny being closest to Mori out of all the other robots. Almost like Mori was Hunny's servant or something.

God, these robots were weird.

So now that everyone was awake, dressed and named, their were only two things left to consider.

"Do you guys eat or sleep?"

They all stopped what they were doing, be it flipping through TV channels (Hikaru and Kaoru), examining my kitchen appliances (Tamaki) and fridge (Hunny and Mori) or using my laptop without permission (Guess).

That was a weird habit of theirs. Anytime I opened my mouth, they would drop everything and listen to what I had to say. Seriously, they could be performing open heart surgery or trying to disable a
ticking time bomb and they'd still ignore it for me. Not that they ever actually did that, but you get the idea.

"You mean, like a human?" the twins asked (that was really creeping me out, the whole 'talking in unison thing).

I nodded.

Then they started laughing. That annoyed me.

"Silly Haru-chan!" Hunny exclaimed. "Of course we don't eat."

"Technically, we're androids," Kyoya piped up. "Which means human sustenance is unnecessary."

Though I was still bothered by their patronization, I gave another nod and inwardly sighed in relief. My dad and I weren't insanely poor or anything, but six more mouths to feed would've been disastrous to our finances.

"As for sleeping," Kyoya continued. "We don't just close our eyes and lose consciousness the way humans do. Our 'sleep mode' must be activated first."

I gave him a look, letting him know to go on.

"You see, we run on batteries which, assuming we are turned on all the time, speaking literally of course, would last around two weeks. A three year supply of replacements were sent with each of us."

He gestured toward a cabinet where Mori had earlier placed six medium sized white boxes.

"It is therefore encouraged that Sleep Mode be activated at least once every three days in order to save battery power. The switch is located behind the left ear, let Tamaki show you."

As if on cue, the blonde walked over and sat in the chair to my right. With a smile, he gently took my hand in his.

"Right here," he said as he placed my fingers on the very realistic skin of his upper neck. "Push down softly."

I wasn't really sure about all this, but I figured he wouldn't let go until I did as he said. With the smallest effort, I pressed my finger down. I didn't feel anything besides veins underneath (it really was shocking how humanlike they were), but it still seems to work, as Tamaki's body suddenly pitched forward and into an unmoving heap on the kitchen floor.

Even though I was half-expecting it, I still gave a shout when he fell. The others remained completely unfazed.

"Alright, now press it again and he'll wake up."

With Kyoya's prompting and the twin and Hunny's urging looks, I nervously kneeled down and moved his head a bit so I could get that spot again. I pressed down, an irrational part of me fearing it wouldn't work and that I'd inadvertently killed him or messed with his circuits or something. That change when he immediately started moving again and, seeing my still anxious expression, pulled me into yet another hug.

"I hope I didn't scare you, my beloved," he said softly. "If so, I can make it up to you."
"I told you to stop that!" I cried as I pulled away from him.

Once I'd composed myself, I got back to the main issue.

"Okay, now we just have to figure out where you guys are going to sleep." I said. "There's the couch and my father's room. One of you can take the couch."

"I will," Kyoya interrupted.

No one disagreed, so I gave a nod.

"Alright, now that that's settled, we'll have to find a way to squeeze you five into my dad's room."

"What about your room, Haru-chan?" Hunny asked innocently.

Oh boy, did I ever want to smack him right then. I'd been trying to keep away from that idea since I had a very bad feeling that it would end in disaster.

So thank you, Hunny, for bringing it up.

Surprisingly, Tamaki was not the first one to attack me with unwanted 'love' and 'affection.' No, it was the twins who grabbed me, one on each side, and leaned in much too close to my face. I didn't even know which one to glare at.

"Why yes," they said. "What about your room, Haruhi darling? The three of us could squeeze in and at night, we can make the kanji for river."

"Hang on," an affronted Tamaki cut in. "I don't think that's very appropriate talk. Haruhi is still getting used to us. She clearly is not ready for anything physical and if you two are going to try and seduce her all night, then you shouldn't be in her room."

For the first time all day, I smiled at Tamaki and really meant it. It seemed he wasn't quite as lecherous as I'd originally thought. Though I would never admit it at the time (and even now had to debate for several minutes), it was actually kind of charming.

"So I'll be staying with her instead!" he announced.

…Aaand there went the charm.

The twins' eyes narrowed as they spoke as one.

"Please, you just want Haruhi all to yourself."

It's creepy how they did that. Like the-twins-from-The-Shining creepy.

Well, Tamaki sure didn't like accusation. His eyes widened to ridiculous lengths and he looked five seconds away from breathing fire like a dragon. It wasn't scary or anything, to be honest it was rather amusing.

"I want her to myself?" Tamaki cried indignantly. "If we let you stay in the same room as her all night, you'll probably defile her. That's why she should stay with me. I'm much more gentle and understanding."

"Nah, you're just a pervert and you know it," the twins replied snidely. "Admit it, you'd love to watch her undress every night."
This set Tamaki off. The blonde began screaming at the top of his lungs, and even my ordering him to stop didn't seem to reach his ears. At this point I was extremely nervous, what if someone heard the noise and called the cops? How the hell would I explain all these guys suddenly living with me?

Of course, Hunny and Mori didn't seem bothered by the fighting, and Kyoya watched the spectacle with an almost amused look on his face.

"What are you smiling about?" I muttered at him.

I couldn't believe the next words out of his mouth.

"I'm just surprised that you find this sort of thing entertaining."

My jaw dropped.


He nodded calmly (stupid perpetually calm robot). "Why else would you allow them to fight like this without separating them?"

"How was I supposed to know they'd do this?"

"Didn't you read the manual?"

Again with those stupid manuals.

"What about them?" I asked after a beat.

"They explain the compatibility rate each of us have with each other," Kyoya explained. "For example, my compatibility rate is highest with the Princely Model, Tamaki, if you will, and lowest with the Wild type, Mori. This, of course, does not mean that we dislike each other, simply that we would not work well together in certain situations."

Since I already had an idea of what those 'certain situations' were, I let that slide.

"So what's the compatibility rate for them," I motioned towards the still arguing Tamaki, Hikaru and Kaoru.

Kyoya studied them for a moment while adjusting his glasses. Did I mention that already? Apparently he wears glasses to satisfy a potential glasses fetish the buyer might have. Yeah…

"They have the second highest compatibility rate," he answered. "However, they are prone to fights when disagreeing. If I were you, I'd read the manuals so you'll have a better idea of how to handle situations such as these."

He nodded in the other robot's direction. I looked and almost screamed when I saw them running at each other like they were about to start a brawl. Tamaki was wielding my broom like a samurai sword while the twins had gotten a hold of both the old mop, and the new one I'd just bought.

"STOP!" I shouted before a blow could be struck. "You are NOT fighting in here, understand?"

They looked at me, glanced at each other, and then grinned.

That's then I realized what a terrible mistake I'd made.

They started for the door, which was still wide open for some reason.
"You can't fight out there either," I frantically called after them. "The neighbors will see!"

That didn't stop them, to my horror. They just shouted that they'd 'make sure no one saw' and then they were gone.

"What are they doing?" I shouted. "Didn't they hear me?"

"They did," Kyoya confirmed with a nod. "They're doing as you said and making sure no one can see them."

I opened my mouth, intent on asking just where they could possibly go, when I suddenly got an answer.

Footsteps. Footsteps on the ceiling.

My face paled and my jaw dropped. I was outside before I even knew what had happened, staring up at the three incredibly idiotic robots on the roof of the building.

Their fight was already underway. Though it was two against one, Tamaki held his own fairly well. None of them actually knew how to 'sword fight', so there were a lot of off target swings, I think Hikaru might have accidentally hit Kaoru a couple of times (and vice versa).

"I'll never allow you doppelgangers to defile Haruhi!" Tamaki shouted, swinging at the twins heads.

"You'll do enough of that yourself, perve!" the twins retorted.

The fight continued. Tamaki began to lose his edge and got a mop head in the face several times. It was lucky my building has a flat roof, or there would've been even more trouble. Now I just had to get them off the roof without attracting any more attention.

At least, that's what I would've been thinking were I not so infuriated that my logical side wasn't working anymore.

"TAMAKI! HIKARU! KAORU! IF YOU ARE NOT OFF THAT ROOF AND BACK INSIDE IN FIVE SECONDS, YOU'LL SLEEP IN THE DUMPSTER, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

And that actually worked. They (and probably everyone within a five mile radius) immediately stopped and looked at me. They looked almost apologetic as they made like they were going to climb back down. I closed my eyes for maybe two seconds. Both to clear my thoughts and to pray that no one would find the shouting and the noises on the roof cause to come outside or worse, call the cops.

At least I'd stopped the insanity before things could get too out of hand.

CRASH

Or not.

I'd lost count at this point of how many times they did something to make my jaw drop. Were my life a cartoon, I imagine it would've fallen all the way to the ground, through the floor and onto the sidewalk below.

There was Tamaki, a suave smile painted across his face, standing in the middle of a wreck of broken wood and plaster and below a brand new gaping hole in my ceiling.

"What's the matter with you?" I heard the twins say, followed by another crash as they reentered the apartment through the window. "You don't come in through the roof. Use the window like a normal
"Nobody enters a house through a window, you idiots!" Tamaki countered. "I just wanted to get back inside fast, so Haruhi would know that I'll always do as she commands swiftly and without hesitation."

The twin robots glanced at each other, then shrugged.

"Well, at least we have a new skylight, right Haruhi?"

Unfortunately, I was too busy trying to keep my intense rage from boiling over to answer or see things from their perspective. I gazed at them and Tamaki. Judging by their smiles quickly fading and the looks of fear they adopted in place of them, I must've looked pretty scary.

"You three," I said in as even a voice as I could manage. "You will sleep in my father's room. Hunny and Mori will sleep in my room."

They opened their mouths all at once, ready to argue.

"I will NOT change my mind," I nearly yelled. "And you are going to fix that ceiling and the window, understand?"

The twins nodded, but Tamaki had a very different reaction: he ran to the corner of the room and crouched into a fetal position. I could just make out his crying over how angry he'd made me and how much he hated himself for it. I looked to Kyoya, who shrugged.

"Read the manual."

As he went back to using my laptop for God knows what, and Hunny talked to Mori about how amazing the kitchen was, and Hikaru and Kaoru muttered to themselves about how it was Tamaki's fault I was angry, and Tamaki himself continued to angst in the corner, I began to feel extremely tired.

That's went I realized that it wasn't even 1 p.m. yet.

It was going to be a long, long, long three months.

*Posted by Haruhi at 9:37 pm 0 comments*
Manuals And The Third Day

07.16.11

MANUALS AND THE THIRD DAY

Today was pretty quiet. It's been raining, so I mostly stayed inside with dad. It was actually kind of nice, we haven't been able to spend a day together in a few weeks now. I won't bore you with the details since there really isn't much to tell, so let's just get back to the story.

Now, I'm sure many of you who read the title of this post are probably wondering why I'm skipping to the third day of my little adventure. The answer is very simple: I spent the rest of the first day and all of the second day carefully reading all the user manuals and highlighting any and all important looking information (read: about two thirds of each one).

Most of them were just technical talk about their mechanics and what not, here are some of the more important details I remember:

The Princely Model (AKA Tamaki) was the most emotional and as such, may blame himself for anything that upsets me regardless of whether or not he had anything to do with it. He also sings and plays piano (he actually tried to run out and buy one when I told him I didn't own a piano).

The Cool Model (Kyoya) is extremely computer savvy (that explained a lot) and feels most comfortable when using one. Exactly what he would do with it, the manual didn't say, so part of me felt a little nervous when I saw him on some website I'd never heard of, typing at superhuman speed and smirking evilly.

The Mischievous Types (Hikaru and Kaoru)- well, first of all, they only came with one manual, something that probably shouldn't have surprised me. Anyway, they're programmed to do everything together. Everything. Walking, talking, sitting, standing, and anything else you can think of. Apparently, they were meant to fulfill a twin threesome fantasy. The manual even came with pictures and instructions in case the owner didn't know how to proceed. Moving on…

The Wild Type was actually programmed not to say more than fifty words every 24 hours. In fact, his manual was much shorter than all the rest and barely said anything about his personality. It's like he was meant to just stand around and be handsome when not engaging in sex.

Finally, the Loli-Shota. I was relieved to discover that Tamaki was telling the truth and the Loli-Shota was not meant for sex. He came with a stuffed bunny and apparently had a thing for elaborate cakes, which struck me as odd considering none of them eat.

There was a lot more, but these are the only things I haven't told you about already that are important for you to know.

While I was doing this reading, the robots were trying to figure out how to fix the hole in my roof and the broken window. We had a close call with my landlady an hour after the hole was made. Someone next door heard the yelling and thought I was in trouble or something. Luck was on my side that day, the landlady was sick with a bad cold and didn't even ask to come inside for fear of me catching it. I told her that I'd just put the TV on too loud and she believed it, but did warn me not to let it happen again.

Of course, it would only be a matter of time until someone noticed that hole. It was completely
visible when one stood a distance away from the building and I was amazed no one found it yet. I knew that my luck wouldn't last forever and so on the third morning, after I'd woken the six of them up, I gathered them in the living room to make my announcement.

"Okay everyone," I felt like a teacher giving a lecture, what with the upright way they were sitting and their rapt attentiveness. "There's a store two blocks away where I can buy supplies to fix the roof, the window can wait. I'm going to be gone for an hour at most, so-

"Wait, are you asking us to stay here?" the twins cut in.

I was about to respond, but Tamaki was a lot quicker. In a flash, he was off the couch and inches away from me with a frantic look on his face.

"Haruhi, darling, you can leave us here!" he cried. "What if something happens to you? WE WON'T BE THERE TO PROTECT YOU!"

"Please don't yell in my face," I said in a completely flat tone that sent him right back to that corner he'd grown so fond of.

"While Tamaki may be approaching this situation foolishly," Kyoya piped up. "I believe he does have a point. Part of our programming is to keep you safe and happy. In this situation, the emphasis goes on safe. Perhaps one of us should accompany you?"

I didn't know what to make of that. In the last two days, I'd come to the conclusion that Kyoya was the most rational out of all the robots and Tamaki the most moronic. If Kyoya was in agreement with Tamaki, it meant either the idiot was making sense, or Kyoya's programming was currently overriding his higher brain functions.

For my sanity's sake, I settled for the latter explanation.

Truthfully, I hadn't actually planned to let them out of the house at all. The odds of meeting up with someone I knew weren't incredibly high, but I didn't want to take any chances. My parents moved into this building several years before I was born and since then, only a few people ever moved in or out. We were all pretty friendly with each other, and normally I considered this a good thing. In this situation though, it definitely wasn't.

If anyone in my building found out that even ONE guy was suddenly living with me, they'd call my dad immediately and then he'd practically run back home to, 'rescue me from that potential rapist hooligan' (his exact words when he misinterpreted a study session between me and a male classmate as a date the year before). Then I'd have to explain the whole story to him and, assuming the news didn't give him a heart attack, he'd probably explode (I would say figuratively speaking, but I simply cannot guarantee that).

The only problem was getting them to agree to staying indoors at all times. Since they were apparently so 'devoted' to me, I doubted it would be a problem. As robots, they shouldn't have the free will necessary to disobey me, thinking they could was giving them too much credit.

You can sense all this fate tempting I'm doing, can't you?

As Kyoya spoke, they all looked at me expectantly. Even Tamaki poked his head out of the corner to hear my response. I sighed in annoyance.

"Look, I understand and appreciate your concern, but I don't need an escort. I've lived here my entire life and I've walked the two blocks and beyond numerous times, so I-"
"But what if something goes wrong?" The twins interrupted me.

"They're right, Haruhi!" Tamaki cried as he ran at me again. "What if you get attacked by thugs, or kidnappers or wild animals?"

I raised an eyebrow. "I highly doubt there'll be any wild animals in the middle of town."

I moved away from him and headed to the door, grabbing my wallet off the side table as I did so.

"Just don't worry, I'll only be an hour," I told them. "Stay here until then, I promise I'll be back, okay?"

Looking at them (specifically Tamaki, Hunny and the Twins), I could tell they still weren't happy about me leaving them behind, but I simply couldn't let that concern me. I shut and locked the door and walked down the steps to the ground floor where I started up the street to the hardware store. I resisted the urge to look back at the hole until I was safely around the corner and could continue my walk in relative peace. It surprised me how calm I felt at that moment, considering what awaited me back home.

Dealing with the store clerk wound up being easier than I'd expected. I wasn't really sure how to explain why I needed wood, plaster and the like, but the guy must have been the most mellow person alive, or else smoking something. He nodded and went along with everything I said, writing it down diligently and recommending a particular type of paint to use that would supposedly make the outline of the hole almost invisible.

The only problem was that most of the supplies weren't currently in stock, but he promised to order them and assured me they'd arrive in two to three days. Which meant two to three more days of praying that no one looked at the roof from far away. But I was in no position to complain and simply nodded, gave him my name and phone number and saw myself out.

On the way home, I mentally calculated the costs of all the equipment in regards to my monthly spending money. Dad usually sent enough to buy groceries and a little extra in case I wanted to get something for myself (read: buy some cute, girly outfits). Needless to say, I hadn't spent a yen of that money, so the amount I'd accumulated as well as a bit of the food money would have to go towards the supplies.

I made a stop at the grocery store on my way back. I'd been running out of milk and figured while I was out, I'd pick up a carton. While in the store, I encountered one of those familiar faces I'd been trying to avoid.

"Oh, Haruhi!"

I froze in place and barely managed to turn my head. It was Mrs. Fukuda, she and her family were relatively new in the apartment building, having moved in only two years previously. Her son, Hiro, was a total brat, you'll hear more about him later. But I digress.

I forced myself to smile at her. If she had seen the hole, I didn't want to give her another reason to think something was wrong.

"Good morning, Mrs. Fukuda, how are you today?"

She smiled pleasantly, which alleviated some of my worry.

"I'm just fine! Are you enjoying your summer so far?"
I felt like laughing in her face.

"Yes, I am. And I'm sure Hiro-kun is as well?"

"Oh yes, I haven't seen him this active since his birthday last month."

Okay, I'll spare you from the rest of the details, since the conversation basically continued like this for several minutes until I politely excused myself and headed to the checkout line.

The walk home was just as peaceful as the walk to the store. The only difference was that I had no choice but to look at the hole this time. It honestly wasn't that bad since the roof was flat, but you could still see the splintered wood sticking out at an awkward angle. I gave a sigh and looked away from the mess. No need to draw attention to it myself.

I climbed the steps at a steady pace, fully expecting to open the door and find all six of my unwanted guests waiting for me with all the artificial smiles and infatuation for me that I'd been dealing with for two days now. I got out my key, unlocked the door and opened it.

Want to take a wild guess at what I saw?

Wait, I should rephrase that.

Want to take a wild guess at what I didn't see?

That's right, the robots were gone. All of them.

The first thing I did was stand in the doorway, burning a hole through the couch with my eyes as if expecting them to appear out of thin air. Next, I searched the bedrooms, the kitchen, the bathroom, and even the closet. Nothing, nothing, nothing, and even more NOTHING. Finally, I stood rigid in the living room, my head spinning as I tried in vain to figure out what was going on.

Eventually, my wandering eyes found the kitchen clock. It read 12:15 pm.

It suddenly dawned on me just what had happened, and I was torn between being furious with them or with myself.

I had told them I'd be gone an hour and to wait here until then. If I remember correctly, I left the house at 11:05. Which means I arrived back ten minutes later than I'd said I would. Sometime in the last ten minutes, they must have decided I was in danger of thugs/kidnappers/wild animals and gone to look for me.

Which meant that six clueless, danger sense lacking and probably very expensive robots in my unwitting possession were currently wandering the streets on their own.

Now, I'm not one for cursing. I rarely ever do it unless I have sufficient cause. At this moment, I feel I had that and much, much more. I really don't think I could have given a more appropriate response to this little development.

"…fuck."

*Posted by Haruhi at 9:49 pm 0 comments*
You know what the best part of living in a city is? Lots of places to go and people to see.

You know what the worst part of living in a city is?

Well… I'm sure you can see where I'm going with this.

I honestly don't remember much of the hour I spent fruitlessly searching for them. I know I went back to the hardware store and the manager looked at me like I was nuts when I breathlessly asked if he'd seen a group of young men looking for me.

When I didn't find them, I searched the surrounding stores. Nothing. Then I tried the supermarket. Nothing. Then the stores surrounding the supermarket. Take a wild guess.

By now, I'd just about given up. I realized that while I'd told the robots I was going to a store two blocks down, I'd never specified which direction I was walking. They could have been anywhere.

I leaned heavily against a brick wall, letting my body slide to the ground as I played it all out in my head: I'd have to call that company back and tell them the robots had gotten lost. I'd probably be made to pay for whatever damages they'd received, if they were even found at all. My father would have a heart attack when he found out. We'd probably have to declare bankruptcy because there was no way we could pay for six extremely advanced robots. We'd lose the apartment, be out on the street…

The thoughts just kept on getting worse and I'm really not one for such dramatics, but under the circumstances, can you really blame me?

I sat there for ten minutes, probably looking very strange to passerby. Then something small and blonde appeared out the corner of my eye.

"Hey, Haru-chan," said Hunny. "You want to go get some cake?"

"Not right now, Hunny." I answered miserably.

And three…

Two…

One.

"HUNNY!"

My scream sent the small robot jumping back into his much taller companion whom I only just noticed right then.

"And Mori, you're here too?" I was too relieved to care what an obvious question that was.

"Yeah," Was his response.
"Takashi and I were looking at that bakery!" he pointed to a brightly colored shop the opposite direction from where I'd come. "They had these huge cakes in the window with fancy designs and they were all different flavors and everything! I wish I could eat them, but I can't, so do you want some?"

"Where were you?" I was in no mood to make small talk about cake.

"You didn't come back. We were worried," Mori deep voice rumbled.

"Yeah, Tama-chan was terrified," Hunny continued. "He kept crying that you'd been capturing by a band of gypsies and sold into indentured servitude to a desert warlord and that we had to travel thousands of miles through rain and snow and storms to stage a daring rescue!"

…nice. I didn't know 'Soap Opera Dramatics' were a feature of a Princely Model.

"Okay," I said, rubbing my now aching forehead between two fingers. "Just tell me where the others are so we can go home."

"Kyo-chan's over there!" Hunny pointed at a building several doors away from the bakery. It was a computer store.

"Why am I not surprised?" I muttered.

I motioned for Hunny and Mori to follow me as I walked across the street to the store all while trying to ignore the whispers and stares of women (and some of the men) who saw Mori. When we entered the store, I found Kyoya immediately. He was in plain sight clicking away at a laptop on display while a salesmen was going on about the features (I doubt Kyoya was actually listening).

I wasted no time in running over, ready to give him a piece of my mind. He seemed to sense my footsteps and looked up from the screen with a smile on his face.

"Why, hello there, Haruhi," he said in a cheerful voice, which was honestly kind of creepy coming out of his mouth. "This man here was just telling me about the new model laptops that just came in. I had no idea yours was so out of date."

"Out of date?" I repeated incredulously. "It's only two years old… look, it doesn't matter. Let's go."

"Oh-ho!" the salesman piped up. "She's a tough one. Your girlfriend?"

Kyoya smiled. "My lover actually."

I gasped, completely taken aback. He said it like he was telling someone the time! Damn, emotionless robot.

"Haru-chan, can Takashi and I go look at the cakes some more?" Hunny suddenly asked me.

I silently shook my head. The salesmen eyeballed Hunny and Mori.

"And who are these young men?" he asked me. "Friends of yours?"

"They are also Haruhi's lovers," Kyoya responded for me.

This, of course, made both mine and the salesman's jaws drop, but unlike me, the man recovered quickly.

"H-hey, that's cool!" he said raising his palms and sweating slightly from embarrassment. "That's
what your into, it's none of my business."

"N-no!" I shouted, desperate to salvage the situation as best as I could. "He was just kidding. I'm not actually romantic with any of them."

"Yes you are," Kyoya commented in an annoyingly playful tone. "At least you will be soon enough."

You have no idea how badly I wanted to hit him right then. And if I didn't know it would cause unnecessary attention and that he was probably made of metal or something and hitting him would hurt me more than him, I just might've.

Anything to get rid of that. Damned. *Smile.*

"Look, thank you, but we have to go," I said as politely as I could to the salesman while pulling Kyoya away and motioning for Hunny and Mori to follow.

"That was rather rude of you, Haruhi," Kyoya lightly berated me once we were outside.

"Shut up," I was beyond not in the mood for patronization. "Just tell me where Tamaki and the twins are and let's go home."

Kyoya adjusted his glasses, he had weird habit of doing that at odd moments.

"I couldn't tell you where the twins have gone off to, but I thought you'd know immediately where Tamaki is."

I blinked, what did he mean by that?

"Can't you hear it?" he answered my question before I could ask it.

I wondered for a moment just how he could do that, but then my ears picked up a sound I hadn't noticed before: a melody I was unfamiliar with being played on the piano. It was coming from a small restaurant/café next door, and already a small crowd had gathered outside to listen. I couldn't blame them, the song was beautiful.

"That's…" I trailed off. I could just make out the piano through the large glass window, and the person sitting behind it, while his face was indistinguishable, was definitely blonde. Just like Tamaki.

"You did read the manual, right?" Kyoya said in that smooth tone of his. "The Princely Model is programmed to be an expert piano player and knows over 700 pieces. He is also capable of learning more."

I shook my head a bit as I came out of my daze.

"Is that right?"

"Oh yes," Kyoya answered (that smile was back…). "He can even play Mozart's sonata for two pianos all by himself."

"…Okay, now that's just ridiculous," I said flatly.

He shrugged. "Call it what you like, it's true."

Did I mention he really got on my nerves sometimes?
With a sigh, I started towards restaurant. The four of us entered through the front door, and were greeted by the unobstructed sight of Tamaki at the piano. His eyes were closed, giving an appearance of concentration and serenity. I'll admit, I had to marvel at how different he looked when he wasn't crying and freaking out over every little thing. So very refined and serious.

I heard female sighs from all around me, it seemed he'd gained a couple of fans. I never would have admitted it out loud, but I could see why.

This was much more like the 'Princely' Character he was supposed to play.

The song ended and was met with thunderous applause. Tamaki opened his eyes as he stood to take a bow. His eyes caught mine midway and the next thing I knew, he was right in my face and, lying dramatically.

"HARUHI!" he shouted. "My darling! Thank Goodness you're safe! I was so worried, don't ever scare me like that again!"

And there went the charm again. It's simply amazing how easily he could switch between temperaments so quickly.

"You were certainly looking hard," Kyoya muttered, glancing at the piano.

"I was looking," Tamaki whined. "But then I saw the piano and the lovely owner asked if I could play. I simply couldn't turn her down!"

Oh yeah, that was another part of the Princely Model's programming. While his main priority would always be his lover, he had a severe compulsion to keep all woman he encountered happy, if in a non-sexual way.

Indeed, the middle aged female owner came right over and gushed about how amazing Tamaki had been. She seemed just as fangirly as the girls my age, which was creepy considering Tamaki was, by appearance, roughly 17 or 18 years old.

"I hope you'll come back to play again," the woman half stated, half pled.

Tamaki just gave her a charming smile. "As long as you'll have me, madam."

The woman giggled. That's right, giggled. These robots must have had hypnosis powers and weren't telling me about, to make a grown woman act so stupid.

So now I'd successfully located Hunny, Mori, Kyoya and Tamaki. That only left the twins. I recalled Kyoya saying he didn't know where they were. And upon asking, I found that none of the others did either. Great.

"Where do you think they went," I exasperatedly asked Tamaki.

"When I told everyone to split up and cover more ground, they went off in that direction."

He pointed to an alleyway which led off into another street. Wordlessly, I walked into the alley, knowing from experience that they'd follow me without complaint. We found ourselves surrounded by even more stores to search through. I had no idea what the twins were programmed to be interested in, only that they did everything together. This was not going to be easy.

"Okay," I said. "Let's start over here. We'll look through each store until we find them and then we're going back home."
"Wouldn't it be easier if we split up?" Tamaki suggested.

"No."

I made sure to be as firm as possible, not caring if it sent him running to the corner (it did, by the way).

"You're not leaving my sight again," I told them. "The last thing I need is for you to get lost for real. Now let's go."

"But we don't need to do that," Hunny said with a laugh. "We already found them!"

This earned another jaw drop. I know I keep saying this, but I don't usually do that. These robots were bringing out all sorts of weird emotions and reactions from me and I did not like it one little bit.

"You WHAT?" I shouted. "Why didn't you tell me? Where are they?"

Hunny didn't answer, aware that Mori would do it for him. The tall robot raised an arm and pointed behind me.

"Look."

His aim was extremely high, which unnerved me. I was almost afraid to turn around and when I finally forced myself to, I found that my fears were right on the money.

There were the twins staring down at me with identical Cheshire cat grins. From atop a fifteen story building.

Though they were high up, the wind carried their voices down to my level.

"HIIIIII HARUHIIIIIIII!

The people around us stopped and looked up. Whispers erupted instantly, they had all come to the obvious conclusion when you see people standing on the edge of tall buildings.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" I shouted. I knew they would hear me, all the manuals had said that the figures had superhuman level hearing.

"WE WANTED TO LOOK FOR YOU FROM A HIGH VANTAGE POINT!" They shouted back.

By now, everyone was staring at me. I'm not prone to getting nervous around large crowds, but due to the situation, this one was getting to me. I just wanted to get those idiots on the ground and run home as fast as possible so I could yell at them properly.

"JUST COME DOWN HERE!" I shouted back in a commanding tone. "COME DOWN RIGHT NOW!"

As I'm sure you can already imagine from reading the last few posts, this was an extremely poor choice of words on my part. I found that out immediately after when I could just make out the twins glancing at each other with synchronized shrugs. They looked back down, those wide, toothy grins ever present.

And jumped.

Posted by Haruhi at 8:57 pm 0 comments
Watching What I Say

07.18.11

WATCHING WHAT I SAY

Have you ever had a moment where time seems to stop?

Sort of like something happening that only lasts a few seconds but feels like a hundred years?

What am I saying, of course you have. Everyone has at least once.

The moment when the twins decided to jump off that building was one of these for me. In reality, it probably only took about 3 seconds for them to hit the ground, but for me it felt more like 3 hours, which it might as well have been considering I was able to quickly reevaluate my previous statement and realize what had gone wrong.

'Come down right now,' I had said. 'Right now."

Clearly, these robots were programmed to obey my every command, but took everything I said as literally as possible. So when I told them to come down 'right now,' they'd decided their best bet was to come down the fastest way possible.

Which happened to be jumping.

In front of a crowd of about 30 people excluding myself and the other 4 robots.

Kill me.

So as I was saying, they jumped off the building. Everyone started screaming, since it looked like the twins had done what the bystanders had all thought they were going to do. I was more concerned with praying they were durable enough to survive the fall, they couldn't be so blindly obedient that they'd endanger their own existence, right?

They landed on their feet. I didn't see it coming even though I probably should. They kind of slowed down a bit as they got closer to the ground, it seemed they did have something built in for situations like this (I have to wonder how that feature was initially pitched).

It should also be noted that they hit the ground at the exact same time, bent their knees on impact the exact same way and brushed themselves off completely in synch. They then proceeded to casually walk over to us as if they'd done little for than step over a puddle.

Okay, I know I've said this a million times now and I promise I will never say it again, but right now, it has to be said.

THEY. WERE. CREEPY.

Thank you and now, back to the story.

The twins closed in on me and smiled, separating from each other solely so they could wrap their arms around me from either side.

"We were worried, you know," they said cheekily. "You shouldn't run off like that."
I shouldn't?

And then the crowd started applauding. I'm completely serious. I actually jumped when I heard it because I'd momentarily forgotten they were there. I wondered what they could be cheering about, until a couple of them began yelling.

"That was awesome!"

"Best street performers I've ever seen!"

"How'd they do that?"

"They must be magicians or something, I don't even see any wires!"

The remarks left me completely speechless. Really, everything that was going on caused it, but this was the icing on the cake. And even worse, the twins were encouraging it. Once they figured out everyone was cheering for them, they let go of me and went to take a bow.

"Street performers," I muttered in a total daze. "They think you're street performers."

"If it bothers you so much," Kyoya said with a shrug. "You could correct them."

"How?" I shot at him. "You really think anyone's going to believe that you're all super advanced robots?"

"Technically, we're androids," he responded coolly. "And if that's the case, wouldn't it be easier to let them believe the twins are mere performers?"

I hated to admit it, but he had a point. Any attempts to explain the truth would land me a one way ticket to the nut house, best to leave things as they were.

"Alright, fine," I muttered to Kyoya, then I remembered something else important. "By the way, stop telling people you guys are my lovers."

Kyoya barely reacted.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" I repeated. "Do you have any idea how it would look to people if they thought I had six lovers?"

"Actually five," Kyoya motioned at Hunny. "But I think they'd imagine you are a wealthy young woman with several male escorts and be envious of your good fortune. If not that, they'd likely view you as a whore."

I know the manuals said that Mori was supposed to be the emotionless one, but Kyoya often made me wonder. I mean, how can anyone say something like that so calmly?

Shaking my head, I gave a sigh.

"Just don't say that anymore," I told him. "Make something up if you have to, but don't tell anyone you're my lovers. You aren't anyway."

He smiled, as if to say, 'not yet,' but I ignored it. I was far too exhausted to fight him anymore.

Now I just had to get the twins away from their adoring fanbase before things got worse.
"Hold it!"

Worse like two cops coming by and seeing the show, then deciding to step in.

They pushed their way through the swarm of people. One of them walked up to the twins while the other worked on breaking up the crowd. The former was the larger and more intimidating of the two, he stared down at Hikaru and Kaoru they were bugs under a microscope. He probably expected them to look away and cower in fear, but the twins just stared right back completely unfazed. After a minute of this, the cop seemed to realize he wasn't getting anywhere and switched tactics.

"I saw that little stunt you just pulled," his voice was deep and rumbling. "It was quite a show."

"Why thank you," the twins answered with wide grins.

"Yes…" the cop wore a fake smile of his own. "And I assume you boys had some sort of permit for your little stunt?"

Their smiles fell. The twins blinked and looked at each other, then turned to me.

"Hey Haruhi," they said. "What's a permit?"

If there was a wall nearby, I would have introduced it to my head a couple of times.

"Well," the cop said as his companion finished driving everyone off and went to stand next to him. "What do you say we go discuss this down at the station?"

The twins clearly didn't know what that meant, leaving me the one to object.

"Excuse me," I said loudly. "But what exactly are you arresting them for?"

The second cop raised an eyebrow. Staring down at my inferior height with a condescending look that really bugged me.

"Oh I don't know," he said sarcastically. "Apart from the lack of a permit for their performance, there's disturbing the peace, potential property damage-"

"What property damage?" I interrupted incredulously.

"Potential, I said," the cop coldly went on. "We don't know what kind of equipment they have up there."

My mouth hung open, but I couldn't speak. They'd left me completely lost for words and I could only watch as the twins were grabbed by the shoulders and pulled away.

Now, I'm sure you remember in my first post that the robots got arrested twice, and reading this, you're probably thinking this was the first time.

Well, it's not.

Yes, you read that right, they did NOT get arrested. The actual arrests, well firstly, all six of them were arrested both times. Anyway, the actual arrests didn't happen until a few weeks later. This time, the twins were saved at the last minute thanks to something I still to this day cannot believe they pulled off.

By 'they,' I specifically mean Kyoya and Tamaki. It started when the cops were about to cuff Hikaru and Kaoru. Kyoya suddenly took a determined step forward.
"Excuse me," he said in a business-like tone. "I'm afraid you can't do that."

The cops stared at Kyoya, then glanced at each other.

"And why not?" the second one asked with a smug smile.

If Kyoya noticed they were close to laughing at him, he didn't show it. Instead, he just went on as if they'd said nothing.

"Our elderly mother would just be crushed if they were sent to jail."

The first thing I noticed was that Kyoya was a spectacular liar. He gave no indication that his words were anything other than truthful. He looked them in the eye and spoke clearly and evenly. Unfortunately, they clearly didn't buy what he was saying, but I suppose that was a given. Nonetheless, Kyoya seemed to know what he was doing and turned to Tamaki.

"My brother, Tamaki, tells the story better than I do," he told the cops. "Go ahead, Tamaki."

The blonde smiled and stepped forward. He knew what Kyoya was doing?

"Oh yes," he said in an overly sad voice. "Our poor dear mother."

Now the cops really did laugh.

"You can't honestly expect us to believe you seven are siblings, can you?" The first one managed through his laughter.

"Not at all," Kyoya answered.

I was momentarily worried that he was about to blow it, but then he pointed at me and said:

"Haruhi here is our cousin."

The cops quieted, but they were clearly ready to laugh again at a moments notice. I could only hope whatever story Kyoya expected Tamaki to tell would convince them to let the twins go. We were all looking at him expectantly now and he appeared to be enjoying the attention.

"Our poor dear mother," Tamaki repeated with even more dramatics. "She adopted us, you see. We were orphans left in a cold, unfeeling orphanage. We're from all different backgrounds. I was the son of a man with a cruel mother who ordered my own mother away and secretly had me kidnapped and brought to the orphanage. I only found out years later that my grandmother and father were killed in a fire. My birth mother, I never heard of again.

"The six of us met and took comfort in each other. Without them, I don't think I would've survived the tremulous years that would follow. We were beaten daily. The headmistress was a cruel woman who hated children due to her inability to bear them. At times she would lock us and our peers in the basement as punishment for the most minor offenses. One day, she fed us cookies made with Tabasco sauce and told us if we didn't eat them all, we'd be insulting her cooking and would be punished severely. Poor Hunny here had it worst of all that day. He's allergic to Tabasco, you see.

"Our suffering didn't end until five years later, when our beloved adopted mother came and took all six of us in. She was an older woman already and like the headmistress, she'd never been able to have children of her own. Her home was the exact opposite of the orphanage, always warm and happy and full of love. She's a wonderful woman, our mother. You'd love her if you met her. Unfortunately, her age has recently been catching up to her. She broke her leg a few weeks ago and
has been bedridden ever since. The doctors say she'll make it, but they don't know if she'll ever fully recovered. Right now, we have every reason to believe she will never walk again. Our cousin, Haruhi, has been visiting to lend a hand, but it's just not enough.

"So you see, you can't arrest my younger brothers. If even one of us got into some kind of trouble, it would crush mother completely. We mean the world to her and we're all she has. I promise they'll never disturb the peace again and you'll find no damages to the building. Just… please…"

Yup.

That's the story he told. I couldn't make this up if I tried. It's like every bad Oscar bait film rolled into one and featured on the Lifetime channel. And you know what the craziest thing is?

They bought it.

Really! By the time it was over, both cops were in tears and believe it or not, I couldn't blame them. The story itself was a big fat lie, obviously, but the way he told it. He made a lot of ridiculous 'woe is me' poses like the over actor he was, but Tamaki actually sounded convincing. I almost wanted to cry myself.

Sensing my amazement, Kyoya leaned over to whisper in my ear.

"The Princely Model has an emergency function which allows him to tell lies naturally and make them sound like the truth," he explained in a smooth voice, "It's not an oft-used function, which is why you didn't find it in the manual. Each of us has one, and each one is different."

"Oh really," I whispered back. "What your's then?"

He smiled that smile again. "Maybe I'll show you one day."

God, he pissed me off.

"O-okay kids," the first cop said, drying his tears. "You're free to go, just don't let it happen again."

"I hope your mother get's better," the second one cried. "I had a sick mom too once!"

The two cops continued crying all the way back to their car. Tamaki looked predictably smug and the twins just shook off what had happened like it was nothing.

"Alright," I said. "It's time to go home and I don't want you to EVER leave the apartment without my permission again, is that understood?"

"But Haruhi," Tamaki protested. "What if you-"

I cut him off with the most vicious glare I could muster. I was NOT in the mood to listen to more melodrama. It proved to be a mistake as the blonde immediately ran to the wall and sat facing it in a fetal position. It took ten minutes to get him out.

The rest of the day was pretty uneventful. We went back to the apartment, I explained that the supplies for fixing the hole and the window would arrive in a few days and I made a mental note to remember that from then now, I had to clearly elaborate whenever I asked them to do something. The last thing I needed was for them to misunderstand a phrase like 'give me a hand' and actually take of one of their hands and give it to me.

I didn't know if they could do that, but they'd sure done everything else so far.
Okay, I think I'll end this here for tonight. I've had a long day and I'm turning in early.

Good night, everyone.

Posted by Haruhi at 10:48 pm 0 comments
A Bit Of An Intermission

07.19.11

A BIT OF AN INTERMISSION

I'll admit right now this is going to be the shortest post barring the first one. There are several reasons for this, the most prominent being that I want to get it out of the way fast so I can get to more important events.

I just want to quickly explain what happened two days later, when the supplies for fixing the ceiling arrived.

First of all, I was still wary of letting anyone see who was living with me. Tamaki may have been the Emperor of Sob Stories, but I still didn't want to take any chances. I'd arranged for the supplies to be delivered to my house, so when I heard the doorbell, I immediately ushered the robots into the next room while I paid the delivery man and let him unload the stuff in my living room.

When he was gone, the robots came back out and I set them to work. I'd read that they could and would perform manual labor, but the instructions did warn that none of them had that as an actual proficiency. At the time, I ignored that part, figuring it didn't matter.

It did.

A lot.

It honestly wasn't as interesting as you think since everyone was too busy trying (and spectacularly failing) to work. I'll just give you a play by play:

First, Tamaki decided since he was meant to be the 'leader' of the group, he would do the majority of the repair work, failing to mention he didn't even know the difference between a hammer and a screwdriver. This became a problem very quickly, when he tried to hammer the screws into some boards for no apparent reason (nowhere in the instructions did it mention needing screws) and wound up breaking almost all the spare wood in about five minutes, until Kyoya finally took it from him and said something to banish the blonde into the corner.

I felt a bit of gratitude for Kyoya right then, he didn't usually do much to help and when he did it was in a very snarky fashion that I didn't appreciate. I figured he'd be taking over from there, since he was apparently 'second-in-command.' Instead, he gave me that stupid smug smile I was really growing to hate and said:

"I'm not one for partaking in lesser man's work."

Then he casually tossed me the screw he'd taken from Tamaki and went back to my laptop while I silently fumed and planned his imminent destruction. Stupid, sarcastic, hoiler-than-thou, robot...

Now it was the twins' turns and it was a disaster before they even got started. The problem wasn't so much that they didn't know what they were doing and more that they insisted on treating it like a game. They tossed each other the hammer and nails like it was some sort of dance and raced to see who could mix the plaster fastest, getting a good bit of it on the walls and the carpet. When a glob of it came mere inches away from hitting my mother's picture, I finally decided enough was enough.

Well, actually I became so enraged at seeing my only picture of her almost defiled, I briefly lost my
sanity as well as my memory of what happened next and just what I said to them. All I know is that the twins were afraid to look me in the eye for two days afterwards.

Hunny stepped up to help now and since he and Mori hadn't really been a bother up until now (aside from the running away thing, of course), I figured he'd at least try to do it right. And he did, at least at first. Then he decided the ceiling would look better painted a different color. Unfortunately (for him anyway), I hadn't brought any paint besides the color my ceiling was already painted. If I thought this would stop him, I really should have known better.

The boy immediately jumped down off the ladder I'd borrowed and ran to my room before I could ask what he was doing. He came back with my old box of markers and colored pencils, insisting we take all the blue ones and paint the ceiling with them.

I was about to, as gently as I could with my ever rising blood pressure, dissuade him from messing things up further, but Tamaki chose that moment to come out of his 'woe is me' state and begin lecturing the smaller robot about why we couldn't paint the ceiling blue.

It would have been much appreciated, had Tamaki's reasons not been that red was a better color.

And of course, the twins then felt the need to get in on the action, proclaiming that green was the best color and then trying to use the advantage of their being two of them to sway things in their favor.

I don't think I need to say that from there, things went downhill and fast. Tamaki managed to confuse whatever they were saying as something dirty about me (you'll find in later posts that he tends to do this a lot) and began yelling at the top of his lungs while Hunny collected all the blue pens and pencils. Tamaki noticed him first and turned his anger towards the small robot. He seemed to forget that Hunny was a martial artist and therefore much stronger than him. An admittedly very frightening glare from Hunny changed all that and sent Tamaki running for the corner again.

The twins began a fight with Hunny over the markers now, struggling to grab the green ones and get the blue ones away from him. Kyoya was easily ignoring the whole thing with a concentration I deeply envied. I had no idea where Mori was during all this, he usually either joined in with Hunny or stopped him when the small blonde was genuinely in the wrong, but at the moment he was nowhere to be seen. I didn't concern myself any further with him, I was too busy trying to stop the fight. Hunny at one point brought up an open blue marker and drew a jagged line across Kaoru's cheek. Suddenly, all bets were off.

The fight lasted a good ten minutes. When it became clear that I was involved, Tamaki once again stopped sulking and immediately sprang into action, shouting something about "Protecting [his] beloved from the clutches of the demon doppelganger aliens!" or something stupid like that.

The five of us fought with the markers until Kyoya finally seemed to notice the EXTREMELY loud arguments happening not two feet away from him and looked up.

"Excuse me," he said, adjusting his glasses. "I don't mean to interrupt your display of childish idiocy, but the repairs are complete."

I must have stared at him for a full minute, trying to wrap my mind around what he'd just said. The bespectacled robot noticed this and gestured with his head to the ceiling. I looked up and I swear, my jaw really did drop through the floor this time.

The hole was gone. Completely gone. By that I mean not a trace of it was left, it was like it had never even been there. I couldn't fathom how it had happened until I noticed Mori slowly coming down from the ladder with a hammer and a paintbrush in one hand and a bucket of paint in the other
(yes, he did come down the ladder with no hands and if that surprises you, you haven't been paying attention).

And that's how the hole in my ceiling was fixed and also how I learned what Mori's 'Special Emergency Talent' was. Where Tamaki could tell the world's most convincing lie, Mori could fix almost anything where hardware was concerned (I suspected software was more Kyoya's field). By fix, I mean 'make it look like nothing had ever been broken.' I had no idea how it worked and to this day, I still don't. Anyway, that wasn't my biggest concern at the moment anyway.

"Why didn't you tell me he could do that in the first place?" I was fighting VERY hard to control the anger in my voice as I addressed Kyoya.

The dark haired robot just looked at my blue, green and red ink covered face, infuriating smile in place, and said:

"Why didn't you ask?"

I hated him so much right then.

So, that was the end of my first problem. My next problem would come a day or two later and trust me, it made the hole look like a paper cut.

That's the main reason I wanted to just speed through this story. It really wasn't as interesting as it sounds and I honestly don't remember most of it anyway. This was just a vague description of what went on.

The events of the next few days were so bizarre and exhausting that they pretty much erased all my concerns over the hole forever. I swear, it was like a sitcom that had taken a bunch of drugs and tried to drive down the countryside at night. I still don't know how we got out of it and how I didn't lose my sanity in the process.

But enough about that, it's for next time anyway.

See you then.

*Posted by Haruhi at 8:01 pm 0 comments*
THE START OF AN EVENTFUL WEEK

I took an extra day to post this for two reasons.

1. My friend Mei came to visit and stayed the whole day. She doesn't exactly know about this blog yet.

Or at least I hope she doesn't…

2. I needed a little more time to consider how exactly I'm going to go about telling this part of the story. It really shouldn't be this difficult. Crazy as this is going to get, it's a pretty straightforward story.

I guess I should just start from the beginning.

It was two days after the whole 'Roof Fixing' incident. I'd gotten Mori to clean up the messes Tamaki and the twins made, so I was in a considerably better mood (not exactly Miss Sunshine or anything, just better).

The twins never spoke of what happened, and Tamaki apologized for any offense he may have made against me roughly 1,000 times.

An hour.

It seemed no matter how many times I told him it was fine and I'd forgiven him, he just kept on believing I was deeply offended and now hated him. By the second day, I really wished that was a feature I could turn off.

Really, the only ones more annoying than him were the twins (okay, maybe Kyoya), especially since, unlike Tamaki, they never once apologized for the chaos they'd started. Made a bit worse by the fact that they'd become addicted to my TV and wouldn't stop watching for anything. They're taste in programming was... odd, to say the least. One minute they'd be engrossed in some kind of violent Serial Mystery and the next they'd be watching reruns of Pokemon. I had to wonder if they were even paying attention to the shows themselves and weren't just fascinated by the pretty lights and sounds.

Whether or not this was the case wound up becoming invalid anyway. Two days later, they just stood up with no warning and stalked towards me with dual expressions of seriousness and determination. It was as odd looking on them as it sounds.

"We want to go to the movies," They said. Not asked, mind you.

At the time, I'd been sitting at the kitchen table eating a late breakfast. Their request jarred me from my eating and I spent a few seconds just staring at them with my mouth wide open and a pair of rice filled chopsticks hovering over it.

"W-what?" was all I could say in response.

"We just saw a movie commercial," they answered. "It said it was a 'must-see' movie event, so we
Okay, let me just stop here for a second and explain something. Now, I know looking at that statement, you'd think the robots had some weird inability to understand expressions and figurative language. You'd be partially right, there were genuine times when this was the case. Not this time. Definitely not this time.

I knew this immediately for two reasons. One, they were smiling, cat-like smiles that clearly showed a hidden agenda. Two, less than an hour ago they'd been heavily engrossed in some sitcom where a couple was at the movies and not watching it, if you catch my drift.

Did I mention these were learning robots? Because they were. Whether or not that's a good thing is entirely up for debate.

So, with every reason to believe the twins didn't care one bit about this 'must-see' movie of theirs, I prepared to give them a negative answer. Unfortunately, they caught on and quickly changed tactics.

The next thing I knew, they had me in one of their double hugs and were nuzzling their cheeks into mine on either side.

"Come on, Haruhiiii," they whined. "We only want some time out of the house with you. Just the three of us. Can't you picture us all alone together in a dark room…"

Three.

Two.

One.

"HOLD IT!"

Right on time.

Tamaki jumped in front of us, a hand held out to further emphasize his point.

"Just what do you creepy clones think you're doing?" The blonde demanded. "How many times do I have to tell you, Haruhi doesn't want to be alone with you too. She knows you'll just defile her purity with your filthy thoughts and actions!"

Oh what, he's a mind reader now?

The twins were unable to respond, thank to the (in)conveniently timed comment by Hunny, who I was starting to realize was very good at that.

"Why don't we all go together?"

The twins and Tamaki stopped their glaring to look at the smiling Hunny. Mori was nodding in agreement, silent as ever, and Kyoya wasn't even paying attention (what else was new?).

"We can have a group date," The small robot continued. "It'll be fun!"

From the corner of my eye, I could see the twins weren't pleased about this. Tamaki immediately declaring this to be an excellent idea probably didn't help much. Even so, their smiles weren't gone for long, and I had a feeling they weren't going to let this go so easily.

In fact, now everyone wanted to go to the movies, even Kyoya had begun looking up showtimes on
the laptop; and loathes as I was to admit it, I kind of wanted to go too.

I hadn't actually left the apartment in the last three days. Normally I'd go out for an hour or so even if I had nothing to buy and just take a nice walk. My lack of trust in my 'guests' had put an end to that. I didn't even like leaving them alone to use the bathroom, let alone to take an hour-long walk. To be honest, I was beginning to feel a tiny bit of cabin fever.

I tried to fight it, but their pleading faces were slowly wearing me down. I had to wonder if 'coercive cuteness' was some other hidden ability of theirs that Kyoya wasn't telling me about. I kept switching from determined to say no to contemplating the cost of such a venture. They didn't eat or drink and I'd only need a water bottle, the spare money should cover the ticket price. It would work… but no! They'd definitely try something, or run off, or do something stupid to get up kicked out.

"Pleeeease, Haru-chan!" Hunny gently pulled at they arm and stared up at me with big, close to tearfilled eyes.

Oh, he was good.

I gave a sigh and went to grab my wallet while the four of them cheered and Kyoya bought the tickets online.

'I really hope I don't regret this,' I thought to myself.

Oh, if only I had known…

Thirty minutes later, we all sat in a row near the center. Tamaki was on my right, and Kyoya on my left. The twins had tried to seat me between them, but I had to refuse after seeing Tamaki about to start shouting. That was the last thing I needed to happen in a crowded movie theatre, so this one time I just did as he wanted. The twins didn't like it, but unlike Tamaki, they simply sat on down and kept eerily quiet.

The trailers started up first, but nothing really interesting was coming out. It was around this time I realized I had no idea what kind of movie we were seeing. All Kyoya had said was that it was imported from America.

It turned out to be a movie about some guy who could shoot green light out of his hand or something. I think it was supposed to be a superhero movie, but I've never been interested in that sort of thing. Anyway, I started to tune the movie out around twenty minutes in, unlike Tamaki, the twins and Hunny, who were so deeply engrossed in the story. a bomb could've gone off next to them and they probably wouldn't even flinch. I couldn't really tell if Mori was enjoying it, he was as stoic as ever. Kyoya, on the other hand, clearly shared my sentiments if his growing restlessness meant anything.

"Stop that," I whispered to him when he moved to adjust his glasses for the twelfth time. "It gets on my nerves."

Kyoya gave me a look. It wasn't quite a glare, but pretty close.

"This is impossibly boring," he droned. "I still don't see why I couldn't bring your laptop."

"Well, you're the one who bought the tickets," my voice was dripping with annoyance.

"Yes, but you're the one who agreed to this in the first place," Kyoya smirked at me. "You should start accepting responsibilities for your actions."
That teared it.

"Just who do you think you are?" I sprang out of my seat.

All around, people shushed me, but the other robots were still too into the movie to realize what was happening.

I came to my senses enough to sit back down and lower my voice, but I still had a few more things to say.

"You are unbelievable," I hissed at his stoic face. "It's like your sole purpose is to make things more difficult for me. Why can't you just...

I stopped. The words were jumbled in my head and I couldn't continue. Kyoya raised an eyebrow, likely filling in the blanks.

"Why don't I act like the others?" He asked. "How so?"

I shook my head a few times to clear it.

"Well for starters, you don't even try to make this easy for me. I never counted on having a bunch of robots living in my house. You rarely ever help, and when you do, you're so rude and sarcastic about it. The others may act idiotic, but at least they treat me with respect and don't act all condescending!"

I stopped when someone two rows above threw a bottle cap that hit me square on the forehead.

"Would you shut up, bitch?" The guy who threw it shouted.

I could hear murmurs of agreement from the group he was sitting with, which ended when Kyoya suddenly stood up and faced them.

"I must say," He said to them in a cheerful tone. "It's rather amusing that you felt the need to shout so loud, considering you're goal seems to be making my friend here be quiet. A bit counterproductive, no?"

The group stared at him (at least I think they did, dark movie theatre and everything) and there was a brief pause before one of them spoke.

"Are you trying to start something?" He demanded threateningly.

"Not at all," Kyoya was predictably unfazed by the man's comment. "I'm simply pointing out the irony of your statement. I'd also appreciate it if you didn't make your point through violence. Throwing that bottle cap wasn't called for, and I may just have to throw something back at you if you do it again."

"Excuse me."

I didn't turn around to see where the unfamiliar voice was coming from, mostly because whoever it was was shining a flashlight straight at us.

"What is going on here?" The employee hissed at us. "Who's making all this noise."

"Forgive me, sir," Kyoya spoke quickly but calmly. "This gentleman here felt the need to throw a bottle cap at my friend for no reason and is now trying to make it sound like she's in the wrong."
My eyes widened, and I'm guessing the man and his friends' did too. Here I thought Tamaki was the proficient liar.

"The Hell are you talking about?" The man who'd thrown the bottle cap raged as he stood up. "That bitch was talking up a storm!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kyoya easily lied. "She wasn't making a sound, isn't that right, gentlemen?"

At first I thought he was talking to the thugs, but then I heard some shuffling behind him and realized the other had stood up and were now looking at the employee.

"She's been perfectly silent," Tamaki confirmed with a nod and a smile. "My dear Haruhi is a model citizen. She'd never do anything as horrendous and vile as talk through a movie, and she'd certainly never throw anything at people who do."

"Got that right," the twins agreed, holding up the offending bottle cap they'd picked up off the floor. Faced with evidence of the throwing and several testimonies, it was clear who was going to win this battle.

"Alright," the employee said to the group of men. "I want all of you out of here, now."

They tried to argue, becoming increasingly louder in their outbursts and bothering more and more people every second until the employee had to force them out of the theatre. They sent several looks in our direction on their way out. I couldn't see them all that clearly in the darkness, but I had a good feeling those looks weren't exactly polite.

The second they were gone, everyone was back to the movie. Except for me and Kyoya, obviously.

"Why did you do that?" I whispered to him.

"Isn't it obvious," he answered in a shockingly warm tone. "You are my only love, Haruhi. I want you to be respected, always."

His words were pleasant enough, but the fact that he said them with that same old smirk of his left seeds of doubt for his validity.

Even so, a good part of me couldn't help but feel grateful, and I began to wonder if maybe he wasn't as much of a pain as I'd thought.

When the movie ended (and by ended, I mean the credits had finished rolling ten minutes ago, but Tamaki and the twins refused to leave), we exited the theatre and I disposed of my empty water bottle in a nearby trashcan.

"That was fun!" Hunny was exclaiming. "I wanna see it again, right Takashi?"

"Yeah."

"Not today," I told him in a gentle but firm tone. "One time is enough for now, and anyway, we should get back before dark."

Immediately after saying this, I felt someone grab my arm and roughly pull me away from the robots. I gave a yelp, which was cut short when the person holding me shoved a knife against my throat.

"Haruhi!" I heard Tamaki shout.
"Back off," the man holding me yelled at them.

I felt something drop into my stomach. I recognized that voice, it was the guy who'd thrown the bottle cap. Footsteps alerted me to the presence of his friends. They all stood in a line on either side of me, facing down the enraged robots.

"What are you doing?" I gasped when the man holding me pressed the knife into my neck a bit more.

"Shut up, would you?" The guy next to him snapped at me. "Do you ever stop talking? You wouldn't be in this mess if you'd just keep you mouth shut."

"That's right," The man holding me said, leaning down close to whisper in my ear. "I may have to shut it permanently."

And I think that's a good place to stop.

Don't look at me like that, this is a long story and it's going to get extremely convoluted. I'll be back tomorrow and get to the next part. Oh, and since I'm sure it's bothering some people, I promise after this, there won't be anymore cliffhangers for a while.

Probably.

Posted by Haruhi at 11:57 pm 0 comments
LOSING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION

There are two ways people usually deal with fear. The most common way is probably to freak out, at least that's what TV tells us. We've all seen it on Crime Dramas where the victim (often a female) is captured by the bad guy and held at gun/knife/whatever point. They shake and shiver and cry and wait for the hero to save them, unless of course the show feels like shaking things up and having the victim save themselves. Either way, there's always at least a little bit of crying and visible fear.

The other way is… well, the exact opposite of the first way. Some people just don't show fear the way other people do, or at all. It doesn't matter how dire the situation, they'll still maintain a calm composure, even if inside, they're scared to death.

If this experience taught me anything, it's that I am of the latter camp. I was scared of course, you'd have to be crazy or suicidal not to be even a little scared when someone much bigger and stronger than you is holding you at knifepoint. However, I didn't shake, I didn't cry, I didn't even whimper. Actually, if I could've seen my face in a mirror, I imagine I probably just looked confused.

The man's grip was extremely tight, so I didn't even bother trying to break free. I knew that however strong this guy was, he most likely paled in comparison to the six robots.

Oh, speaking of which, you're probably wondering how they were taking this.

"YOU FIENDS!" Tamaki yelled. "HOW DARE YOU DEFILE MY HARUHI WITH YOUR FILTHY HAND! UNHAND HER AT ONCE OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES!"

"Yeah," the twins continued. "We'll break your skulls open!"

"You should never pick on a girl," Hunny stuck his tongue out at them. "Meanie-faces!"

The last one got the thugs laughing. The one holding me kept his knife steady, though I'm pretty sure he was close to breaking the skin at this point.

Tamaki and the twins looked ready to lunge at them, but something held them back. Kyoya ended up making the first move, although this only consisted of taking two steps forward and pushing up his glasses. He studied the thugs intently, placing special attention on the one holding me. I had no idea what he was thinking or how he was planning to get us out of this. The minutes dragged on, or so it felt. Really, I don't even know how much time passed before Kyoya finally spoke.

"You're doing this because we got you thrown out of a movie?" He asked like he was asking them the time. "Seems a bit disproportionate. Can't you just see the movie again at a later point in time?"

"You really think they'll let us back in the theatre?" The man holding me retorted. "We've already been thrown out of there, like, fifty times before. No way we're getting back in now. And it's the only movie theatre for ten miles."

"Hmmm," Kyoya brought a hand to his chin. "I don't see why they wouldn't let you back in. If they've been tolerant of the other 50 instances of disturbing the peace, why should this one be any different?"
Around me, I could see the thugs giving incredulous looks to Kyoya.

"50?" The man repeated. "Dude, I was just exaggerating 'cause... you know... it's been a lot of times... What the Hell is wrong with you?"

"I'd have to say there's something wrong with you," Kyoya smugly answered. "You're the one who lied about how many times you've been thrown out and then tried to make it sound like I was the one at fault."

"Are you ON something?" The man bit back. I noticed his grip on me was beginning to loosen, but not enough for me to break it. "Quit twisting my words around!"

"I don't see how I can twist your words," Kyoya put on a confused look that I couldn't determine as being fake or real. "Words are not tangible things. I cannot physically take your words from your mouth and twist them in any direction with my hands. You really don't make a lot of sense."

The man sputtered for several seconds, and I can't say that I blamed him. Kyoya was really something right now. I knew he was the smartest, so he should know this guy wasn't speaking literally. Was he just trying to confuse him?

"You have got to be kidding me," It seemed my captor had finally regained his voice. "You can't possibly be serious!"

"Actually, I'm not," Kyoya smiled cheerfully. "I'm just trying to distract you."

"Distract me?" The thug repeated. "From what?"

Kyoya's smile became a smirk as he motioned with his finger for the man to look around. I did the same, and instantly realized two things which I probably should've noticed a long time ago.

First, every robot besides Kyoya were no longer standing next to him. I don't know when they disappeared or why I didn't notice. I had a multitude of theories from temporary selective blindness to Kyoya’s 'special talent' being some from of hypnosis. For the record, neither of those theories ended up being correct. The truth was... I have no idea why I didn't notice. Frankly, I don't even care that much.

The second thing you can probably figure out from reading the first thing, but I'll tell you anyway.

The second thing was that all the thugs besides the one holding me were now unconscious on the ground. Tamaki, the twins and Hunny stood over them with identical looks of triumph on their faces as they congratulated each other on a job well done (it should be noted that the twins were being extra careful to trample the thugs they'd taken down whenever the had the chance).

The remaining thug gasped and began to shake. He backed up a bit, still holding me. He stopped after hitting what felt like a wall, but that couldn't be since we were nowhere near one. That's when I realized one of the robots was still missing. I had to crane my neck all the way up, but I eventually saw Mori bearing down on us, his hard gaze resting square on the thug.

A brief staring contest followed, the thug was clearly too scared to do anything but stand rigid in shock. Mori wordlessly raised a hand and grabbed the arm that held the knife to my throat. He wrenched it away with ease, and I immediately took my cue to run away. I felt myself grabbed again a second later, but this time it was by Tamaki, and so I relaxed.

The blonde robot pulled me into his arms and refused to let go, even after I squeaked and began to fidget. He put his face in the crock of my neck and exhaled deeply (yes, they could breath, sort of.
"I was so worried," He whispered. "Don't ever scare me like that again."

For the few seconds after he said that, I had to stop fidgeting. Not because I was so deeply affected by his words, I just was surprised by how honest and genuine they sounded. I knew they said they loved me, but I figured it was just programming, and there wouldn't be any real emotion behind it.

I was very slowly coming to see that this may not have been the case.

Meanwhile, Mori was still silently threatening the thug. The man had dropped his knife (not like it would've done much good) and was now trying to find an opening to run away. Mori got to him first. The much taller 'man' grabbed the thug by his collar and lifted him about three feet in the air, holding him at arms length. What was interesting was that his face maintained the usual look of expressionless boredom, even though when he spoke (and said the longest sentence I'd ever heard from him thus far), his voice was low and, dare I say it, frightening.

"Leave Haruhi alone. Don't come near her again."

With that, he dropped the thug to ground. The terrified man needed no further prompting, he tore out of the alleyway with a scream, leaving his knocked out gang behind.

The twins cheered, jumping up high so they could clap Mori on the back. The large man didn't acknowledge them and simply walked up to me, a funny look I couldn't identify in his eye.

By now, Tamaki had let go of me and stood back, perhaps recognizing that Mori wanted to have a moment with me to himself. I was unsure of what to say. In the time since I'd gotten these robots, I'd have fairly lengthy conversations with all of them except Mori. Just why was he programmed to be so quiet anyway? Were there people who actually liked this sort of thing? I found it more odd than I did sexy.

"Uh…" I searched for the right words. This wasn't going to be easy. "I… Thank you, Mori. Thank you very much."

It was stupid and standard and I didn't really say anything. And yet, Mori gave me a reaction I never would've expected.

He smiled.

It wasn't a grin, it wasn't even a particularly defined smile, but it was a smile none the less. Then he reached out and lightly patted me on the head. I didn't really know how to feel about that, and I really wished he would just say something. Why did he have to be such an enigma?

So, your probably thinking the post will end here. You're also probably wondering why I played this event up as so insane when it really wasn't anything that special.

Well, you're wrong on both counts.

There's one more thing I have to tell you before I wrap this entry up, and it involved the direct effects of this little fight scene. The fight itself wasn't part of the event, rather, it was the trigger for it. So here's how it REALLY started:

What I'd failed to notice, again, was that the fight had drawn a pretty substantial crowd. Okay, maybe 'failed to notice' isn't really the right phrase. I did notice, I just didn't care to acknowledge it at the time, figuring nothing would really come of it since they hadn't done anything indicative of being
more than human (except maybe Mori).

Boy, was I wrong.

"Excuse me, Excuse me! Coming through!"

I heard the voice before I saw who it belonged to. People in the crowd would jerk to the side, glaring down at whatever had run into them. Whoever it was made a path and got through the crowd a second later, finally allowing me to see his face.

The first thing I noticed was that he was short. Very short. Not quite to dwarfism levels, but pretty close. He was probably middle aged if his slightly worn face and graying hair were any indication. He wore a regular business suit and for some reason had a whistle around his neck, that was kind of weird.

He had a large smile on his face. Not a warm smile, mind you. He looked more like a villain in a Child's TV show. Minus the black clothing and mustache twirling stuff.

His gaze was set on the robots, and warning bells went off like crazy in my head.

"Hey there," Even his voice sounded wrong. "That was some amazing stuff you guys did just there."

I could tell the robots didn't really know how to take that. All except Kyoya of course. It was like he was their spokesperson or something.

"It wasn't really much," Modesty didn't really suit him, I noticed. "Our friend here was in danger, I'm sure you would have done the same for your close friend."

"Oh yeah, sure," His distracted tone said way more than his words. "Anyway, I'm Jonii Usagiuma."

He said it in a dramatic fashion, as if expecting us to immediately know who he was and flock to him like sheep. Obviously, none of us did that, we just stood silently while he slowly deflated.

"Jonii Usagiuma," He repeated a bit more firmly.

We continued to not react, so he gave an annoyed sigh.

"I'm a very prominent TV show director," He explained. Instantly, he brightened up again. "And I've decided you six would be fantastic on my new show!"

I don't know about the robots, but my reactions was instantaneous. Wide eyes, skin losing color, a weight dropping in mind stomach. You know, the usual.

"Oh no!" I said a bit too forcefully. "No, no thank you sir. My friends here aren't interested."

He raised an eyebrow at me.

"And who are you, their agent?" His voice was completely condescending. "Why don't we let them speak for themselves."

We both looked up at the robots. They had varying looks of confusion, nonchalance and thoughtfulness.

"You want us to be on TV?" Tamaki questioned, the look in his eye was not one I could say I liked. Usagiuma grinned. "Of course! It's a primetime slot even. You'll be the stars of the show and
everyone will know your names."

He paused and wrapped an arm around me before I could stop him.

"You'll even impress the girl here," He pointed at me. "She may be a stick in the mud now, but wait until she sees your names in lights. She won't know which of you to choose."

"Get off me!" I jerked away and he didn't stop me. The damage had been done anyway.

I could see Tamaki, the twins and Hunny definitely wanted to do it now. Mori would probably do whatever Hunny did and Kyoya would never miss an opportunity to make me angry. It amazed me that no matter how hard I tried to explain to them that they could not, under any circumstances, do anything conspicuous in public. As you've probably come to realize, it was about the only thing they never listened to me on.

Usagiuma practically ran over to them, pulling several papers out of his jacket pocket. Once I realized what they were, I couldn't believe he'd actually carry them around him, like he expected to randomly find people on the street he could scout.

"If you'll all just sign here, please," He pointed to a spot on the paper and held out a pen to Kyoya, the one closest to him.

"You guys," I began a last ditch effort to stop this before it went too far. "You guys don't really want to do this, right?"

My desperation probably showed very clearly on my face, and it definitely wasn't a good thing. If I'd learned anything about Kyoya, it was that he interpreted everything as a yes. Either that, or he was just a complete asshole who got off on tormenting me. I would not have a hard time believing either on.

"Why not?" He asked me, taking the pen and smiling serenely. "It sounds like fun."

One by one, they signed the paper. Usagiuma was too thrilled to even inquire about their apparent lack of last names.

Just like that, my six unwanted robots had signed themselves up to be TV stars and there was nothing I could do about it besides beg them to reconsider (they didn't) and introduce my head to the wall (I did).

Now, you're probably wondering: just what kind of TV show are we talking about here?

Well, so was I. Throughout the whole conversation, Usagiuma failed to explain just what kind of show he was talking about and if it was written in the contract, none of us ever saw it since he immediately took it back once all the names were signed, gave them a piece of paper telling us where to go tomorrow, and left with a spring in his step.

I didn't find out until the next day, when the robots practically dragged me to the address listed, which I discovered was not a TV station at all, but an open field occupied by a TV crew.

So, would you like to know now what kind of show this was?

Well here, I'll give you a few hints, in the form of various things I heard from the TV crew and what was said to the robots:

"Do you all have medical insurance? You may want to give you carrier a call."
"Can someone get the motorcycle ready and bring me a blowtorch?"

"Be sure to wear a helmet or you're skull will most likely crack open. Assuming you're lucky."

If you can't figure it out from that, I guess you need to watch 'Extreme!' The hottest new stunt show on Japanese TV, soon to feature a group of six idiotic robots, with the goal of giving me as many heart attacks in a row as humanly possible.

And that's it for now, I think.

Wait, this doesn't count as a cliffhanger, right?

Ah, forget it. I'm way too tired anyway.

 Posted by Haruhi at 11:56 pm 0 comments
Extreme!

07.24.11

EXTREME!

Let me just start by saying I've always hated reality shows. I mean, I'm already not that much of a TV watcher anyway, but reality shows are just... well, I tend to equate them with a twenty car pile up happening in super slow motion. At first, you're entertained by it even though you know you shouldn't be. Then, you begin to see the sheer horror of the situation, and you wonder how anyone could survive with physical or psychological damage of some sort. Finally, you're feeling so awkward and uncomfortable, you can barely stand it and just want it to be over already.

I hope that makes as much sense on paper as it did in my head.

Anyway, I'm not entirely sure Extreme! would be considered a 'reality show' since it's typical content is not something normal people should be doing, but on repeated thinking, I'd say most reality shows are like that in the first place.

Okay, that's the last time I will go off topic in this... actually, never mind. I can make no such promise.

So to continue from yesterday, my stupid robot houseguests decided in their infinite wisdom that signing up to participate in a stunt show produced by a man with the highly unfortunate name of 'Jonii Usagiuma' was a fantastic idea. Because obviously, I just love watching them bungee jump off bridges, skateboard down a mountain, oh, and my absolute favorite:

"Okay, time for the bike ride through a flaming hoop!"

Yeah.

You're probably wondering which of them got to do that little stunt. Well, Mori and Hunny had done the first two things, I had no idea where Tamaki was, and Kyoya... well, we'll get to what he was doing later.

That's right, it was the twins turn. From what I understand, it's really only supposed to be a one person thing. Unfortunately for the TV crew, and to my total lack of surprise, Hikaru and Kaoru really were as inseparable as they seemed. They could be separated in the literal sense, of course; they weren't bound together with invisible rope or anything. It's just that if someone tried to pull Hikaru away from Kaoru (or vice versa) they would run right back to each other, letting nothing stand in their way.

Going off topic for a second, I know, but I have to bring this up. At one point, an exasperated crew member demanded to know why they were refusing to separate for, in his words, mind you, 'just a few goddamn minutes.'

You want to know their answer? Take a wild guess.

"We can never part, we were made for each other."

I'm not going to describe the reaction that got, use your imagination.

So once everyone got over that, Usagiuma stepped in and decided to just let them to it together. His
logic appeared to be along the lines of: One person doing it is crazy. TWO people doing it is EXTREME!

Remind me never to write that again.

The twins were suited up, given a basic outline of what they were suppose to do (and no, no one even once asked the very obvious question: did they know how to ride a bike). Somehow, they managed to find a two person bike for them to ride. All I could think was how incredibly unsafe this had to be. In fact, shouldn't they be having trained professionals doing this stuff, not some guys they found on the street?

Needless to say, this whole thing made no sense to me, and believe it or not, it was going to get worse.

So, the twins were given helmets and climbed up the ramp to where the bike was waiting for them. Meanwhile, some other crew members went to light the hoop on fire. It was about this moment that I finally realized something very important.

THEY WERE ABOUT TO JUMP THROUGH A FREAKING FLAMING HOOP ON A BIKE!

"Wait a minute!"

I jumped out of the chair they'd given me and ran headlong through a crowd of workers to where Usagiuma was shouting instructions through a megaphone. He barely glanced at me when I stopped in front of him. Even when I caught my breath and started talking, he wouldn't look at me.

"What- what is this?" I panted. "You can't seriously mean to make them jump through that hoop, right?"

This did get his attention, though not exactly in the way I wanted. Instead of turning around, telling me he understood my concerns and, hopefully, calling this whole thing off and letting us go home, he eyeballed me without turning his head and snorted.

"Oh sure, I'll just cancel this whole very expensive shoot to make you happy, that sound good?"

Why yes, Usagiuma-san, I very much like the idea of the EXTREMELY expensive robots I don't own nor have the money to pay for NOT participating in anymore of this potentially fatal stupidity, thank you.

If it weren't for the outright stating of my little secret in that tirade, I probably would have said it out loud. Something like it, anyway.

I actually didn't have any time to formulate a response, Usagiuma took that moment to shout into his megaphone (right in my ear, no less) and the twins attention back to him.

"Okay, you two," He called out. "Just like we told you, try to get as much speed as possible during the initial descent, you read?"

NO!

"YES!"

"Excellent," Usagiuma practically cheered. "Get ready, on my mark. 3... 2..."

You ever feel like your heart is about to literally rip out of your chest and possibly start beating you
over the head with a club? That's me right when this was happening. I don't think I'd ever been as terrified as I was right at that moment. So far, anyway. I wanted badly to shut my eyes, but know I couldn't. I had to watch every single second of this insanity that would probably cost me a fortune and leave me with the duty of explaining to all these people why their broken bodies were filled with wires and circuits rather than organs.

That's something I doubt even Tamaki could lie his way out of.

I noticed this had been happening a lot lately, and often thanks to the twins now that I think about it, but time seemed to slow down exponentially as Usagiuma spoke the final number.

"I... GO!"

You know, this would be a good spot for a cliffhanger, wouldn't it?

…

…

Aw, forget it. I'm not that cruel.

It turned out the twins actually did know how to ride a bike. Impressive, considering it was a two person model, but since they did everything together anyway, I guess it wasn't too difficult for them. They raced down the ramp, picking up speed as they went until they reached the end of the line and flew into the air. I don't know how long they were up there, just that it probably wasn't nearly as long as it felt like. They headed towards the hoop, which was flaming brilliantly even in the daylight. For a split second, just before they reached it, I thought they weren't going to make it. That had been the fear from the start, but actually seeing it. Seeing it and being completely unable to stop it…

Well, I'm sure you understand why I collapsed under my own weight just as the twins touched down on the ground, unharmed and unfazed by what they'd just done. The crew, Usagiuma especially, were besides themselves with joy as they applauded. Usagiuma was gushing like a twelve year old fan girl and congratulating the twins on their successful run over and over again. Meanwhile, I was just busy trying to step my entire body from shaking and get back on my feet (possibly running over and punching Usagiuma in his fat face was also on my current to-do list, I will neither confirm nor deny).

I placed one hand on the ground for leverage to hoist myself up. My other hand flailed outwards, and I jumped when someone grabbed it, only inwardly growl when I realized who was holding it.

"Where have you been?" I don't know why this was the first thing that came to me, but it's what ended up coming out of my mouth in the end.

"I'm not one for playing games," Kyoya answered, his usual smirk of superiority in place. Oh, so that's what he called this. "I've been busy with other things, but enough about me. You seem stressed, aren't you enjoying yourself?"

I gawked at him as he easily pulled me back up.

"Enjoying myself?" I repeated incredulously. "You've got to be kidding me. Did you see what just happened?"

He blinked, glancing away for a few seconds at the twins, who were removing their helmets and checking each other for non-existent injuries, let's just say this was getting quite a bit of attention from the female crew members and leave it at that.
"Ah, you mean the twins' stunt," He stated with a nod. "In that case, don't worry. They're both very
durable. Even if they missed their target, it would take a lot more to cause any major damage."

"I don't want to cause them damage period," I shot back. "How many times to I have to say it? I. Do
not. Own you. You were delivered to me by mistake. If something happens to you, I have to pay for
it. Do you understand?"

His smirk faded, that was a first. Normally nothing I ever seemed to faze him, the sole exception
being yesterday at the movies, and look where that got us. Predictably, his hand went to the rim of
his glasses. I didn't know robots (or androids, whatever) had nervous habits.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," He countered. "But you didn't complain nearly as much when Hunny
and Mori were performing."

Admittedly, this was true. I mean yeah, I objected and tried to get them to stop, but as I was about to
tell Kyoya, it wasn't exactly the same those times.

"Yeah, but their 'stunts' were more controlled. Bungee jumping and skateboarding down mountains
can be dangerous, but they're not as insane as jumping through a flaming hoop on a bicycle or-
or, uh-"

"Getting shot out of a canon?"

I nodded, "Right, exactly… what made you think of that?"

The last part I added once I realized Kyoya wasn't looking at me anymore. Rather, he was staring at
something behind me, a look on his face I recognized as his 'amused' face. He didn't answer my
query aside from a tiny head gesture, signaling me to turn around and see for myself.

Now, having heard about Kyoya, the twin, Hunny and Mori, you've probably noticed that one
person is still missing. And since you already read Kyoya's 'suggestion' of someone getting shot out
of a canon…

Yup. The second I turned around, there was Tamaki, not thirty feet away, about to be shoved into
the end of a large canon. He noticed me, even from so far away, grinned like the idiot he was, and
waved.

"HARUHI!" He shouted. "WATCH THIS!"

He was out of sight seconds later, and Usagiuma was starting the countdown once again. Had I more
time to react, I probably would have screamed, ran around, and made good on that earlier potential
promise to punch out Usagiuma. Since the canon went off before I could gain enough mental
function back to do this, and Tamaki went flying I don't know how many feet in the air, there was
only one thing I could do in the end.

All I know is that when I opened my eyes, I was in the nurse's tent, and all six of the robots were
hovering over me.

Yes, that's right. I'm ashamed to say I fainted, but I did. If you were in my shoes, you would have
too, believe me. Don't give me any, 'Oh, I'm a tough guy,' nonsense.

As you can imagine, none of them were harmed aside from some dirt stains that came off easily.
Tamaki was going on about how much fun he had and how he wished he'd been built with flight
capabilities (thank God no one was around to hear that) until the twins pointed him in the direction of
a mirror. His hair was completely wind swept and messy, I hadn't realized what a soft spot Tamaki's
hair was to him before then. His immediate reaction was to scream and run into the corner of the tent while the twins laughed like maniacs. It took ten minutes to pull him out of it and more ego stroking than I care to remember.

Anyway, I was let out with no problems, once it had been determined that I was fine aside from needing some good relaxation. And despite what you may think, that was actually looking like a possibility. All six (well, five) of them had completed their 'work' and were free to leave. I couldn't tell you how relieved I was, it was a stark contrast to the rest of the day's heavy anxiety, I'll tell you that.

I mean, surely they wouldn't have to do this again, right? Usagiuma had gotten his stuntmen and his stupid TV episode. That was all he needed, right? That *had* to be all.

Okay, I know normally I leave some parting remarks about my day or whatever, but we're going to do it a little differently tonight.

But first, I'd like to apologize if I seem extra irritable in my narration, the reason is that this whole event was so emotionally trying and so infuriating that even *remembering* it a year later makes me mad. Perhaps I'm exaggerating, but frankly, I don't care. It was exhausting for me and that's the end of it.

So, with that out of the way, I'm going to leave you with the parting words dear old Usagiuma-san left us with as we were about to head home. Once you read them, I'm sure you'll understand exactly why I don't have anything to say about it: If I so much as tried, it would come out only as a swirl of cursing and enraged gibberish, pretty much my thoughts at that very moments. You'll also probably understand why I've made a pledge to never sign any legal document without reading it over at least twelve times.

Here they are, word for word and burned into my skull, probably for all eternity:

"Good job today, boys. That was a great dress rehearsal. I'll see you tomorrow when we shoot it for real!"

*Posted by Haruhi at 8:27 pm 0 comments*
Oh man, today was a rough day. I don't even feel like posting anything tonight, but I know you're all probably wondering what happened the next day at the 'actual shooting.' Well, I'm really tired and I'm writing this a lot later than usual, so this is only going to cover the first part of the next day, and will probably be fairly short.

Sorry about that.

Anyway, let's start with the rest of the first day. The androids kept me up until around six am because Hikaru and Kaoru found a marathon of the Ju-On movies playing and insisted we watch them. By the time it was over, I was falling asleep on Mori, Tamaki was cowering in the corner, and the twins were cheering and asking when we could see them again.

No comment.

We got to the shoot again the next day, and I did indeed see a great deal more cameras than the day before. Kyoya immediately wandered off, I had to wonder why no one tried to stop him.

Usagiuma greeted us by the dressing room, and several attendants ushered them inside leaving me and the fat director alone. Usagiuma had this smug look on his face, like he was the world's greatest genius. I honestly wouldn't have put it passed him to think like that.

"Ahhh,' He said, taking an exaggerated deep breath. "This is a great day for filming. Perfect weather."

He turned to me.

"What do you think, Haruna? Ready for the shoot?"

I'd love to shoot you, Usagiuma-san, but I'm afraid there are too many witnesses.

…you don't actually believe I said that, right?

"It's Haruhi," Is what I really said. "And no, not really."

Usagiuma's smile faded a bit at that. Did I ever mention I can be a bit too blunt when it comes to answering questions? I mean it, I can't lie to save my life.

I could tell right away Usagiuma wasn't happy with that response. He stopped walking and examined me, clicking his tongue as he did so.

"And why is that?" He asked.

I stopped as well, giving his as even en expression as I could manage while inwardly boiling with rage.

"I'm worried for my… cousin's safety," It took me a moment to remember the cover story Tamaki
had come up with. I just hoped Usagiuma didn't notice the pause.

"Hmmm," He rubbed his unshaved chin. "I see, but they did sign a contract knowing all the risks. It's not like their children and you're their guardian."

…okay, let's play a game everyone. It's called: How many things are wrong with this statement?

Number 1: None of them had the chance to even skim that contract.

Number 2: They don't know what the 'risk' means.

Number 3: YES I AM THEIR GUARDIAN, YOU IDIOT!

Granted, only the first two were safe for me to say, but the point still stands.

"Even so," I ground out. "They are family and I care a great deal about them. I really don't like them doing this."

Usagiuma raised an eyebrow.

"So what would you like me do to about it?"

I glanced from side to side. Mostly from the awkward air this conversation was beginning to take on.

I gave a weak shrug.

"Let them out of the contract so we can go home?"

It was a hopeless attempt, I know that now. Actually, I knew that then too, but what was I supposed to do? Odds were that contract was legally binding, and the last thing I needed was to get sued on top of all my other problems.

Usagiuma was giving me a funny look now, one I couldn't really describe except that it didn't leave me very hopeful.

"I see," He said a second time. "Why don't we discuss this more in my office, Ms. Fujimoto."

"It's Fujioka," I grumbled.

He ignored me and gently placed his open palm on my back, guiding me into a dark room just a little ways down the hall. He opened the light while I walked in, revealing a room filled with nothing but clothes racks on either side of the room. I blinked in confusion.

"This is your office?" I asked.

"WHOOPS!"

SLAM

I whirled around, Usagiuma was grinning at me through a window in the now shut tight door. Without missing a beat, I ran to it and tried to turn the knob. It wouldn't budge.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Usagiuma was definitely NOT sorry. "I accidentally shut the door and it locked on it's own!"

I gave him the strongest glare I possibly could. Seriously, I probably could've killed a puppy with it or something.
Usagiuma pretended to search his pockets for something, still grinning widely.

"Darn," He said, snapping his fingers. "Can't find the keys. Oh well, I'll just get you out after the shoot is over. You'll be fine until then."

He turned to walk away while I fruitlessly banged on the door and called out to him.

"Relax," He shouted over his shoulder. "When I'm a world famous movie director, I'll thank you in my Oscar speech!"

Oh, I knew what he could do with his Oscar speech.

And his Oscar, but that's another story.

Anyway, I spent roughly an hour banging on the door as well as the window on the other side of the room. Nobody was in the hallway, but people were constantly passing the window and not one of them acknowledge my pleas for help. I had no idea whether they couldn't hear me or if Usagiuma had outright told them to ignore me. Either way, I wasn't getting out anytime soon.

This, of course, meant the androids performed all those dangerous stunts again, and this time I couldn't even see them. Somehow, that made the situation both better and worse. Don't ask me how.

I eventually gave up trying to get anyone's attention. I slid to the ground, moaning as I went, and thought of all the horrible things I wanted to subject Usagiuma and those stupid androids to. Meanwhile, I could still hear Usagiuma shouting instructions, along with the voices of other crew members, making random comments about, 'not enough fire,' and 'those skates are the wrong size.'

One such remark, however, got my attention rather quickly.

"Alright, time for the big one!"

That was Usagiuma, obviously.

I had no idea what he meant by 'the big one,' but the fact that this statement was met with cheers and whoops didn't reassure me of anything. I shook my head, trying to remove all overreacting thoughts from my head.

I was sure there wasn't any other stunt that hadn't been rehearsed yesterday for whatever reason. Usagiuma was a lot of things, but he wasn't a liar, right?

Right?

"Alright, get ready for the big stunt!"

Wait, what the Hell was I thinking? Of course he was a liar.

"Why's this door locked?"

That comment came from behind me, by the door. I almost jumped, but settled for just whirling around in time to see two men in the little window before the door came open with a squeak.

The two men looked at my relieved face as I walked over to them.

"Thank God," I said more to myself than to them. "I've been waiting forever for someone to come."

"Are you here for the show?" One of the men asked.
I started to nod, then stopped.

"Well, yeah, technically I guess."

I'm not sure if the men heard more than the first part of what I said. They gave relieved sighs of their own while the one who spoke grabbed my arm, scowling at me.

"Do you know how long we've been waiting for you?" He demanded as he pulled me down the hall. "This is not professional behavior."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded right back.

"Just come on," The man ignored all my further protests as he dragged me to the back door and opened it.

I found myself in a field, most likely behind the actual set. All I could see besides grass and a few other crew members was a large elevator-type box connected to an intricate series of wires. How had I not noticed that before?

A female employee ran over as we exited the trailer. She had an identical look of relief to the two men.

"Finally, now we can get started," She breathed out.

I was pulled over to the box, one of the employees pushing something into my ear before I could object to it.

"Just calm down," The female employee said, giving me a funny look. "Why are you so nervous, you've done this sort of thing before, right?"

"Done WHAT before?" I responded loudly.

Something was forced onto my head before she could respond. I yelped and tried to fight it off, until I realized it was just a helmet.

Wait, a HELMET?

"Alright, the stuntwoman's all set," The man who pulled me out here said into his ear piece. Meanwhile, I was being all but pushed into the elevator box.

"Stuntwoman," I repeated, everything now starting to make sense. "Stuntwoman?"

SLAM

I was really starting to hate that sound.

"Alright, just listen to the microphone for instructions," The female employee explained to me while grinning. "You don't really have to do much, just try not to rock back and forth too much, okay?"

"Hang on a minute!" I shouted back.

Then I heard what sounded like a machine starting up, and the crew member ran back towards the others.

The box lifted into the air, and despite the woman's warning, I did shake it quite a bit as in my shock. I went up higher and higher, until I could see over the entire set. I noticed a flashed of blonde hair at
one point, but couldn't tell if it was Tamaki or Hunny.

I could barely here Usagiuma shouting something through his megaphone, but what I could make out gave me a fairly good idea of what was happening here.

"…completely unrehearsed… trained professionals only… will they rescue her from certain death in time?"

Find out on EXTREME!

At least, that's what I assume followed that last bit.

Okay, I'm going to stop here. I'm sorry if this post doesn't seem as good or amusing as any of the others, but I'm about to literally fall asleep over my laptop.

Good night everybody, see you tomorrow!

Posted by Haruhi at 12:57 am 0 comments
Has anyone reading this ever made tea?

My dad drinks it on his days off as part of his 'Ranka Relaxation Time' as he calls it. He has a day for this once a week, likely because of how heavily caffeinated he's been keeping himself ever since he quit drinking a few months ago.

Back on topic, I've made tea plenty of times in my life; ever since I could reach the oven top at least. One of the recipes my mother left me before she died was for a specially flavored tea passed down from her Grandmother. It's probably my favorite thing to make and also my least favorite.

Yes, you read that right.

It's my favorite because when made right, the tea tastes great. I can never get enough of it and have to make two kettles worth, one for my dad and one for me.

It's my least favorite for one very simple reason:

The sound of a teapot is, in my opinion, the absolute worst sound in the universe.

You know what I'm talking about? That obnoxiously high pitched whistle whenever the tea is finished? To make it worse, TV shows are always using that sound to illustrate growing tension between the characters that eventually explodes into utter chaos. And people wonder why I don't watch TV.

Now, I'm sure you're all wondering what any of this has to do with the story.

Honestly? Nothing.

I bring it up because I want you to do something for me while you read this post: imagine that whistling sound. Imagine it getting louder and louder and louder until you're sure it's going to explode and spew scalding hot tea all over the place, burning everything in it's path.

At this point in the story, that teapot is me.

You'll understand what I mean in a few minutes.

Just to refresh your memory, I'd been locked up in a changing room by a fat butterball of a 'director' and subsequently freed by a group of employees who mistook me for a stuntwoman. Now I was floating several hundred feet in the air inside what appeared to be an elevator box made of some kind of glass material that didn't feel particularly sturdy at all.

You'd probably like to know just what kind of crazy stunt this was supposed to be. Well, the best I could figure at the time was that it was either some kind of Damsel in Distress rescue thing, or an escape artist trick. I wasn't sure which option I liked better.

It ended up being the former, as I discovered upon moving very slowly to the side of the box and looking down to see all the robots aside from, you guessed it, Kyoya, being fitted with harnesses and
listening to Usagiuma as he explained something I couldn't make out while constantly pointing up in my direction.

I not going to lie to you guys: I was terrified. It's weird because I'm not usually scared of heights. I can stand on tall buildings and fly on planes with no problems whatsoever. I guess it was just knowing that the only thing keeping me from plunging to my death was a cable, rather than a dozen stories of concrete.

To be fair, I later discovered that there were safety precautions set up, so the chances of anything bad happening were a lot smaller than they appeared at the time, but I digress.

They were getting everyone ready to start, and I was fearing for my life. Usagiuma finished what he was saying and went to sit back in his director's chair, which looked way too small to hold his weight I might add, and grabbed that megaphone of his.

"Okay guys, we only get one shot at this, let's do it perfect!"

About that moment, I heard a buzzing in my eye that almost made me jump until I remember the ear piece I was wearing.

"We're about to start," the unfamiliar voice told me. "Stay in one position, don't worry about the cameras until you're out."

"Wait a minute," I shouted, clutching my ear as if that would enable him to hear me better. "There's been a huge mistake here! I'm not-

"There'll be a close up as you're coming down, so be sure to smile big and look happy."

"Wha- ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME?"

"Other than that, there's really nothing you have to do. Remember the safety protocols and we'll see you on the ground in a few minutes!"

"What safety protocols? Why aren't you answering me?" I shouted at nothing.

Literally nothing, since the voice never came back after that final word. I figured about that time that the microphone wasn't two-way, which was just great. I was so happy to have an even greater confirmation of how royally screwed I was.

Shaking, I lowered my hand and went back to staring out the side. The android's were just about to start climbing, Usagiuma signaled for the cameramen to start rolling and what looked like Hunny craned his upwards, shouting so loud that I could hear him with near perfect clarity.

"Don't worry, Stuntlady-chan, we'll get you down," He shouted, with a determination that may have sounded reassuring had he sounded more like an adult and less like a five year old. "You can count on m- Takashi, look at those cakes!"

Without warning, Hunny grabbed Mori by the arm and dragged him over to the buffet table, much to the crew's aggravation as they tried and failed to bring him back over, and to my utter disbelief and rage.

Remember that teapot metaphor.

The remaining 'rescuers' were luckily a bit more focused. Tamaki charged forward like a madman, gaining a good ten feet before the twins started to catch up. Unfortunately, as they weren't saying
anything, I couldn't tell you for sure what they were thinking at the time. I can only give you my best guess.

Once Tamaki noticed the twins closing in, he gasped and his eyes immediately narrowed in concentration. He went faster, leading the twins to go faster. They more or less had a race to the top, shoving and pushing at each other the entire way. They almost lost their grip and fell around five times, at times it almost seemed like the twins wanted Tamaki to fall and vice versa.

When they were almost there, neck and neck (and neck), Tamaki suddenly let out a burst of speed. He squeezed out from in between the twins and zoomed up amid their angered shouts and curses.

I got a bit of a jolt when he appeared in front of me seemingly out of thin air, and opened the door with a key he'd apparently been holding in his hand the entire time.

I don't think he noticed at first that it was me in the box. His initial greeting was a suave smile that probably would have worked on anyone who wasn't me at the time.

"Fear not, my dear lady," He said like a corny 1950s superhero. "For I am here to rescue- Haruhi?"

He blinked, all traces of charm gone in an instant and replaced with surprise, followed to my intense frustration with cheerfulness.

"I didn't know you were a stuntwoman," He remarked with a smile. "How fun, that means you can be on the show too!"

It should be noted that at this point, I was flat on my back against the other side of the case, shaking and sweating, my eyes bugging out in fear.

Keep remembering that teapot.

"I'm NOT… a stuntwoman," I somehow managed to hiss out through my grit teeth. "Please just get me down from here, okay?"

Tamaki blinked again. He had a very particular look he wore when confused, which I assumed was including in his design to make him seem more charming and endearing. How ironic.

"Okay, Haruhi," he said a moment later, holding a hand out to me. "Don't be afraid, you're beloved prince is here to save you. I'll have you down in no tiIIIIIEEEE!"

The android was shoving aside right then, swinging to the side on the wire attached to him while I faced down identical mischievous grins.

Oh, don't tell me you forgot about the twins.

"Hey, Haruhi," they greeted me casually. "Enjoying the view?"

I was too busy alternating between staring at them and at Tamaki as he swung back down and, with an enraged shriek, attacked the twins.

"I was here first!" The blonde screamed as he shoved Hikaru away by his face. "That mean's I'M saving her!"

The twins collectively scowled at him, using one hand each to push the crazed Tamaki as far away from them as they could.

"Uh-uh, it's two to one against you," they informed him smugly.
"NO IT DOESN'T," Tamaki screamed back at them, grabbing their arms and wrenching them away. "I was built before you two, so I have seniority here!"

"Hardly," was the response.

"I don't care WHO saves me!" I shouted, stepping forward without thinking. "JUST ONE OF YOU GET ME DOWN!"

Several things happened at that moment.

First, Usagiuma started shouting something into his megaphone about going against the script or whatever.

Second, one of the twins, in an attempt to gain leverage, grabbed the top of the case and pushed down, causing it to swing once he let go.

Finally, and most predictably I suppose given that I'm not the most coordinated person in the world, I made a frantic attempt to steady myself, which lead to the opposite effect when my feet slid out from under me and I fell flat on my stomach. I slipped feet first out the wide open door, catching myself just as I'd gone completely over and struggling to hold onto the edges of the case while dangling several hundred feet in air with no support.

Everyone down below gasped, and a couple even started screaming. This turned out to be a good thing since it alerted the robots to something being wrong, affectively ending their pointless fight.

Tamaki's jaw dropped as he swung towards me.

"Haruhi!" He shouted. "Grab my hand!"

"No, grab our hands!" The twins cried, rushing forward.

"You two stay out of this," Tamaki snapped at them. "This is all your fault anyway!"

I don't remember the rest of what they said since I was too busy staring at my slipping fingers and trying with all my strength to pull myself back into the box. I was never very good with physical education, I even opted out of gym every year of my school career so far. I guess it's no wonder I ended up falling.

Falling to your death is kind of weird. It feels like all the air has been forcibly ripped from your chest and your throats been closed off. I fell feet first, but I could still see the ground getting closer and closer by the second. People ran to get out of the way, and even louder screams could be heard all over. One of them was even calling my name.

At least, that's what I thought until I looked up and saw Tamaki falling just a few feet above me, hand outstretched as far as it could go.

"HARUHI! TAKE MY HAND!"

I managed to hear that over the rushing wind. My mouth was open wide, but I made no sound, I was too afraid. I figured right then, in my last moments of life, that at least I wouldn't have to worry about these stupid robots anymore. Hell, one of them was apparently going to die with me.

I reached out to him anyway. My fingers just barely hooking into his. His next move was so fast it made my head spin. Somehow, he pulled me into his arms and closed to his chest. Then he managed to flip himself over so he'd land on his feet instead of his head. Clutching me tight, he landed hard on
his feet, bending down to absorb the shock as he hit. I still felt it in spite of his efforts, in fact, the splitting headache that developed as a result of this didn't go away for hours.

Moments after rebooting my mind and finding that I was indeed still alive, I heard another pair of thuds. The twins landing right next to us and examined the scene with looks of annoyance and jealousy. They 'umph-ed'.

"We could have done that."

I imagine Tamaki was feeling very pleased with himself at the moment. He had, after all, saved my life. And don't think I'm a selfish person for what you read next, because I did feel grateful to him. It's just that I was also feeling very scared, exhausted, shocked and more than anything else, angry. Very, intensely angry at all of them.

Hear that teapot whistling yet?

As for the crew members, they were in stunned silence from the moment Tamaki and the twins broke their suspension cables to the moment of our landing. I was still in shock and clutching at Tamaki's shirt, but I started to come out of it about the time they started cheering and applauding us.

"Oh man, that was awesome!" One crew member shouted.

"Way better than what we had planned," said another one. "These guys sure know how to improvise."

"This is gold," Usagiuma gushed. "I can just taste the awards."

I've just realized that I've used up every insulting word or phrase that I have for this guy. Oh well.

"Wow, Haru-chan!" Hunny cried as he and Mori approached. "You were really cool. So were you, Tama-chan!"

"What about us?" The twins muttered.

Tamaki was absolutely glowing at the praise, and hugged me to him tighter than ever.

"Oh, it was nothing," he then looked down at me with a loving expression. "Anything for my Haruhi."

I don't really know what it was. It could have been that statement, or maybe it was completely random. The shaking came to a stop and my stomach settled. I fidgeted roughly in Tamaki's arms until he got the hint and (reluctantly) let go. I stood on legs like jelly, and somehow managed to back away from the five robots while the crew members continued to look on.

"It something wrong, Haru-chan?" Hunny was the first to notice my lack of joy.

I shook my head.

"Yes Hunny, something is very wrong," I told him in barely a whisper. "Very wrong indeed."

"I'll say," a familiar voice said from behind me. I didn't even need to turn around to know that it was Kyoya. "Didn't you know that you aren't allowed to participate without a contract, Haruhi?"

The bespectacled android moved to stand in front of me, giving me a clear view of his signature smirking face.
"How would you know?" I retorted, my breathing heavy. "None of you even read the contract!"

Kyoya clicked his tongue and shook his head, as if he were scolding me.

"Now, Haruhi," he began. "Don't be silly, of course we read it. Or I did anyway."

"You had it for barely two seconds!" I cried, getting up on tip-toes in a vain attempt to look him in the eye (stupid tall robot…).

If possible, his smirk got bigger.

"Two seconds is enough when your emergency ability is speed reading," he explained. "I can read up to 1,000 pages in the blink of an eye."

…

…

…

Here's where that teapot thing comes into effect. Really, this has been in the making since the day I got these robots. Everything that's happened to far, all the pain, the fear, the pestering, the shock; really, it was only a matter of time before this happened.

Before I exploded.

"YOU BASTARD!" They even got me to swear at them. "YOU STUPID SON OF A BITCH! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU, ANY OF YOU! YOU'RE ALL THE MOST ANNOYING, FRUSTRATING, IDIOTIC, UNHELPFUL PAINS IN MY ASS EVER!"

I wish I could describe the looks on their faces as I went completely red and rounded on each of them.

"YOU ARE A MANCHILD," I shouted at Hunny. "YOUR GIMMICK ISN'T CUTE, IT'S STUPID AND ANNOYING!"

Next was Mori.

"AND YOU MIGHT AS WELL NOT EVEN BE HERE FOR ALL YOU DO OR SAY."

And the twins.

"YOU ARE DISTURBING. THERE IS NOTHING APPEALING ABOUT BEING EXACTLY THE SAME, IT'S JUST WEIRD."

And Kyoya.

"YOU ARE THE ABSOLUTE WORST. YOU NEVER HELP, YOU JUST ACT LIKE A DICK AND MAKE EVERYTHING MORE DIFFICULT. YOU ARE SCUM! NO, THAT'S INSULTING TO THE SCUM.

Tamaki.

"YOU'RE A COMPLETE NARCISSISTIC IDIOT. WHEN WILL YOU GET IT THROUGH YOUR STUPID HEAD THAT I DON'T LOVE YOU? ANY OF YOU!"
"IN FACT, I HATE YOU ALL. I HATE YOU ALL SO MUCH I CAN BARELY STAND IT!"

I started walking, pushing past the dumbfounded crew and not caring what the robot's reaction to this was. I didn't even look back when I said my last to them.

"DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT COMING BACK TO MY PLACE! I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOUR FACES AGAIN!"

For the record, that's word for word what I said to them. A lot of the dialogue has some minor embellishments (mostly just words used, nothing important) because it's been so long that I can't remember absolutely everything.

I remember this moment with such perfect clarity that it's scary. I remember running off the set towards the street, following it to the nearest town, hailing a cab, and going straight home. I remember paying the driver, walking up the steps, putting the key in the lock, opening the door, closing it behind me, kicking my shoes off, and finally, collapsing on the couch. That's right, I was too tired to even walk into my bedroom.

It's like the whole thing was burned into my brain with a blow torch. Even now I can't help but recall it sometimes. Whenever I do, I try my hardest to push it away, using memories of what happened the next day. You'll find out about that next time.

On that day, I didn't have the memory of the next day to cheer myself up with. All I had were the events of that very day to go over in my head again and again.

And slowly, my anger faded, only to be replaced by loneliness and regret as I stared aimlessly at the partially open closet across the room, where the side of one of their crates was barely visible.

Posted by Haruhi at 9:10 pm 0 comments
A Visitor

07.28.11

A VISITOR

I don't know how I got to bed that night. Hell, I'm not even sure how I got from the couch to my futon or when. It was about 4:30 when I was jolted awake by a crashing outside, but we'll get to that in a minute.

I know I shouldn't really use this to talk about my present life since this is supposed to be about last year, but I just had an extremely tiring day helping my neighbor clean out her closet. I shouldn't have gone out early for the mail because then she wouldn't have seen me, and she wouldn't have used her chronic back pain as an excuse for needing help and gone on for a full twenty minutes about how her kids never come home and won't help. I wouldn't have felt bad for her and figured, 'oh, how much could one elderly woman have in her closet? This shouldn't take too long.'

As it turns out, age does not factor in to tidiness the way one might think. I swear, I was hit by a junk avalanche of cartoonish proportions the second that closet door opened. It was five tedious hours of sifting and organizing and listening to complaining… so you can imagine how very tired I am right now.

Somehow, though, I still have the energy to write this. I don't know, I'd been planning on just sitting tonight out and resuming work tomorrow, but I don't think I have to. My guess is it's because of how relieved I am to get this part done thanks to spending the last few days writing about what as arguably the most stressful situation they got me into for those entire three months.

'Arguably' being the key word, mind you.

So yeah, that's how I spent my day. That ends my pointless rambling, and now for the ever continuing story that you all came here to see (mostly) uninterrupted from this point on.

As previously mentioned, I somehow in my cloud of anger, frustration, dying adrenaline and, most confusing at the time, regret, managed to get into bed. I was awoken at roughly 4:30 in the morning by a loud crash outside.

After my mind got out of that initial 'just woke up' incoherency stage, I shoot up in bed and eased myself out of the futon. There was another crash right then, putting me even more on alert if that were possible. I stood up to full height and tip-toed to the closet where we kept the broom. It has a metal handle, so it works well for dealing with intruders. At least that was my hope, we'd never actually had an intruder before this.

I crept up to the door, careful not to make even the slightest noise as heavy footsteps approached, very quickly picking up speed. When I was right next to the doorknob and my hand was hovering over it, it began to jiggle. My body tensed, the beginnings of sweat pouring down my face. Having never dealt with a burglar before, I wasn't entirely sure I could do this and wondered if I should just go call the cops. Then, somehow, the lock on the door seemed to magically vanish as the door swung open. I could just make out a man taller than me before I screamed and swung the broom at him, hitting the back of his head.

The man grunted and stumbled into the house, but didn't appear to be all that affected by my attack. It didn't matter by then anyway, because now I could finally make who he was, and I'm sure a lot of
you and it at least partially figured out by now.

"Tamaki?" I asked in disbelief. "Wha- what are you doing here? Where is everyone else?"

"They couldn't come, you ordered us not to follow you home! I just needed to see you again. I'm so sorry, Haruhi!" The over-emotional robot then ran up clung to me like I was a rag doll and cried into my shirt. "I must have scared you terribly, Haruhi!"

You got that right.

"I deserved it! I deserve to die after how horribly I've treated you!"

…Okay, that was going a bit too far.

"Tamaki," I said again, pulling away from him quickly. "Calm down, I don't want you to die and you've treated me just fine. It's okay."

"NO IT'S NOT OKAY!" Tamaki screamed, making me cringe since I just knew the neighbors would hear this eventually. "We've all been so foolish these last few weeks. We just love you so much, we never wanted to hurt you. We live to make you happy, Haruhi!"

Everything froze. Completely. I think I may have even stopped breathing for a few seconds.

"Happy?" I said in a low voice. "Happy?"

I could feel that boiling rage from before acting up again. And here I thought it was all spent from my little tirade earlier that day.

"Do you honestly think anything you all have done has made me happy?"

"Well-" Tamaki started, but I was not ready to hear his answer. I still had quite a bit more to say.

"I've told you again and again that I'm responsible for you because if something goes wrong and one of you gets hurt, I'm the one who's going to have to pay for it. That'll put me and my father out on the street! Is that what you want? Is that how you think you'd make me HAPPY?"

"I… I…"

"Stop kidding yourself! You've done nothing but cause problems and nearly get me killed. You expect me to just forgive you all for that? And you expect me to love you? I don't! I don't even like you! And you don't really love me anyway, you've just been programmed to!"

"That's not true."

Tamaki took three big steps, somehow getting from across the room to right in front of me in an instant. I swallowed a yelp and stepped back, not taking my eyes off his.

"I do love you," he went on, putting heavy emphasis on his words. "It has nothing to do with my programming."

"It has everything to do with your programming," I shot back. "I've read all your manuals, I know what you're built for and what guidelines you must follow. Even when you're not making trouble, everything you and the others do fit those guidelines. You don't love me, not for real."

Ever so slowly, his face fell. His eyes went wide like that of a child who'd just been told Christmas was canceled. I looked away, that face was somehow cracking through my anger clouded mind and
playing with the niggling feelings of regret I was trying to keep as buried as possible.

I wished he wouldn't look at me like that.

"You're wrong," he told me softly, his hands beginning to shake. "I love you, the others love you too."

He backed away, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say he looked ready to cry.

"When you almost fell before, I was terrified. I thought for a second that you were really going to die and I couldn't bear the thought of that. Isn't that love?"

And there it was again. That... I don't even know how to describe it. Just this way about him that only showed once in a blue moon and made me question everything I knew about the androids. I saw it for the first time after they rescued me from those thugs, and now here it was again and at the worst possible time I might add.

I was supposed to be angry with them, not wondering if they may love me for real and genuinely want to apologize.

My thoughts were so frenzied I could barely speak. Disjointed bits of words and phrases fell from my lips one after another, and Tamaki just kept silent, waiting for me to gain some level of coherence and answer.

"Tamaki, I..."

I couldn't do it. I couldn't tell him to leave and I couldn't ask him to stay. I didn't know what I wanted from him, I just knew I was extremely close to letting my frustration out in the form of hysterical crying. Boy, wouldn't that have been a great sight for him.

He let out a sigh, his head falling, and I quickly figured out that he'd made his own interpretation of my actions.

"Well, I just wanted to see you one more time," he murmured.

I hung my head, I just didn't want to look at his face. I watched his feet turn around, take two steps towards the door, then stop. There was some shuffling, but I refused to look up and see what he was doing.

"We're staying at a hotel for the night," I heard him say. "I'm leaving their card in case..."

I don't know why he stopped there. Maybe he wanted me to get up and cry and ran to him and beg him not to go and whatever... but somehow, I don't think that's what it was.

The front door opened with a crack, allowing me to hear the chirping crickets outside. A long pause followed.

"Goodbye, Haruhi."

I heard the door close gently, along with his decrescendo-ing footsteps. They were long gone by the time I suddenly found it in me to straighten my head back up. I stared at the plain white painted door, taking in it's every feature from the faded gold doorknob to the noticeable crack running lengthwise down to the floor. Apparently, it had been there since my parents first moved in before I was born.

'I wonder if Mori could've fixed that,' I said to myself. The thought was like a bucket of cold water
being poured down my back. I couldn’t believe that had crossed my mind and I felt more than ever like jamming my head into the wall and keeping it there forever.

‘Stop it, Haruhi,’ my mind demanded. ‘Don’t do this to yourself. You know you’re right, you have to be right. Robots don’t have feelings, they only think they love you for real.’

With these thoughts coursing through me and cleaning out all the unwelcome ones, I went to my bed, kicking aside some books and clothes as I went. I made a mental note to clean up in here to tomorrow and get back into bed, making extra sure to keep my vision straight and not stray to either side of the futon where Hunny and Mori used to sleep.

I laid back down, stretching in my tiredness and taking a few deep breaths to relax myself. I tried to imagine myself in a peaceful place and lowered my arms back down. My left landed on something strange, so of course, I leaned over to pick it up. Suddenly, my efforts to forget all my troubles were rendered moot as I took in the introductory page of the Princely Model's manual.

Just great.

Groaning, I slammed my head down on the pillow and clamped my eyes shut, but I didn't put down the manual. When I opened them again, they gazed into the printed words which were fairly readable thanks to a streetlight located right in front of my bedroom mirror.

I skimmed it contents, though I knew most of it already, and my attention was caught at one particular paragraph:

*Your lover figure is the perfect mate in every way. He is handsome, loving, attentive and obeys your every command. His internal hardware keeps him wired into complete compliance, and he is incapable of going against a direct command for any reason.*

Ignoring the weird BDSM-like undertones of that, this little blurb stuck out to me for one very specific reason.

The androids could not disobey me, that I already knew. Now that I think about it, this whole situation probably could have been avoided if I’d been more firm in telling them no. Like when they first signed the contract, I shouldn't have just suggested they not do it, I should have ordered them not to.

Now I feel stupid. It's an unpleasant emotion.

Okay, back on topic. The manual directly states that they have to obey me. I told them not to follow me home and according to Tamaki, that's why none of the others came. I didn't know if they had some kind of shock system, or if they'd automatically shut down for a while or self destruct, but the point is, they couldn’t disobey my orders.

But Tamaki did.

That realization left me completely floored. I told all of them, including Tamaki, not to come back to my apartment, and he did it anyway.

He went against my orders.

He directly disobeyed me, and once again, the manuals listed that as impossible.

He came to my house when I told him not to all so he could tell me that his love for me was real.
The implications of that were staggering.

You'd better believe I got no sleep that night. I couldn't get over what I'd discovery or stop trying to figure out what it meant. Any alternatives to the obvious fell flat regardless of all the effort I went to in order to justify them to myself. In the end, there was only one conclusion I could come to: I would have to find out when I went to their hotel the next day.

*Posted by Haruhi at 11:08 pm 0 comments*
IT MIGHT ALL WORK OUT

Emphasis on *might*.

So my power's been out for the last few days thanks to a hurricane. I don't know how many of you readers live in my area, but you may have experienced similar problems. I bring this up because I know it's been a while since I last posted. Considering I'm coming to the end of this part of my story, I'm sure a lot of you have gotten really impatient having to wait for so long. That's why it took so long, I apologize.

Now, after spending several hours lying on my futon and staring at the wall, the sun finally rose and I was able to get up for real. My mind was still on Tamaki and what he'd said to me and what I'd say to him and the others when I found them. Unfortunately, I was drawing a massive blank on that third one.

I got dressed quickly and forewent breakfast. The hotel card clutched in my hand, I ran out the door, just barely remembering to lock it on my way out. Several neighbors who were bringing out their garbage stopped to say hello to me, but I was so distracted that I couldn't give more than a brief wave in their general direction.

I hailed a taxi and gave him the address I'd pretty much memorized at this point. Five minutes later, he was driving away from me as I stood before the hotel building staring up at a random third story window.

Now, knowing that this was a reality show on public television, you'd probably think the hotel my pet androids and the film crew were staying at would be pretty fancy. Or at least halfway decent.

You'd be wrong.

I mean it, I don't think I've ever seen a more ratty and broken down looking building. Not helping at all was the fact that I saw three woman leaving who looked rather suspiciously like hookers. I probably reread that little card fifteen times, making completely sure that I was in the right place and the driver hadn't missed a turn somewhere or something.

But no, this was definitely the place, and decrepit or not, I was going in and finding the androids now. I walked across the parking lot filled with purpose, taking note of the row of parked vans I knew belonged to the film crew. I pushed open the glass door, which had a large crack running down the length of it. I noticed right away that the front desk was empty, but walked over anyway, thinking maybe the person in charge had just stepped into the bathroom or something.

Being annoyingly short, I had to stand on my tip-toes to look over the edge of the counter and see that it was completely deserted. There was a smoking cigarette butt in an ashtray next to a computer that was so old, Kyoya would probably want to vomit if he saw it. From that, I could tell that someone had definitely been here recently, but for all I know, they could have been arrested for drugs or kidnapped by loan sharks seconds before I got there.

In a place like this, I wouldn't have been surprised.

I rang the small bell labeled 'RING FOR SERVICE,' not that I was really expected it to matter at this
"Hello?" I called out. "Is anyone there?"

A door opening down the hall drew my attention away. I turned my head and looked down a long hallway of numbered doors. The one opening was number 53 and the person exiting was a very familiar and meaningfully named Usagiuma.

"Hey!" My mouth and my feet moved without any of my own input, but I wasn't about to stop them.

Usagiuma's eyes bugged out, like I'd just pointed a gun to his head and demanded all his money.

"Oh crap," I could just barely hear him mutter.

"Hey," I repeated. "I need to talk to you."

He awkward glanced around, as if expecting to see some of his pals pop out of thin air to intimidate me away.

"Uuuh, sounds great! But now's a bad time, so if you'll just make an appointment with my secretary, I'll-"

"No, right now."

Personally, I don't know who was more shocked by the forcefulness I was showing. Because I'm not a confrontational person, and if something or someone bothers me for whatever reason, I tend to just roll my eyes, ignore them and go on my merry way. This time, however, I was close to boiling over with the desire to take what remained of my explosive anger out on Usagiuma. He'd sure be a more deserving target, the robots at least had their hearts in the right place. Mostly.

Usagiuma was taken aback, but not willing to let the situation fell out of his hands just yet. He put on a bored face and crossed his arms over his pudgy chest.

"Okay, this has been fun, but I don't have time to play games. I'm a very busy man with a TV show to shot, so if you'll excuse me, Ms. Fujiyama, I-"

"It's Fujioka," I shouted back, moving closer in a threatening manner that actually made him gasp. "Fu-ji-o-ka, and you are not going anywhere. You are going to stand here and listen to me!"

At this, my whole body was shaking and I could hear my heart beat in my ears. This man was bringing out all the anger and frustration in ways the robots never have. Thinking about that made my feelings of guilt overtake me again, but I fought them off and turned them into anger at Usagiuma. I was going to need as much of it as possible if I planned to keep this up before coming to my senses.

He opened his mouth, probably to make another excuse to leave, but there was no way in hell I was about to let him.

"For the last few days, you and your stupid TV show have been making my life miserable. Not only that, you are endangering the lives of my cousins over and over again all for the sake of ratings and money. Furthermore, you locked me in a closet when I tried to discuss this calmly with you, which led to me being mistaken for a stuntwoman and almost getting me killed! Do you have any idea how many times I could get you arrested?

"All I want right now are my friends. I'm here to get them and bring them home and there's not a
thing you can do to stop me."

Usagiuma was backed into a wall by now and I didn't realize until I'd finished shouting at him and wondered just when during my tirade had I begun moving. He had a hand raised in front of his face in a defensive position, but dropped it, likely assuming that I was finished.

"W-well," he said, trying to regain his footing. "That's all fine and good, but I didn't lock you in a closet, it was a changing room. Besides, aren't you forgetting something? You're friends signed a contract, and they can't go back on that."

I grit my teeth, and my mouth ran away from me a second time.

"You can take that contract and shove it up your ass!"

"Why, you little-" Usagiuma's face broke into a snarl. His slightly crooked teeth were highly visible and his beady eyes shone with anger. I had to admit, it was kind of a scary sight. I tried to move away, but he grabbed my arm in a surprisingly tight grip. He raised the other one, his intent obvious. I closed my eyes, shrinking back defensively, but the hand I expecting to connect with my face never even got close.

I heard Usagiuma gasp, and tentatively opened my eyes. The first thing I saw was another person's hand clamped tightly around his, so tight, I think I could see some veins popping out. I followed the length of the new arrival's arm, and found myself looking into the darkening grey eyes of Kyoya. A deep frown was etched into his face, his brow set in a glare that would have made the devil cry in fear.

"Pardon me, Usagiuma-san," he said in a polite but deadly way. "But I'm afraid my cousins and I must agree with Haruhi on this."

For a moment, I was confused, but then my brain finally registered the full scene before my eyes. Lo and behold, all six robots were there. They stood as a group, the twins and Tamaki on Kyoya's left, Hunny and Mori on his right. Tamaki looked at me, a peculiar smile on his face. I almost couldn't contain the urge to smiling back.

Usagiuma was sweating now, and I couldn't tell if it was from fear or the strain of trying to free his arm from Kyoya's iron-like grip. He tried to pull it out with his other hand, removing it from my arm and freeing me in the process.

"Let go of me," Usagiuma shrieked. I could hear some cats screeching in the distance, possibly in response. "You little shit, you work for me!"

"On the contrary," Kyoya put on his signature 'I-am-superior-to-you-in-every-way' smile and I'd never been more happy to see it in my life. "The contract said nothing about you owning us. Not that it would matter if it did since there was nothing legal about that so-called contract in the first place."

That both surprised and didn't surprise me, which is a much more mind numbing combination of emotions than one might think.

"W-w-w-what?" Usagiuma shoot backwards shaking and sweating profusely and generally looking extremely guilty. "I don't k-know what you talking about!"

Kyoya bent his head a little, the sunlight shining over the lenses of his glasses and covering his eyes.

"Don't you?" He asked. "Because I find it odd that you even felt the need to sign random people on the street in the first place. Could it be that no real professionals will work with you?"
"I-I-I-"

"I see," Kyoya nodded. He stood over the sniveling form of Usagiuma, clearly basking in the glow of his triumph for as long as he could.

I felt a tugging on my shirt and looked down to find Hunny giving me a big eyed sad face that would probably make 'moe' fan girls melt into goo.

"Haru-chan," he sounded close to crying. "We're really sorry we made you mad. We won't do it again, right everybody?"

I looked away, feeling the eyes of every single one of them locked firmly on me. They didn't say anything, but gave me similar pleading faces (though without the tears). I said nothing, taking in their individual faces one at a time until I reached Kyoya, who remained impassive and stared right back at me.

I frowned, I should have known he'd be the most difficult about this. At least, that's what I thought.

"I suppose I made an error in judgment," he said softly. "It wasn't my intention to anger you and I should have quit pushing you before everything became too difficult. For this, I deeply apologize Haruhi."

I blinked. I blinked and I stared. I blinked and I stared and I opened my mouth. I don't know why I did that last one because I had absolutely no idea what to say. Here was Kyoya, having a very un-Kyoya like moment and admitting that he'd done something wrong. If it hadn't actually happened, I'd probably think someone was hacking my account and writing bad fan fiction of this blog. I couldn't take my eyes off him nor could I get Tamaki's voice out of my head:

"I love you, the others love you too."

I felt like closed my eyes and going back to sleep for several hours. This was becoming harder and harder every second, and I still had no idea how to handle the notion of six robots having real feelings that didn't tie in to their wiring. As if sensing my distress, Kyoya started to walk away, motioning for us to follow.

"We should finish this discussion in a more private setting," he commented.

I stared after him, inwardly sighing at the flippancy of his statement. Of course Kyoya hadn't really changed, it would have been stupid for me to assume as much. Somehow though, that was okay. He may have been an ass (and believe me, that's never going to change), but I know now that underneath it all, he really did care about me and the others.

I silently followed him, prompting the others to follow me. I took three steps, coming up right behind Kyoya, when two very large bodyguard-type men stepped out. I nearly ran into Kyoya, he stopped so abruptly. The duo stared down at us, dark glares that probably made babies cry. I turned around, and their were two more man behind us, baring down on Tamaki and the others. I heard a chuckle, one that filled me with pure disgust for the person it was coming from.

"So sorry, boys," Usagiuma came to stand in the middle. "I'm afraid I can't let you leave just yet. We still have several more days of shooting and I just can't afford to lose you."

"You can't keep us here!" Hunny shouted, balling his hands into fists. "We don't like you, Usa-baka, you were mean to Haru-chan!"

Usagiuma could only stare at the shortest robot.
"Alright, enough of this," he then shouted, snapping his fingers. "Boys, get them into the changing room, and throw that girl out!"

The closet bodyguard loomed over me, putting a meaty hand on my suddenly very thin looking wrist. Not a split second later, that same giant man was flying through the air, courtesy of a double punch delivered by Hikaru and Kaoru. I had no idea how they got there so fast, but you'd better believe I wasn't complaining.

"Nobody touches Haruhi like that and gets away with it!" They shouted.

The other man charged at them, while the third and fourth went for the other four. Predictably, an all out brawl broke out right there in the hotel lobby. Even more predictably, the androids were winning by a massive degree. Were it not for the sheer determination of the four bodyguards to get back up no matter how many times and how painfully their were thrown back down.

I was amazed that they weren't drawing the attention of the hotel's other guests, assuming any existed. I was starting to believe that this place was completely empty aside from this quote unquote film crew.

What a shocker.

As the fight went on, I think Usagiuma realized his trump card wasn't going to cut it. He plastered himself flat against the wall, which didn't do much good thanks to his giant beer belly. One of the men had finally been taken out, but the other three weren't done. I watched Mori deliver a high kick to one's face while Hunny was taking a lower route, going for the man's knees. The twins had the second man and moved in perfect synchronization to the point that their opponent could do little else besides stand there with his fists half raised. Tamaki had the third man, but what really amazed me was that Kyoya was actually helping him. Granted, Tamaki did the brunt of the fighting (he threw a pretty good punch from the bruises on the guy's face), but whenever he was closed enough, Kyoya would take out one or two more of his teeth.

I don't know how long exactly it went on for, all I know was that by the time the second man (the twin's) had gone down, I'd decided that was enough.

"Hey," I called out, but they didn't hear me. "Guys, stop it! You're done enough!"

The third man flew over my head, courtesy of Hunny. He sprang right back up and stumbled into the brawl zone yet again.

"Guys!"

They still weren't hearing me, meanwhile I was boiling over with frustration. This had to end and it had to end now. I took a deep breath and-

"STOOOOOOOOOOOP!"

Now, I don't really know how since the room wasn't really that big, but my voice echoed several times. All movement had ceased, like time itself had complied to my demands. The six robots were staring at me now, Hikaru and Tamaki holding one man each. We all remained frozen until Usagiuma, whom I'd somehow forgotten was there, finally succumbed to whatever intense shock he was undergoing and fainted right on the spot.

I breathed heavily, my throat aching slightly from the strain. Composing myself, I crossed the hall, stepping over the two unconscious thugs in the process. I motioned for Hikaru and Tamaki to drop the other two, who by now were out cold as well from the look of things.
I stood tall, which honestly wasn't saying much, and proud. This was my way of reminding them once and for all that I was in charge and I make the rules. If that wasn't a good enough message, the next thing I did sure would be.

"Here's how things are going to work," I began, speaking authoritatively in a way I recalled my mother speaking to her clients on days when she took me to work with her. "From now on, if I tell any of you not to do something, you do not do it and you do not question me. If I tell you it's time to stop, then you stop. If I say it's time to go home, then you follow me. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Haruhi-chan!" They answered in unison (though I think Kyoya left off the '-chan').

I was a tiny bit taken aback by their compliance, but I kept from showing it pretty easily. Besides, I knew that they couldn't disobey me anyway.

'Tamaki did,' a little voice in my head whispered. Annoyed, I brushed it aside. That issue was for another day, right now I just wanted to get home and make myself a nice big cup of coffee.

"Good," I nodded. "Now let's go home."

"So this means you forgive us?" The twins called out.

I stopped, staring at the twins who looked back expectantly. I bite my lip and looked away, knowing that a part of me still hadn't. Or rather, a part of me wanted very much to walk away and let them fend for themselves.

But there was another part of me, a much stronger one that shoved that first part back and reminded me that they weren't really so bad, they just made a mistake, it's only-

…my train of thought kind of crashed right there.

I shook my head, coming back to reality and reminding myself that I still needed to answer them. I studied their faces, their hopeful expressions, and that second part of me claimed an indecisive victory.

"I forgive you."

They looked ready to start cheering and possibly hug me into an early grave.

"This time," I added immediately. "Don't ever do anything like this again."

The six of them quickly agreed, still smiling just as happily as though I hadn't said anything. As I'd suspected, I got a bone crushing hug from everyone aside from Kyoya. He was never the 'hugging kissing' type anyway, so he just smiled and patted my shoulder twice before taking the lead and walking out of the hotel and into the sun. We were halfway to the street when a thought struck me.

"The film."

Everyone looked at me with curiosity.

"What film?" The twins asked.

"You know," I motioned with my hands. "The film that they shot with you guys, they still have it!"

They collectively blinked, then, to my utter confusion and agitation, burst out laughing. Their humor came in varying degrees, Kyoya was chuckling softly, the twins were rolling around on the ground like asylum escapees.
"What is so funny?" I demanded, my face turning red.

"Oh, Haruhi," Tamaki managed, grasping my shoulder to gain some balance. "You really think we haven't taken care of that?"

I blinked.

"Yeah, Haruhi," the twins slithered up in front of my face. "We broke into the editing room and destroyed it all hours ago."

My stomach dropped. Very slowly, my neck turned to the person who I just knew had the idea to do that. Kyoya smirked at me.

"It wouldn't have been a good idea for Ouran Co. products to appear in the media anyway."

I didn't know whether to laugh uproariously or punch him in the face.

So that's how our adventure as reality show stars came to an end. When we got home, I made myself that cup of coffee, and then had to make a second one because Tamaki was so fascinated by it the first time and begged me to show him how I did it. I tried to refuse, and then he tried to do it himself.

Meanwhile, Kyoya was back to using my laptop and installing updates to programs I later found he had put on by himself without asking. Hikaru and Kaoru took over my TV again and put on another horror movie marathon that scared Tamaki and Hunny to the point where they wouldn't come out of the closet until I ordered them to put on something else. The channel they clicked onto turned out to be a cooking network doing a special on cake decorating, and Hunny had it on for the next four hours.

All in all, it was pretty much back to business as usual. Only now they would at least stop when they knew they were getting too crazy. I was surprised by how easily I slept that night, knowing that tomorrow I'd have to chaperone these wild robots for yet another very slow day of headaches.

But things were getting easier. Slowly but surely, I was growing accustomed to them, even though it would be a while yet before I could completely enjoy their presence in my life.

Right then and there, the only thing I knew was that this might actually work out in the end.

Might.

Posted by Haruhi at 9:16 pm 0 comments
The Carnival

08.02.11

THE CARNIVAL

Every year during the summer, my town plays host to a traveling carnival for a week. They usually come in July, but they've been late/early in the past too. I went to my first when I was five, the year before my mother died. I don't remember much besides riding the merry-go-round and my dad getting sick from eating too much bento.

We didn't go the next year, or the year after that. In fact, I didn't start going again until two years ago when my dad's friend Mizuzu came to visit and brought with him his rather upbeat and bubbly daughter, Mei. Yes, this is the same Mei I mentioned in a previous post. This was how we first met, and we became good friends after spending time together at the carnival which Mei insisted we go to. I had been reluctant, but somehow she talked me into it, and I was surprised at how much fun I had. I even rode the merry-go-round.

Anyway, I'm sure from this little intro of mine, you have a pretty good idea of where the next part of my story took place. Last year, I didn't have a Mei around to beg and plead until I was convinced to go.

Nope, instead I had six (okay, four) androids who decided a visit to the carnival was a wonderful idea. Granted, I already kind of wanted to go, that's why I didn't just order them to stop asking. My only condition was that we would not go on the Ferris Wheel or anything like that. I was still anxious about heights after the fiasco from that whole stuntwoman mix up.

We arrived early on either the fourth or fifth day of the event (I can't really remember). I could sense that everyone wanted to run in different directions, so I quickly ordered the androids to stay in a group unless I stated otherwise. There was pouting, but nobody disobeyed, not like they could anyway (I was still refusing to think too hard on Tamaki).

We went on a few of the less extreme rides, I go some ramen noodles, which Tamaki for some reason found fascinating, and in general, things ran pretty smoothly.

"Hey, Tamaki, wanna try some of this slurpee stuff, I bet it's tasty?"

"GAH! How dare you pour that on me! You fools know we don't drink anything!"

...pretty smoothly.

Granted, this was an isolated incident, so I wasn't about to blow up at Hikaru and Kaoru over it. I calmly walked to them and snatched the empty cup that once contained a barely touched slurpee drink I bought but hadn't liked and tossed it into a nearby garbage can. I then grabbed a wad of napkins when the guy behind the refreshments counter wasn't looking and gave them to Tamaki. All that completed, I was now faced with the task of dealing with those bothersome twins we've all come to know and love. They were wearing cheeky grins, which I'd come to find was their default expression, as I focused on them.

"Hikaru," I addressed the twin who'd done the pouring. "That was incredibly rude and you know it. I want you to apologize to Tamaki right now and never do something like that again."

I paused, then eyeballed the other twin and made a last second addition to my speech.
"You too, Kaoru, apologize."

They didn't answer right away. Actually, they didn't answer at all. They did however stare into my so hard I think I could feel some pressure in my head like it was about to explode. And I had absolutely no idea what had caused this. Even when I had my big rant session on the Extreme! set, they hadn't looked as... I can't even describe it, it was like I'd grown three heads or something.

This lasted a much shorter amount of time than it felt, I just couldn't stop from shrinking away from their gazes. Then it all stopped, they blinked and smiled as one, but there was no mirth behind it. Hard as it was for me to believe at the time (and still a little bit now) they looked pretty shaken.

"Okay, Haruhi," they answered me, and Hikaru accompanied his with a nod before they turned abruptly and stepped towards Tamaki, who was still drying himself off.

I stared after them, not really sure how to feel about what had just happened. It occurred to me that this was the first time I'd ever seen either of them do something independent of the other. Had I done something to cause it? All I did was ask them to apologize, did something in my words trigger this?

All these questions and many more would have to wait, for at that moment, I was jarred from my quest for understanding by the very subject of mine and the twin's conversation.

"Haruhi! There's a man over there who says he'll give me a toy if I just knock over some glass bottles! You should let me play for you, please please PLEASE?"

Tamaki's eyes were sparkling through his entire fast paced and breathless speech. Consciously or not, he was also leaning uncomfortably close, requiring me to lean back away from him. We stared at each other, then I backed up for real and coughed.

"I don't know, Tamaki. I don't really li-

"But you MUST, Haruhi," he begged me. "Those toys all have such sweet, smiling faces. I'd like to see you smile as well, my beloved."

My eye twitched at the name. Hadn't I asked him over and over again not to call me that? He was still giving me that look, and I realized that he wasn't going to give up on this. Sighing, I reached into my purse and handed him 200 yen, enough for two games. It wouldn't hurt I supposed, as long as he didn't do something crazy like-

"Hang on," I pulled him back upon suddenly remembering that this was a man made of metal parts that I was dealing with. That combined with his unbelievable naivety was a recipe for disaster as far as I was concerned.

"Okay, young man, step right up," the carnival worker said to Tamaki as he handed over the money I gave him. "Win a lovely prize for your girlfriend."

At this, Tamaki gave a chuckle.
"Oh, Haruhi is not my girlfriend, she's my cousin."

The man, whom I should probably mention was clearly a foreigner, froze, money in one hand and basket of ball in the other. I, meanwhile, suddenly had this great urge to simultaneously slam my head against a hard surface and slam Tamaki's head against a hard surface. Clearly, we still had some things to work out, including where and when the cover story was needed.

"Riiiight," the man finally said, eyeballing us oddly. He dropped the basket, which contained three tennis balls and pointed at the pyramid stacked trio of milk bottles. "Just knock over all three bottles, and you can have whatever prize you like."

Tamaki nodded, picking up the first ball and throwing it without aiming or even looking at the target. If you're thinking he has some kind of robotic targeting system that would enable him to get a hit without looking, you'd be wrong. The ball smacked against the wall several feet to the left of the bottles. The worker clicked his tongue.

"Well, you got two more," he reassured Tamaki. "Try to aim it this time."

The android glanced at me, as if needing my permission to pick up the second ball and try again. I gave him a small smile, which did the trick as he grabbed the next ball, held it in mid throw while narrowing his eyes at the center space between the bottles, and threw. The ball sailed through the air, and I'm no sports enthusiast or anything, but even I could tell it was a good throw. The ball closed in on the bottles, hitting them square in the center.

And bounced right off.

I had to rub my eyes to make sure I wasn't just seeing things. Lo and behold, the tower was standing as perfectly as if he'd made another bad throw. I heard the worker chuckle and saw him shaking his head.

"Oooh, so close. Well, you still have one more."

The smile he wore was not even close to the friendly one he'd been wearing up until now. All of a sudden, he looked so smug and sleazy it make me scowl and wish I hadn't let Tamaki waste my money on this. It was clear to me now that this game was rigged, those bottles were probably glued down or something. I can't imagine anyone had ever won before. Glancing at Tamaki, I could see that he wasn't ready to give up, and I probably should have listened to the growing feeling inside me that said he was about to do something he didn't. I ignored that feeling, and could only watch the blonde headed android pick up the final ball and lob it at the target, much harder than he had the last few times.

I opened my mouth to say something, but it was far too late. I can't even begin to explain what happened next.

Because the thing is, he didn't knock over the bottles. Not even one. No, what he did was way worse. I don't even know how this was possible, it shouldn't be possible. But, I saw it with my own two eyes and I have that carnival worker as an eyewitness.

The ball went through the glass right in the center. And left a hole.

A hole.

Nothing shattered, there were no cracks in the glass, it looked perfect as ever.

Except for that ball sized hole in the middle.
The carnival worker was somehow more amazed than I was. His jaw went all the way down and his eyes bugged out. He pointed a shaky finger and the bottles and the clearly very proud of himself Tamaki, who grinned happily at the man.

"So, do I win?" He asked. "I'm not sure if that counts, but if not, I could try again, right?"

"No!" The man shouted, waving his hand in fear. "No, no, you won. Take whatever you like and go!"

As per usual, Tamaki completely missed the tone of the man's voice, focusing only on his words and he let out a cheer and grabbed the first stuffed toy he could find on display. Jumping with joy, he held the animal, a bear specifically, in my face.

"Look Haruhi, I won this for you," he squealed. "Isn't he just the cutest?"

It should probably be mentioned that the bear had an obvious frown, and the way it's eyes had been stitched gave the appearance of a scowl.

"Uh… he's nice. I don't really like stuffed animals though."

Tamaki visibly deflated. His shoulders sagged and he stopped jumping, his smile melting away. I flinched slightly, not liking the face he was making and wondering when I started caring about him being sad.

"Well, if you want, you could hold him for a while," I amended, hoping this would make him at least a little happier.

To my surprise, he seemed pretty satisfied with this. He brightened right back up, though thankfully he didn't start jumping again. People were beginning to stare.

"Okay, I'll hold him for you, Haruhi. I promise to protect him with my life!" He declared, and I'd grown far too used to this sort of melodrama to try and bring him back down to earth. "But what should we name him?"

I tilted my head to one side. "Name him?"

"Of course!" Tamaki cried, looking slightly offended. "Everyone and everything should have a name. So why don't we call him…"

He paused, furrowing his brow as he tackled the difficult and life changing task of naming a stuffed toy. Tamaki gasped, a light bulb going off in his head.

"I know, his name is Kuma-chan!" Tamaki raised the bear into the sky, as if announcing this to the world.

"Kuma-chan?"

"Yes, I'd been thinking Antoinette, but then I decided that name was more suitable for a dog."

And to that, I had no response.

I swear, Tamaki said the strangest things.

Several hours went by. I and the group continued to try various rides and a few more games, though none of them won anything and I was incredibly grateful for that. The sun was beginning to set and the sky darkened accordingly. Around six thirty, I decided it was time to head home, but apparently
today was 'Drag Haruhi Around The Carnival Day' since I found myself being pulled again, only this time by a much different robot.

"Come on, Haru-chan," Hunny exclaimed. "I want to go on that ride!"

I wondered what this scene would look like to an outsider. Probably like a boy dragging his big sister to a ride while laughing happily. A perfectly normal, every day, heartwarming scene. As long as Hunny didn't try any of that 'Beloved' stuff, I was just fine with this.

"This is gonna be so much fun!" The small android cried.

"Where are we going?" I asked as he pulled me past a couple of kiddy rides.

"Over there," Hunny pointed with his free hand. I followed it, my eyes finding a very familiar and very nostalgic sight.

The merry go round.

It hit me right then that this was the only ride I hadn't gone on today. I couldn't believe I'd missed it. It looked just as I remembered it too, the colorfully painted horses and ponies turning slowly on it's axis and accompanied by tinkling music box tune. Hunny stopped on the rather short line, showing his and my bracelets to the ride operator. He lead me to a pair of free pony seats. I took the farthest one, a purple painted pony with purple and pink hair and a unicorn horn. Hunny's had no horn and was completely pink. It looked rather bubbly, sort of like Hunny himself. I grasped the handle bar firmly as the ride started.

It moved slowly at first, picking up speed as the my seat moved up and down. I watched the world spin around, catching sight of Kyoya standing with Tamaki by a face painter, the twins getting on a roller coaster for the sixth time, and Mori in the crowd of parents, watching Hunny like a hawk.

I set my own gaze on the small android. He was kicking his legs this way and that, humming along with the music. I found myself smiling, he really was like a child. I couldn't believe he was really the strongest of the androids and an expect martial artist. That bunny of his was crushed under his arm, I don't think I've ever seen him without it. His innocent disposition had some negative effects as well. I felt a twinge of jealousy, I hadn't been like that since I was three and witnessed a screaming fit between my parents and my mother's parents, which I later found out was over my father's cross dressing. I knew then how cruel and uncaring some people could be, even to their own families. My grandparents never came back to visit again.

And here was Hunny, a robot with a ten year old body and a who knows how old level of intelligence. He was a pure person, even with his lethality. He was happy found everything enjoyable, traits he shared with Tamaki, I realized. My jealously faded away, making room for admiration. I don't think I ever admired anyone as much as Hunny in that moment.

When the ride came to a stop, he was the first one off his horse. Hunny held out a hand for me, and I took it with a smile, allowing him to help me off. We met up with Mori in the group, who silently listened to Hunny excitedly tell him every single detail of the ride that he could think of. I was too busy staring at the sky, which was now a dark purple that was a hair's breath away from black.

"How did it get so late," I wondered aloud, glancing at my wristwatch. "We'd better get home soon."

"Home already?" Kyoya asked, appearing out of nowhere right behind me. "That's quite a shame, Tamaki was telling me how much he wanted to see the firework display."

I blinked. "Fireworks?"
"Yeah," the twins answered, coming up from the other direction and wrapping their arms around me. "They said there's going to be a big show tonight, don't you want to see it?"

"Fireworks sound like fun, Haru-chan," Hunny jumped in.

"Yeah," Mori agreed.

I couldn't see Tamaki yet, odds were he'd gone off on his own to the fireworks display. I knew where they set them off every year, a hill just at the edge of the carnival that had an amazing view of the sky, especially on clear nights like this one. My eyes went in the hill's direction, and as I suspected, I could clearly see Tamaki's blonde head just over the colorful tents and waving flags.

With a sigh, I wiggled out of Hikaru and Kaoru's grasp, gestured them and the others to follow me as I headed to the hill.

I mean, why not? It was a nice night, and the fireworks were always beautiful, everyone had behaved today, and I was really just in a very good mood. I found I was really enjoying myself for the first time in weeks. The androids were all smiling and happy, and it was contagious, I grinned along with them. We caught up with Tamaki, who was clutching Kuma-chan to him and eagerly showing us the spot he'd picked for us to watch the show. I sat in the cool grass, feeling the summer air on my face. It was a cool night for July, just the right kind of weather for the right kind of day. I didn't think anything could happen that would make things turn sour.

And in some ways, I was right. It was getting easier, I was coming to like the androids, they were toning down their wild behavior. It was a slow process, but it was getting somewhere.

I can't say the same for this night.

This would become very apparent to me when I got home later on.

You read that sentence correctly, by the way. When I say 'I got home,' I mean, 'I got home.'

Not 'we,' I.

Just you wait and see.

Posted by Haruhi at 10:05 pm 0 comments
I've always loved the fireworks display. Even though I never went to the carnival in the years preceding, that never stopped me from watching them out the window of my bedroom. Some may think it childish of my, but I just couldn't help myself. The bright lights and colors were enchanting no matter how old I got. I can only imagine someday, I'll be a crotchety old woman waving my cane around, trying to follow the patterns in the sky before they fade away.

Being able to watch them up close for the second year in a row, I'll admit, was a real treat. I was becoming less and less annoyed with the guys for making me bring them, if I ever really was to begin with.

Yup, things were going pretty well that day. Nothing insane or dangerous (or insane AND dangerous) had happened, all six of them were behaving, and we were about to watch an amazing display before heading straight home and calling it an early night. I hadn't been that relaxed in weeks and by God, was it ever a welcome change.

A change that, sadly, wouldn't last.

I'm sure you remember the rather ominous lines of my last post and are only reading this because you want to know what I meant by that. Some of you may already have it figured out if the comments were anything to go by. Those of you who haven't work it out for yourselves, sit tight. We're about to delve right into it.

So, when we left off, I and the others were sitting down at the spot Tamaki picked out to watch the fireworks. I had to hand it to him, it was a nice choice. We were close enough to see the carnival workers getting everything ready, but far away enough that the inevitable noise wouldn't be too disorienting. I had no idea how, with their superior hearing, the androids would be able to handle any type of loud sound, but then I realized the 'Oh-So-Brilliant' yet 'Ever-So-Unreachable' company that made them had probably thought of that. I sure hoped they did, anyway.

"I'm not sure I understand," Kyoya was saying, glancing around at the surrounding families and hyperactive small children. "How is a sequence of colorful lights in the sky considered entertainment. Don't you already have things like that?"

"If you mean stars," I answered. "Then yes, but this is different. It's... well, it looks really nice and it's fun to watch and..."

I trailed off, finding it hard to come up with a decent explanation with Kyoya's expecting eyes glued onto mine with no sign of letting up.

Leave it to Tamaki, still clutching that precious bear of his, to come to my rescue.

"Come now, Kyoya," he said jovially. "We're here to have a good time with Haruhi. Relax and enjoy yourself."

"Yeah, Kyo-chan," Hunny piped up, his own arms wrapped around his Usa-chan toy (I swear, he and Tamaki looked like brothers right then). "You can have fun without lots of questions!"
Kyoya sniffed at them. "Forgive me for my curiosity. I prefer to understand the workings of such foreign practices in order to achieve full enjoyment out of them."

It was right at this moment that my happy night, along with that wonderful trouble-free streak I'd been relishing in, came to an abrupt and deeply unwanted end. And it all started with a shadow over my shoulder and the nasally laugh of a child.

"HAH! You've sure picked up some weirdo friends, Haruhi!"

I cringed. Even my toes were clenching, the sound was so unbearable. I wanted nothing more than to ignore him and pray he'd lose interest in a non-responsive target, but then I realized the guys would most likely provide enough engagement for him, and figured I'd better get rid of him quick before that happened. I found him right behind me, a half eaten ice cream cone in one hand and some sort of little prize toy in the other. He wore a cheeky little grin I often saw on his face after a particularly nasty prank. Biting back a groan, I gave a very fake smile of my own.

"Hello, Hiro-kun," I said.

Okay, since some of you might not remember, allow me to jog your memory. I had a conversation with Hiro-kun's mother a few weeks back. I mentioned it in one of my earlier posts and also stated that we'd be seeing Hiro at some point. Well, ladies and gentlemen, that time has come.

Let me just say first that I have absolutely no problem with small children, or children at all for that matter. I try to look at them the same way I look at adults: some are nice and genuinely good hearted, and some are complete jerks I wouldn't want to spend more than ten seconds around. I'll let you read the rest of this post and come to your own conclusions about which group Hiro fits in.

"Hiro-kun, is your mother around?" I continued as the androids turned their attention to us.

Hiro took a bite out of his cone and gave the seven of us a once over, that grin never once leaving his face.

"Nah, I'm with Shinta and Akira," he jerked his head at something behind him, and I glanced upwards momentarily to confirm that he wasn't lying. "I just wanted to come and see my favorite neighbor and her new friends."

I felt a stab of something unpleasant in my stomach, a common occurrence where Hiro is concerned. I tried to come up with something to say; being my neighbor from a close knit community, it would be harder to convince him of the 'cousins' story than it would a random stranger. Wouldn't you know it, I was beaten to the punch, as if I should have expected different.

"Hello, my fine fellow," the king of liars himself said proudly. "My name is Tamaki, we're good friends of Haruhi here!"

He wrapped an arm around my waist and pulled me to him. I didn't bother pulling away, though considering what happened next, maybe I should have.

"Oh really," Hiro asked, wiggling his eyebrows. "How good?"

"Hiro!"

"What," he talked back to my reddening face. "Just a question, no need to get defensive. Or am I right?"

"No, you are not," I answered in as hard a voice as I could muster. "You shouldn't even know about
things like that, you're ten years old."

"I'm the smartest kid in my class," the cocky little boy shot back. "Plus, my TV has 300 channels."

I growled, but refused to delegate that with a response. Pulling myself free from Tamaki, I turned back around and exchanged brief eye contact with Kyoya. He had a funny look in his eye that I couldn't place, and before I could think harder on that, Hiro decided to start in with him.

"What about you, Specs," he leered over Kyoya's seated form. "Anything special with you and Haruhi. I know I've never seen any of you with her before."

Unfortunately for Hiro, it seemed Kyoya wasn't in the mood to play kid games. The 'Cool Type' lived up to his name by remaining silent and not even sparing Hiro a glance, much to the boy's clear annoyance.

"Hey," Hiro snapped his fingers in Kyoya's face twice. "You deaf or something?"

This time, Kyoya turned his head. I thought for a moment that he was going to say something horribly scarring that would send Hiro screaming and running for the hills never to return. Even after a long inner debate, I never figured out whether or not this would be a good thing. It didn't matter anyway, because that isn't what Kyoya did. Instead, he began talking pleasantly to Hiro, his voice not even one octave higher than normal. It would've made no sense to me, were it not for the fact that I couldn't understand a word Kyoya was saying.

Yes, he was speaking an entirely different language. It was one I recognized, but didn't speak a word of beyond 'hello,' 'goodbye,' and 'thank you.' I don't think Hiro could speak it either if his look of confusion was anything to go by. So much for being the smartest kid in his class.

"What the heck are you talking about?" he asked after a minute or so of this.

Kyoya tilted his head to one side, then called out to the twins, who responded in the same language before laughing raucously, as if Kyoya had just told them the funniest joke it the world. It had the desired effect, as Hiro shook his head wildly, trying and failing to make sense of what they were saying. Then he gave a groan and literally threw up his hands.

"Man, you guys are a bunch of freaks!" he shouted before stalking away back towards his family.

I let out a sigh, glad to be rid of the little brat, as Hikaru and Kaoru became silent. I looked at Kyoya.

"Was that English you were speaking?"

He smiled and nodded. "We are all programmed to speak 30 languages fluently, English included."

I gave a slow nod of my own, inconspicuously glancing around to make sure no one was close enough to hear him talking like that.

"Yeah," I muttered. "You guys sounded… kind of funny, actually."

"How so?" he asked.

"Well, it's nothing really," I answered shaking my head. "I could've sworn your voice sounded completely different."

He gave a knowing smile at that and a chuckle reverberated in the back of his throat.

"It would," he said smoothly. "You remember, of course, that we are artificial intelligence. Nothing
about us is natural, including our voices."

I furrowed my brow as he paused for a moment when the twins started baiting Tamaki into another fight. For the moment, I ignored them, wanting more of an explanation from Kyoya.

"You see, the voices you hear us use everyday come from actors whom the company have paid for use of their voice clips. It's the same for every language we speak. Our English speaking voices come from a group of actors centered in the city of Houston in the state of Texas."

I had to let that sink in a bit before speaking.

"I see… and do they know exactly what these voice clips are being used for?"

His smile stayed in place, but no more was said on the subject. Really, that was pretty much all I needed to know the answer, and I found myself wondering once again just what kind of company this Ouran Co. really was.

All talking ceased when an official's voice rang out through a megaphone, announcing that the show was about to start. Cheers and applause followed, and it even got Tamaki to stop yelling at the twins for whatever they'd said to set him off this time. We all got comfortable, even Kyoya, who still didn't appear all too interested. I took a deep breath, allowing myself to relax and forget about Hiro and my problems. For the moment, all I could care about was the first stream of shrieking red light shooting through the air, to be met with even more applause and much louder cheering.

Many more lights followed, leaving the night sky bright enough to almost pass for day. I heard somebody gasp, probably either Honey or Tamaki and saw Hikaru and Kaoru pointing at one of the bigger ones as it exploded, letting loose a barrage of color. I let my body fall back on the ground, gaining a better view and relieving the kink in my neck from craning it up so high. This meant I had a perfect view of the next big firecracker and a pair of familiar red sneakers zooming passed us. Unrelated was my excellent hearing picking up Hiro's loud exclamation as he continued running.

"I can too get closer! Just watch me!"

"Hiro!" I shouted, stumbling as I tried to get back on my feet. "Hiro, what are you doing?"

Either is was too far away to hear me, or just didn't care to answer. With frantic eyes, I watched him get closer and closer to the fireworks table, and nobody was trying to stop him. Top notch security detail, gotta love em.

"HIRO!" I shouted through cupped hands. "GET BACK HERE, OR I'M TELLING YOUR MOTHER!"

I thought about running after him, and I might have too had I not suddenly felt a large hand on my shoulder. Looking up, I found the giant form of Mori, staring out ahead of us at the sprinting child.

"Stay here," he said, deep and rumbling as ever. "I'll take care of it."

I barely had time to give any sort of response before he was tearing after the wayward Hiro. By now, the boy had stopped moving and now stood in awe as fireworks shot off three feet away from him. Mori closed in, and wasted no time in grabbing Hiro and dragging him, kicking and screaming, away from the potential danger. I sighed in relief. Hiro may have been incredibly annoying, but I certainly wouldn't have wanted him injured in anyway.

"LET GO OF ME!" I heard him shout as him and Mori got close enough. "I KNOW A KID WHOSE DAD IS A COP! I'LL HAVE YOU ARRESTED FOR KIDNAPPING AND
HARRASMENT AND A BUNCH OF OTHER THINGS!

Okay, maybe some damage to his vocal chords would be appreciated. Just something temporary.

I had to back up as Mori returned to the group, otherwise I would have gotten a black eye from Hiro's wildly kicking legs.

"Hiro," I cried, trying to find a spot where I could grab him and not get kicked. "Hiro- Hiro would you calm down?"

"HEEEELP!" he screamed at the top of his lungs. "THIS PERSON IS KIDNAPPING ME AND TOUCHING ME IN INAPPROPRIATE PLACES!

I gave up, groaning loudly as I nodded at Mori.

"Just let him down."

He promptly obeyed, dropping his arms and letting Hiro fall to the ground and land hard on his rear end. He gasped in pain, but it was better than the screaming by a wide margin. I hoped the incident would end there, and that his screaming would be ignored the same way his little stunt had. It seemed, though, the general public suddenly cared about his well-being, as another male, and much older, voice sounded.

"Hey, what's going on over here?"

I turned to see three men in regular clothes walking over. I had a feeling they weren't quite so average though, as their loose fitting t-shirts exposed muscular forearms that could only be gained from large amounts of time in the gym. They moved to surround us, one in the middle, his two friends on either side of us. They all had serious faces and deep frowns that made me feel slightly nervous. But I refused to let that show.

"Is there a problem here?" the one on the left asked, eyeing each of us individually a hard, unfeeling gaze. "We heard some rather suspicious sounds just now."

I could just feel Hiro's smug little smirk, even though he wasn't within my line of sight at the moment. I inhaled deeply, needing all the calm I could get to avoid saying or doing anything that would make things worse.

"Sir, there is no problem here," I explained evenly. "Hiro-kun here is my neighbor, and he was just trying to do something reckless. My friends and I were trying to stop him, but you know how kids can be."

The three men exchanged glances, the one in the middle raising an eyebrow. I had no idea if they believed me or not, but it sure didn't help that Hiro decided to take matters into his own hands.

"I was not!" he shouted, moving to stand in front of me. "I was just minding my own business, then these guys tried to kidnap me!"

"We did no such thing!" Tamaki cried, choosing now to finally enter the conversation. "Mori here saved your life, how dare you be so ungrateful!"

"I was fine," Hiro snapped. "I wasn't even doing anything. This giant guy here just grabbed me for no reason!"

"Liar!" the twins shouted, pointing accusing fingers at Hiro, who stuck his tongue out at them in
"Alright!" the one in the middle shouted, his authoritative tone drawing all attention to him. "Let's hear what the so-called 'giant' has to say about all this."

They turned to Mori, as did I. He was standing next to Hunny, saying nothing and expressionless as always. His eyes fell on me for a moment, then slipping away as he gazed at nothing. I blinked and took a step to the side, back into his view and gave a nod, silently egging him on.

'Go on,' I mentally urged him. Say something!'

He looked at me again, but soon looked away, leaving me confused and gawking, at least until I felt a presence next to me. Kyoya leaned over, whispering in my ear as discreetly as possible.

"I believe Mori may have reached his daily limit."

At first, I had no idea what he was talking about, and then I remember that User Manual of his, and the list of features built into the 'Wild Type' model, particularly the 'can only say 50 words a day' part. My mouth fell open, I couldn't help myself. We're talking about someone who never says more than two words a day, even when in a situation were talking would be extremely useful, and the one time he actually needs to say something, he can't.

Perfect.

When did he even say anything today? When I wasn't around or something? Do he and Hunny secretly have deep, philosophical discussions when they're left alone together?

I had no idea, and all it really meant was that I would have to figure out another way to get him out of this before Hiro found another way to make things worse.

"Just wait one second!"

Or Tamaki did.

"I don't know who you think you are," Tamaki said while wrapping an arm around Mori's much taller frame. "But my brother here is a model citizen, and was merely protecting this child from a close brush with death. If anything, he is a hero and should be regarded as such!"

He sounded convincing as ever, helped by the fact that he was telling the truth this time. Granted, an over glorified truth, but the truth nonetheless. These three guys weren't that easily convinced though. They turned analytical eyes on Tamaki, looking him up and down before the third one spoke for the first time.

"You're saying this guy is your brother," he repeated, waving a lazy finger back and forth between Tamaki and Mori.

"Of course," the former stated confidently. "We're adopted siblings, all of us."

"Except for Haru-chan," said Honey as he pushed his way forward. "She's our cousin."

"Cousin?" Hiro shouted before doubling over with loud laughter. "You gotta be kidding me. She doesn't have any cousins. She doesn't even have family besides her weirdo dad and those grandparents who never come around."

I bit my lip, feeling a growing desire to tape Hiro's mouth shut and leave him like that for the rest of
his life. I also wondered just how much his mother talked about my family when I wasn't around and he listening in. I pushed those thoughts aside, knowing there were more important matters at hand. Like the fact that the first man was now approaching Mori with what couldn't possibly be innocent intent.

"Sir, may we talk in private, please?"

He grabbed Mori by the arm roughly and pulled. Mori remained still as a statue, only moving his head to give the man a look I couldn't place. Grunting, the man pulled harder, but couldn't budge him an inch. Then he succeeded in wrenching Mori's arm out from his side, but the man's triumph was short-lived. I heard a thump first, then watched as the man let out a gasp and feel to the ground, clutching his leg in pain. Beside him was Honey, crouched in a fighting pose and glaring daggers at the man.

"Honey!" I shouted at him, a heavy weight beginning to press onto my stomach. "What are you doing?"

"He tried to hurt Takashi," the little android fired back. I was taken aback by the look in his eye. It was as if the childish nature I'd come to define him by had vanished. Right now, he looked even scarier than Kyoya did on a bad day.

"That doesn't mean you have a right to kick people!" I answered.

But my scolding had come far too late. Already, the down man's companions were rounding on Honey, looking furious and ready to take him down. They didn't get very far, as an arm shoot out into their path, courtesy of Mori. It seemed he was returning the favor by protecting Honey. I'm not really sure what happened next, it was so fast and loud and messy. I know that the man Honey attacked got back up and went for him again, missing his mark and accidentally knocking Kaoru to the ground. This incited Hikaru's rage, and he launched a screaming attack on the man. Tamaki got involved when a flying fist grazed by my face, despite having no idea who had thrown it. By the end, even Kyoya had gotten a hit in, knocking out one of the men when he kneed Tamaki in the stomach.

We'd gotten quite an audience by now. It appeared the fireworks show had finished sometime when I wasn't paying attention. Now a crowd was swarming us, including several security guards who weren't making a move, and probably wouldn't have been able to do much even if they did.

"This is awesome," Hiro said, sitting comfortably a safe distance away and finishing up his ice cream cone. "Way better than the stuff on TV. COME ON, KICK HIM IN THE HEAD!"

I hate to admit it, but I had to hand it to those three guys. They were holding their own shockingly well in a fight with six robots, two of whom had expert knowledge in martial arts. They even managed to find their ways out of the scuffle, one after another. By the end of it, the robots, sans Kyoya, where left to punch and kick each other until they realized what had happened and stopped, a tangled mess of limbs piled up before three enraged men I was absolutely sure weren't civilians. And as suspected…

"Alright, that's it," the first one shouted, pulling a badge and a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket. "You are all under arrest for assaulting an officer."

"Booo!" Hiro screamed, throwing a crumpled up napkin and missing by at least a foot. "That is so anti-climatic!"

I had no time to imagine any more ways to silence him forever, right now, I was too wrapped up in
watching my non-human houseguests get cuffed one after another. Were I in a more subdued state of mind, it might have occurred to me that they'd inexplicably stopped fighting and were completely calm and submissive as they were pulled two by two to their feet and led away by the three cops. A few people in the crowd applauded and whistled, but almost everyone had no idea what had just happened or how to react to it. I charged after them upon finding my footing, and only looked back once to see Hiro running in the direction of his two friends, Shinta and Akira.

My breathing became ragged as I compelled my not-too-powerful body to move at full speed.

"Hey, wait!" I shouted once I was with earshot of the cops and the androids. Only the former turned to look at me.

"I'm sorry ma'am," the cop holding the twins said, as if knowing just from looking at me what I wanted. "We have to take them in. If you want, you can come and post bail, but we can't just let them go after what they did."

"I know that," I answered through gasps of breath. I've read several books on police procedural from all over the world in my prep to one day attend law school. I knew exactly how serious this was, and most upsettingly, I knew the bail for assaulting an officer was not going to be cheap. Add in the fact that there are six of them and… well, I just hoped I could go without food for a couple of weeks.

My very long moment of silence provided ample time for the cops to haul the six of them into plain looking cars before attaching sirens to the top. I caught sight of Tamaki, pressing his face against the window and giving me puppy dog eyes that could rival any real dog's. It took all I had not to look away, his pathetic-ness was overpowering.

"Don't worry," I called out. "You guys don't try anything, just do as the policemen say. I'll come and get you as soon as possible. I promise!"

The sirens let out a whine as the engines roared to life. I watched, defeated, as the androids were carted away to a jail cell somewhere in a part of town I wasn't familiar with. I waited for them to turn a corner and leave my line of sight before taking off running again, pumping my legs harder than ever before, while trying to think coherently enough to make a plan.

'Okay, dad has some emergency money in his secret drawer. He put the key in that shoebox in his closet where he keeps his old make-up and perfume samples. I just have to take it all and hope it's enough. I don't know what I'll do if it's not.'

If that was the case, I knew my best bet was to get Kyoya out first. He was the smart one and made all the plans after all. I prayed that it wouldn't come to that, because outside of a massive jail break, I had no idea how else I could get them out of there.

I was so lost in thought, most of my trip home went by in a blur. I'm still amazed that I was able to make it all six blocks without busting a gut or coughing up a lung. As the apartment complex came into view, I felt a wave of relief. Now all I had to do was get inside, get the key to the drawer, grab the money and hail a cab to the police station. I kept repeating this plan in my mind over and over again, focusing my eyes on the light up windows of my apartment.

Half a second later, I was skidding to a halt ten feet away from the fenced in building. My vision was filled with nothing but those windows and the light shining through them. Light I knew I had turned off before leaving the house. I stared at them, making sure that really was my apartment I was looking at and that I hadn't made a mistake in my panic. I took in the curtains that obstructed my view of a lamp, so great was my focus, that I literally jumped back in shock when a shadow moved right passed the window. I saw in for barely a few seconds, but even that was enough for me to
recognize a head of long hair and some flowing articles of clothing.

Oh.

Oh no.

'Oh no no no no no no no no no!'

I raced up the stairs, all the panic I'd been feeling up til now multiplying by ten. I don't even know how I made it to the second floor landing all the way to my apartment door. I could barely think straight.

'Please be a burglar. Please be a burglar. Please be a burglar. Please be a burgler. Please be a burglar.'

I got out my key and fitted it into the door. That's when I discovered it was already unlocked. It was probably the most damning piece of evidence that my worst fears had been realized. I pushed the door open anyway.


I saw him immediately. The very second my foot was in the doorway, he had launched himself from the kitchen (were some noticable smoke was coming from the toaster oven) into the doorway and gathered me into his arms. I got a nose full of his very strongly scented lavender perfume as he let out a gleeful squeal and spun me around the living room, kicking the door closed with one high heel clad foot.

"HELLO, HARUHIIIIII!" he sang. "YOUR ADORING FATHER HAS COME HOME FOR A VISIIIIIIIIIT!"

…I believe I mentioned in a previous post that my father is a tranny, right?

Well, just in case I didn't, my father is a tranny. It's a very long story that even I don't know all the details of. I just know that he was always one, but never really went all out until after my mother died and he swore off women completely.

His real name is Ryoji Fujioka, but he goes by 'Ranka' and has worked in several tranny bars throughout the years. The reason he was away all these months was because of a great job opportunity at a bar in Hokkaido. The job was only available during the summer months and paid twice what Dad usually gets at the bars around here. He'd have been stupid not to take it, and this story would have been a great deal shorter, I can tell you that.

As it was, he had abruptly come home for a surprise visit at the absolute worst possible time and, as you can imagine, I wasn't particularly happy about it.

"DAD!" I couldn't stop myself from shouting. "What- wha- what are you- Why are you- I thought you were working and- I-"

He interrupted me with a laugh, patting my head and giving a reassuring smile. As if it needed to be more obvious that he had misread my disjointed stammering.

"Oh Haruhi, didn't you get my letter?" he chuckled, pulling me into another hug. "I sent it over a week ago! I hope it didn't get lost in the mail."

More than likely, he forgot to send it. Dad can be a little forgetful sometimes, especially when he's
"Now then," he went on, letting me go and bustling into the small kitchen where that toaster oven was covering in a cloud of white smoke. "I was just making us some pancakes, I learned a recipe in Hokkaido that I've been dying to try out."

He stopped talking there, grabbing a dish cloth from the sink and attempting to wave away the smoke and see just how badly he'd damaged the toaster oven this time. I hadn't moved a muscle. I couldn't even look away from my dad's back length red hair and floral print dress. He was humming a song under his breath, one I could somehow make out over the ringing in my ears as I began to feel faint.

Okay, I know what phrase you're all thinking right now. I know you can see it coming, because as most of you have grown up on mindless cartoons and anime, you know there is only one thing I can say right now that would accurately describe the situation.

So let's just say it all together now.

Ready?

Here we go!

'There is no way this could possibly get any worse.'

Did you say it? I bet you did, don't lie.

Well, whether you did or you didn't, I know you'll all be shocked to learn that… no, no there is a way this can get worse. There is a way my whole ridiculous perdicament could get much, much worse.

Would you like to know what that is?

Why am I even bothering to ask you?

So right about that moment, the doorbell rang. I wasn't mentally at a point where I could recognize this, but luckily, Dad was.

"Sweetie, could you get that?"

I didn't say anything, but my feet moved of their own accord to the door, and I somehow found it in me to reached out my hand and turn the doorknob, allowing the door to swing open, and our visitors to come into view.

I blinked.

Then I blinked again.

I stared into a pair of faces I hadn't seen in years. Not since my mother's funeral, when they'd refused to come within ten feet of us and only dared approach me when Dad wasn't around. They hadn't changed much in ten years, aside from wrinkles that hadn't been there before. They also looked shorter, although that may have just been me. I was frozen in place, staring at them just as deeply as they stared at me. Finally, my jaw started to move again, and I spoke aloud two simple, yet heavy, words.

"Grandma…? Grandpa…?"
Grandma's face broke out in a smile.

"Haruhi, dear you look so beautiful," she said softly.

"Just like your mother," Grandpa continued, looking close to tears. "I- we're sorry to barge in like this, but-

"Haruhi, who is it?"

I heard Dad's footsteps come up behind me, then stop abruptly. There was a deathly silence, I couldn't imagine what Dad's face must have looked like right then, but I doubt it was pretty.

"What are you doing here?" I almost shivered at the coldness in his voice.

Both my grandparents flinched, as it that tone had psychically hurt them. I dazedly stepped to the side, so they and my Dad would have nothing separating them. Grandma gave Grandpa a look, expecting him to be the first to talk, I surmised. Coughing to clear his throat, the elderly man straightened his posture and gave my father a serious look.

"Ryoji," he said. ".…or is it Ranka, now?"

Dad said nothing.

"Well, the reason we're here is… well, we know it's been a long time and…"

His faltering was coupled by a growing tremor in his hands, and Grandma took it upon herself to relieve him of the task at hand.

"Ranka," she said gently, with a warmth I never thought I'd hear from her. "Mashiro and I have been seeing a counselor recently, and he's brought to light a great deal of bitterness we've been carrying, particularly towards you and our daughter's decision to marry you."

"We know we said terrible things," Grandpa started in again. "We can't take back the past, but we know that Kotoko loved you, and that we were horribly unfair to judge you based on your um… your hobbies and not see how happy you made our daughter."

"If it's too late to apologize, we understand," Grandma's eyes were filling with unshed tears. "But we want you to know that we are deeply sorry for everything. If it pleases you, we'd like to try and make amends. We want to be in our granddaughter's life again, and yours as well."

They looked older right then, older than when I'd first opened the door if that were possible. Here they were, standing at the door of the only family they had left, pleading for a second chance to the man they'd shunned all those years ago. I looked at my Dad, at his expressionless face and slightly parted lips. I had no idea what was going through his head at the moment. Would he say anything? Would he invite them in? Would he slam the door in their face and never look back?

The answer… well, honestly I probably shouldn't have been surprise. Maybe it comes with the whole Tranny thing, but my Dad is a complete sap and well dissolve into tears at even the most melodramatic display.

That's not to say that my grandparents weren't genuine, they really were. I just hadn't expected Dad to openly burst into tears and fling himself at his in-laws, holding them close as my grandma began to cry with him and my grandpa just smiled and patted him on the back.

Meanwhile, I was still off to the side, watching it all unfold before me in a dazed cloud of shock and
awe. I don't think it had completely reached my brain just what was happening yet.

My father had come home for a visit.

And then my grandparents choose today to try and bridge fences.

And I have six androids that I need to bail out of jail.

And I'm going to need a new toaster oven when this is all over.

...okay, NOW it can't possibly get any worse.

Posted by Haruhi at 8:05 pm 0 comments
Bail Money

08.04.11

BAIL MONEY

I'd just like to clear one thing up before we get started.

Before last year, I had not seen either of my grandparents since I was a very young child. My dad's own parents had died before I was born, and with no aunts, uncles, or cousins, it was always just me and him. The cards they sent on my birthday had generic poems printed in flowery font and a check for 2000 yen. That's it.

Needless to say, I was pretty indifferent to it and them by the time I was in my early teens. Dad certainly didn't talk about them, not even when those cards came in the mail. If they didn't care about us, why should we care about them?

I carried that resolve, never intending to break it, but I guess there was always a very, very small part of me deep, deep, deep down that kind of maybe missed them a tiny bit. I could vaguely remember their visits from when my mom was still alive. They treated me like a princess, buying me dresses and dolls and a bunch of other stuff I stopped caring about when I was seven. I imagine there was already hostility towards dad, but at least back then, Mom was around to keep the peace. Once she was gone, so went that.

So contrary to what the last post may have implied, I wasn't unhappy that my Grandparents wanted to bridge fences. These days, we hear from them once or twice a week, they visit once or twice a month. They've even offered to pay part of my tuition when I start college next year. I've been trying to politely turn them down, as I'd prefer to carry my own weight, but they are very persistent. So I am happy to have them back, and I was that day too, really!

I just wish their timing wasn't so mind-bogglingly abysmal.

Seriously, any other day would have been wonderful. Had I not had a group of houseguests that needed bailing out of prison, I would have been perfectly happy to sit at the kitchen table for over an hour and reminisce and listen to crazy stories from my parent's dating years. Of course, there would then be the problem of my group of houseguests actually being in my house, but that's another matter entirely.

Had this been the case, I know I wouldn't have sat rigid and pale with sweat running down my face while Dad obliviously regaled Grandma and Grandpa with the tale of his and Mom's first date at the water park (something about an expired coupon and some kid who lost his floaties, I don't get it either).

I think the kitchen clock had broken along with that toaster oven. Every time I looked at it, it read the exact same time and never changed. Now that I think about it, that may have had something to do with the fact that at this point, I'd looked at it close to thirty times in rapid succession.

I fisted my denim pants as hard as I could, fingers quivering from the strain. I kept my head bent low, praying they wouldn't notice as I tried over and over again to calm myself down and focus. I was never going to get out of this mess if I did nothing but freak out. I needed a plan and I needed one fast.
'The emergency cash is in the bedroom,' I thought, my inner voice speaking at as calm and slow a pace as I could manage. 'I just need to excuse myself to the bathroom, it's right next to dad's room. I can run in when they're not looking, grab the money, and…'

My body slumped lower.

'This'll never work. Not only is it technically stealing, but how am I supposed to get out of the house without getting caught? They're definitely going to see me leave and even if they don't, they'll realize I'm gone eventually. I really don't want to leave the androids in jail all night.'

All that did was bring another, equally unpleasant thought to light.

'Oh God, how am I going to explain this to them? I have a half dozen SEX androids living in this apartment! That is not going to go over well. Just great. I have no way out of this!'

"Haruhi, are you alright?"

I jumped, my back slamming into the chair as I came to attention. Grandpa looked taken aback, and I wondered how many times he'd called my name before I finally reacted.

"Uh- Yes? Yes, I'm fine," I coughed, struggling to maintain a smile that didn't look too obviously fake.

Somehow, he bought it. I'm pretty sure I'm not that good an actress, but I won't complain. Grandpa cracked a smile, his wrinkled skin looking moreso all of a sudden. He gave a raspy chuckle and patted me on the head affectionately. I would have stopped him, but the action made me freeze for a moment as deeply buried memories dug themselves free. He used to do that all the time when I was little.

Dad let out a high-pitched laugh right then, a small, softer one accompanying him. You couldn't hear the latter unless you listened very carefully. It was amazing how convincingly female my father could be sometimes, right down to having a better feminine laugh than an actual woman.

"Oh, that's quite the story," Grandma said amidst her dying laughter. "I can't believe Kotoko never told us."

"That's mostly my fault," Dad admitted, smiling apologetically. "It was kind of embarrassing and I didn't want anyone to know. Looking back all these years later, I think I get why Kotoko wanted to tell people, it's a laugh riot."

This brought about a second round of infectious chuckles. I found myself giggleing softly along with them, though I hadn't actually paid attention to the story or anything that didn't have twelve numbers arranged in a circular shape and made a tense, rhythmic ticking once per second.

I had to get out of this.

I had to get out of this fast.

I had to get out of this over an hour ago.

I couldn't imagine how the androids were handling jail. Tamaki was probably a wreck, and I doubt the twins would be helping the situation much. Hunny would be okay as long as Mori was with him, he might even see it as a game or something. Mori himself, I honestly had no idea what he'd be thinking. He'd be quiet and calm as ever, but beyond that, I had no idea. Kyoya would take it the easiest, that I knew for sure. He was the adaptable one, and if the nature of their crimes had been
anything else, I bet he'd be able to talk their way out of it. It would be even easier if they could get Tamaki to calm down for five minutes and spin one of his tall tales, earn the policemen's sympathy again.

Seeing as that clearly wasn't happening, I needed a plan. I wasn't going to be able to make one with my impromptu family reunion all around me. What I needed now was some quiet alone time. I pushed my chair out and stood, getting everyone's attention.

"Haruhi, is something wrong?" asked my dad.

"Sorry," I said with a bow. "I need to use the bathroom, I'll just be a few minutes."

I turned and left quickly, locking the bathroom door as soon as I was inside. The heavy wood blocked out all sound, even as I pressed the side of my head into it and slid down onto the floor, groaning all the way.

"There has got to be a way out of this," I said. "The policemen probably took them to the station next to that ramen shop, it's the closest one around. If I could just get over there, I could…"

I trailed off, unmoving even as my voice died away and my lips remained in an 'o' shape. I lay there in that highly uncomfortable position, possibly getting a million microscopic splinters, rethinking what I had just said for an indiscernible amount of time (probably not that long, though). An idea had hit me, shining like a figurative light bulb in my head. I let it play out, seeing how it could theoretically work. It was risky, I realized. It's success hinged mainly on the androids agreeing to go home without me and stay there until I got back. I'd have to deal with hiding them from Dad and my Grandparents later. After what had happened all the other times I left them alone, you'd better believe I wasn't thrilled about doing it again, but what choice did I have?

I pulled myself back up, brushing some lint off my pants and briefly noting that I should do some vacuuming when this was over. I left the bathroom untouched and put on the best smile I could as I walked back into the living room.

"That was fast," Dad noted when he saw me approaching.

"Yeah," I muttered under my breath. "Listen, I was just thinking. Since this is kind of a big day for all of us, why don't we go out for dinner? I know this place that serves really good ramen and I don't know about you, but I'm getting hungry."

That last part was actually true, which I figured out when my stomach suddenly growled right then. I hadn't eaten since early in the afternoon, and in all the excitement, I guess I just forgot.

"Now that you mention it," Grandma spoke up. "I'm pretty hungry myself."

"Just as long as they don't put anything hot in my food," Grandpa said.

"That's a wonderful idea, Haruhi!" Dad cheered, jumping out of his seat and rushing over to hug me. "This'll really be a night to remember!"

"Oh, I know that," I muttered through grit teeth. (Or at least I thought I did.)

So from there, I excuse myself again to go get changed while my father called for a cab to come pick us up. While he was distracted, and my grandparents' backs were turned, I side stepped into my dad's room and slid the door shut behind me, careful not to make a sound. Moving as fast as I could, I tore open the closet and pulled out the worn out gray shoebox. The collective smell of old perfume hit me like a brick to the face and I threw my hand over my mouth to prevent coughing. While struggling
with that, I fished out the key, replaced the lid, threw the box back into the closest and slammed the door shut.

I took a couple gulps of the fresh, clean air before honing in on the set of drawers right beside Dad's futon. My finger ran along the bumpy end of the key as I kneeled down in front of it, tracing the shape of the key hole with my eyes. The key went in and turned, rewarding me with a telltale click. I wasted no time, pulling open the drawer by the key, taking in the large roll of bills shoved into the very back and held neatly together by a plain, beige rubber band. Ignoring the little voice in my head that kept crying 'thief' in my ear, I pulled it out and stuffed it into my pocket, trying to flatten it down so it wouldn't be noticeable. I gently closed the drawer and locked it back up, sheer relief filling me as I started to stand.

I caught sight of a shadow growing large against the door, accompanied by my father's cheerful voice.

"I'll just be a minute, I'd like to put on something nice for the occasion!"

If I had to guess, I'd say my next move took all of two seconds to complete. One second of comprehension, of watching my father's fingers wedge themselves between the door and the wall, and one second of placing my free hand on the drawers and hurling myself over it. I pressed up on the wood of it, pulling my legs in so far that it hurt. The drawers were big enough to hide me (I'm admittedly pretty small), but after the day I'd had, I was not even close to willing to take chances.

My dad skipped around his room, humming a tune I didn't recognize, messing around in his closest, and a habit he's always had that I've never been able to break him of in spite of my efforts, throwing whatever clothes he rejected across the room. He has a surprisingly good arm too. In the time I sat there, sweating and shaking with horrible thoughts of being caught, upwards of five shirts, two skirts and one faux fur coat landed in my lap and on my head. There was one other thing as well, though I'm debating with myself over whether I should bring it up. I guess it doesn't matter since it was over a year ago now, so whatever.

It was an… undergarment, let's say. And not just any old type of undergarment either.

Let's just say I learned that night the true extent of Dad's dedication to cross dressing.

Anyway, this went on for a while longer, and every I was getting more and more nervous every second that went by that he didn't leave. After the above mentioned incident, I had become increasingly paranoid that he would do or throw something else that might put me at a risk of exposing my presence. I clutched the hem of my shirt so tightly, I'm surprised it didn't split in half.

When he suddenly stopped humming, I froze in place. The only sounds now were my grandparents' muffled voices somewhere in our living room. I waited, sucking in a breath and refusing to let it out no matter how much my lungs protested. Then dad let out a long, exaggerated sigh.

"Oh well, I guess what I'm wearing will be good enough."

'Are you KIDDING me?' I very badly wanted to scream. I settled for biting my lip as hard as could and smacking my head against the drawers once I heard the door open again and my dad step back outside.

I crossed the room, keeping hidden behind the door so I could look out discreetly and make sure no one would see me leaving. My dad was showing Grandma and Grandpa the shrine my put up for mom in the corner, all three backs were to me. I tip-toed out of the room, leaving the door open just as Dad had left it. I counted the steps to my room, from 1 to 6, reaching out for the door and-
"Haruhi!"

I whirled around, my hand instinctively going to my pants pocket where the money rested.

"Y-yes?"

Dad smiled brightly, either missing my clear case of nerves or misinterpreting it. Behind him, Grandpa assisted Grandma in standing back up and reached for their coats with his other hand.

"You ready to go, sweetie?" Dad asked.

A pause following as I needed time to process that I hadn't been caught. This whole night was turning me into a pile of overly paranoid goo. Then again, it was probably long in the making, just like every other crazy emotional breakdown I'd gone through since those damn androids entered my life.

I finally settled for a nod, and that satisfied him.

From there we left the apartment, leaving the lights off this time, and climbed downstairs to find a perpetually bored looking cab driver waiting. I gave him directions to the restaurant, happy that at least one thing was going right today; nobody had objected to my choice in dining.

Ten minutes later, I was seated in between Dad and Grandpa, listening to them trade more stories of my mother and her and dad's courtship, while I stared out the massive window on the opposite side of the restaurant at the brick wall of the police station. I imagined if I had x-ray vision, I might be able to see them all in their waiting for me.

"I'm so glad we came to see you two again," Grandma said, placing her hand on Dad's. "I know I've been saying it a lot, but I hope you can forgive us for our foolishness all those years ago."

"You said some hurtful things," Dad admitted. "But I think Kotoko would have wanted us to reconcile. Besides, I'd like it if Haruhi had more people to rely on, she's a bit of a loner."

The last part was whispered in Grandma's ear, but I heard it anyway. Narrowing my eyes, I coughed to get attention.

"I have to use the bathroom, I'll be right back."

"But didn't you go back home?" asked Dad.

"And we haven't ordered yet," Grandpa said while I stood and walked away.

"Just get me some pork ramen, please," I called back over my shoulder, hoping they could hear me as my feet were refusing to stop for anything.

I turned a corner, passing the enormous sign that read 'RESTROOMS' and hung over a twin set of doors. I instead went all the way down the hall to the back exit, which thankfully was unlocked. Once outside, I broke into a run, heedless of the people walking by and wanting to get away from the windows and my family's potential line of vision as fast as possible.

I rounded the police station, stopping at the front entrance. I needed a few seconds to catch my breath, then I opened the glass double doors and strode in with purpose, the weight of the money in my pocket suddenly becoming more noticeable.

"Can I help you?" the uniformed man at the front desk asked as I stopped in front of him.
"I'm here to post bail," I answered bluntly, fishing the money out of my pocket while the policemen went to pull something up on his computer.

"Name?" he asked with disinterest.

"Well, there's actually more than one of them," I started to explain, only to be interrupted by a voice I recognized immediately.

"Haruhi, is that you? HARUHI?"

I turned my head, catching sight of an arm sticking out of jail cell and waving frantically. Ignoring the policemen calling me back, I hurried over, desperate to make sure they were all in one piece and hadn't been beaten or raped or tattooed in the time since I last saw them.

The cell they were in housed only the six of them, much to my relief. I couldn't help but notice a large, bearded man in the next cell over eyeing Hunny-senpai in a very not nice way. Tamaki was up front and center, ready to greet me. On either side of him were Kyoya and Hunny, Mori directly behind the latter. The twins were sitting against the wall, staring up at the ceiling as if entranced by florescent light bulbs.

"Hi, Haru-chan," Hunny said, jumping up a little in barely restrained joy at seeing me again. "We've been having a lot of fun here, but we'd like to go home now."

Mori just nodded, still unable to talk it seemed.

"I'm inclined to agree," Kyoya spoke up, running one finger along the metal bars and making a face of disgust at the dirt residue. "This place is rather filthy."

"And the neighbors are kind of scary," Tamaki whimpered, glancing to the side at a massively tattooed man who gave an evil glare right back.

"Okay, okay," I said, silencing anymore complaints before they could be voiced. "I'm going to try and bail you all out. Until then, just stay calm and don't make a scene."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," Kyoya said, going into his 'give-Haruhi-information-that-would-have-been-much-more-helpful-if-given-before-trouble-started' mode. "We are programmed, in the event of an accidental crime committed, to remain complacent in the face of police involvement."

I opened my mouth, but paused as the day's events replayed in my head and suddenly began to come together.

"So that's why you stopped fighting when they placed you under arrest," I stated more than asked. Kyoya smiled. "Had we been aware of their status earlier, we wouldn't have fought them at all."

"I see," I muttered, the fact that this all could have been easily avoided was becoming more and apparent and equally infuriating. Then something else occurred to me. "Wait, you said 'accidental crime.' What if you committed a crime on purpose?"

"We can't," Tamaki answered as if it were the most obvious thing in the universe (and in retrospect, it kind of was). "We are programmed not to. The most we could do is fight off anyone who threatens ours lover in any way, that being you."

"But what about when you destroyed Usagiuma's film," I shoot back, unsure of why I was fighting them on this when there were other things to consider. "That wasn't an accident."
"Sure it was," the twins called out, acknowledging my presence for the first time since I arrived. "It's not our fault that fire and gasoline don't go well together."

"Hey!"

The extra, unfamiliar voice was followed by loud and fast approaching footsteps. I looked in their direction, not too happy to see the policeman from before coming closer.

"Ma'am, you can talk to them after you've bailed them out, please come this way."

He didn't turn around, he was going to stand there and wait for me to follow. I sighed and looked back at the androids, trying to seem reassuring.

"I'm going to go and get you out now," I said. "Just be patient, okay?"

"Okay, Haru-chan, we love you!" Hunny answered with a wide grin.

I walked ahead of the policemen all the way back to the front desk. I pulled out the money and removed the rubber band, flattening the stack of bills out on the desk and sliding it over to him. He pulled them out of view and counted them at light speed, his head down so I couldn't see his face. He was mouthing something to himself the whole time, and when he stopped, I tensed up.

"You wanted all six of them?" he asked.

I didn't like that question, not one little bit.

"Yes," I answered, trying not to show my dawning fear. "They're my cousins, see, and I'd like to get them home as soon as possible."

He raised an eyebrow, studying my face.

"Well, that's too bad," he said, holding up the money Dad and I had been saving for over three years. "You've only got enough for three of them."

It was like a brick being dropped into my stomach. No, that's not right. More like fifty bricks. I wanted nothing more than to collapse right then and there from a combination of frustration and sheer exhaustion. I was so angry, I don't know how I managed to give the policemen the okay to go ahead. I know that I stood there for a while after he left, staring at area of wall that wasn't obstructed by pictures of fallen officers or award ceremonies. I could vaguely make out people talking behind me, but it wasn't until someone started screaming that I finally snapped out of it.

By that time, someone had come up from behind me and pulled me into a bear hug. I would've tried to fight them off, thinking it was an escaped criminal trying to kidnap me or something, but then to 'assailant' spoke.

"Oh, Haruhi my love, I'm so sorry to have left you all alone. You must have been terrified without us to protect you!"

"Not really," I muttered as Tamaki continued to babble declarations of love that I was in no mood to deal with. "What's going on back there?"

I could hear the screaming, now accompanied by banging on the walls, growing louder. I pulled myself away from Tamaki, standing beside him as Hunny ran over and hugged me as well. I didn't pay much attention to that, as I could finally see what was causing all the ruckus.
Two officers, including the one I'd been dealing with, dragging a frantic, wild-eyed Hikaru away from the jail cell, while Kaoru's arms jutted out, hopelessly grasping for him. Both of them were shouting, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. I don't think they were even using real words, and I wondered if maybe they shared some secret language that the manuals (and Kyoya) didn't mention.

"Come on," the officer on the right grunted, pulling Hikaru into a standing position. "What's with you two? Can't you be apart for a little while?"

'No,' I internally answered, the answer dawning on me. 'No, I don't think they can.'

Hikaru said something incoherently, something that sounded a little like Russian, but was mostly just gibberish. Then his body relaxed and he fell into some kind of catatonic state, unable to move for himself or even at all. From the jail cell, Kaoru also became uncomfortably silent. I could tell the policemen weren't happy about this, but at least now Hikaru wouldn't fight them.

Tamaki rushed over and grabbed his fellow android from them, lifting Hikaru into his arms with ease while the cops tried to catch their breath.

"What is wrong with that kid?" one of them demanded.

"…well," I started awkwardly, then caught sight of Tamaki in my peripheral vision and pulled him closer. "Let me just let Tamaki here explain."

I gave Tamaki a pleading look, praying that his 'secret' function didn't have some kind of password that I didn't know and wouldn't activate now when I really really needed it to. Considering how my luck had been all day, I wouldn't have been surprised.

"Oh, yes," Tamaki said, his eyes widening with understanding. "My poor younger brother's heart condition. It's congenital, you see, and he's suffered from it since infancy. It was a trying time, the doctors were sure he wouldn't make it past early adolescence. We prayed everyday for a miracle, hoping beyond all hope that our God in heaven would be merciful on our little family and—"

Okay, I'm going to spare you the rest because it gets incredibly sappy and ridiculous to point where even Soap Opera writers would call it too over-the-top. As expected, it worked like a charm, and by the time Tamaki had worked in a war between two ninja clans over a can of cream of mushroom soup (don't ask), both officers, as well as several inmates, were bawling their eyes out while we made a quick exit.

By that time, Hikaru had regained consciousness and was now walking on his own in a zombie-like state. I don't know if he was even aware that he was moving, he almost walked into a lamp post before I steered him away from it. Being separated from Kaoru must have been killing him, and I made a mental note to re-read their manual later on and see if there was anything I missed that may have mentioned what to do in such a situation.

"Okay, listen carefully, guys," I said, moving in front of them. "I have to get back to that ramen shop over there before my family realizes I'm gone."

"Your family?" Hunny asked.

"Yes, I'll explain later," I said, waving his curiosity off. "I need you guys to go home and wait for me. We'll be back in about two hours, so when you hear us coming, go hide in my closet. I'm afraid you may have to stay there all night."

"What do we do about the others?" Tamaki raised his hand. "I don't think Hikaru here is going to
make it without Kaoru."

I looked at the redheaded robot, who was staring at the ground looking ready to put a gun to his head at any moment. I tried to catch his gaze, but he refused to look at me.

"We'll figure that out once my Dad and grandparents leave. Hikaru will be okay until then," I said, not really believing it, but needing to reassure myself that he wasn't going to spontaneously self-destruct due to lack of contact with Kaoru or something.

I think Tamaki must have sensed my nervousness, because of course, he took it upon himself to 'comfort' me with a hug and sweet nothings in my ear.

"I'll always be here to help you no matter what happens," he said. "I love you so much, Haruhi."

"Yes, I know," I answer flatly and very un-romantically. "Just go home, all of you. I'm trusting you not to make any unnecessary pit-stops on the way. Go before anyone sees you."

"Like your family?" Hunny asked, pointing at Grandma and Grandpa, who stood directly behind me.

"Right, like them," I answered dismissively. "…THEM!"

I whirled around, somehow not getting out of Tamaki's grip in the process. Grandma and Grandpa were alternating between staring at me, staring at Tamaki, staring at Hunny, staring at Hikaru, staring back at me, and so on and so forth. This went on for some time, with me feeling like I was facing down a firing squad, Tamaki and Hunny oblivious, Hikaru despondent as ever. My mouth fell open, but the only thing to issue from it was a barely audible hiss.

"Haruhi," thank Grandma to be the one to break the intensity of the silence. "You left to use the bathroom fifteen minutes ago. Is everything all right?"

"And who are these guys," Grandpa motioned at the three androids. "Don't tell me you were sneaking off to see your friends tonight of all nights!"

"Well, at least now we know she isn't really a freaky loner," Grandma 'whispered' in his ear.

"Okay!" I shouted. "Uh… I can explain all of this, I just… where's dad?"

I hadn't realized he was missing until right then, and I got an answer immediately. Not from my grandparents either. No, instead I got Tamaki being wrenched off of me, followed by a thud and a yelp as something or someone was thrown to the ground behind me. I turned slowly, to find Tamaki face down on the concrete, moaning in pain I didn't know he could experience. A heeled foot rested on his head, belonging to none other than my loving father. He was glaring down at Tamaki, a toothy smile on his face that was negatively accented by the crazed and very angry look in his eye. It was plain wrong for a man who dressed in women's clothes on a daily basis to look that frightening.

"Oh dear, Haruhi," he said in a deceptively sweet voice. "I see there was a little cockroach crawling up your arm. I think I'll have to crush it now."

If that brick wall had been any closer, I'd have slammed my head against it a couple of time, hopefully until I knocked myself out. Maybe then I'd wake up in bed and this will have all been a bad dream. As it was, I could not move a muscle, I could not speak a word, I could barely even think straight, aside from a single question repeating itself over and over again.

'Why?'
SEPARATION ANXIETY AND MORE MISUNDERSTANDINGS

When we last left my little story, all six of the guys had been arrested for fighting with a group of off-duty cops; my father decided to come home for an unannounced visit on the exact same day my grandparents chose to do the same; I'd managed to get myself in a position to bail them out of jail, only to find that I didn't have enough for all of them, and now all my efforts to fix this and get them home without raising suspicions have been rendered completely worthless.

I suppose I had no one to blame but myself for not keeping track of time. The whole idea was risky from the start, and here I go being reckless and throwing caution to the wind the one time I need to keep it as close to me as humanly possible.

As my dad's heel dug into Tamaki's skull, I desperately racked my brain for something to say or do that might calm him down (while simultaneously thanking God he wasn't wearing stilettos today). The only thing coming out of my mouth at the moment was a low hissing, and that wasn't helping anything. I also had to wonder why Tamaki hadn't pushed my dad off yet. Surely he could have if he wanted to, and yet he lay there unmoving save for a twitch here and there. For one terrible second, I was convinced dad's attack had messed up his circuitry or something. Then I remembered all the abuse I'd seen the androids take in the time since I'd known them and realized he was stronger than I was giving him credit for. Of course, I was the only one who knew that, which is probably why Grandma looked ready to smack my dad with her handbag as she stomped over to him.

"Goodness, Ranka, get off the boy before he ends up hurt!" she shouted. I was suddenly reminded of my early childhood, being scolded when I broke her ceramic cookie jar in my quest for a snack. I shivered involuntarily.

Dad glared at her, but it was half-hearted and forced. He was just as intimidated by that 'strict mother' look as I'd always been. Still, he didn't let up his hold.

"Why should I?" he argued. "Didn't you see this little punk with his arms wrapped around my precious daughter? I've never seen him before in my life! What right does he have?"

"Well, obviously, he's a friend of Haruhi," Grandma answer, crossing her arms over her chest. "Or do you really think she'd let just anyone do that."

It was a statement, rather than a question. I felt a rush of gratitude towards the old woman, smiling at her in spite of myself. She paid it no heed and continued staring dad down. I, Grandpa and Hunny watched with baited breath to see how he would respond, be it with words or more violence towards Tamaki's head. I opened my mouth to say something, but it proved unnecessary as dad let out an irritated growl and lifted his foot. Barely a second passed before Tamaki was back on his feet. He moved his head from side to side, stretching out his neck experimentally. Otherwise, he was grinning cheerfully as if nothing had happened, and grasped my father's hand to shake, much to the latter's befuddlement.

"Hello, so you're Haruhi's father, right?" he asked conversationally. "My name is Tamaki, it's a pleasure to meet you. I had no idea you were a cross dresser. I must say, I almost mistook you for her mother. You are very beautiful."
The surprise must have worn off them, as Dad's eyes narrowed dangerously and he jerked his hand away. He leaned in so close, the tips of his and Tamaki's noses were almost touching. I can't really describe the look on his face aside from that it looked suspiciously like Dad was trying to make Tamaki's head explode psychokinetically. Just take my word for it.

"Don't you try to butter me up," he spat. "You're not of the hook yet. Now tell me what you are to my daughter?"

My stomach dropped like a brick. That question. Of all the things my dad could have said, all the question he could have asked and he had to pick that one. Because really, no answer Tamaki could give would make this any better. If he said he was my lover, Dad would kill him. No ifs, ans or buts about it. If he went with the cousin story, Dad would no right away that he was lying and he'd probe me for the answer until I had no choice but to spill the beans.

Needless to say, I was not about to let either of those things happen. I had broken into a run and was a half step away from dive-tackling Tamaki before even a syllable could pass through his throat. My own emitted a funny sound that, while not actually meaning anything, did put all the attention on me (except for Hikaru, who was still sulking next to the wall).

"Dad, I-" I said without thinking. "I... I can explain all of this."

Dad glanced back and forth between me and Tamaki several times, one eyebrow going slowly up to his hairline.

"Oh really?"

I swallowed and gave a nod. My toes were curling tight in the confines of my shoes. I fought the urge to look away from his penetrating gaze and instead focused on making up a good story. I would have had Tamaki spin another of his yarns, but the time where that was an option had passed. In fact, I had just ruined our chances with that by pinning everything on myself. When that thought hit me, the look on my face must not have been a nice one, as Dad's own expression softened.

"Haruhi?" he said gently, likely an attempt to put me at ease. It didn't help much, but it was a nice gesture all things considered.

I kept my head level, sweat pouring down my cheeks from the strain of trying not to look away from his hard, expectant gaze.

"They..." I started, my mouth going dry, like whatever was clouding my mind also decided to attack my speech capabilities. As I struggled, something moved out the corner of my eye, a yellow-ish something I quickly identified as Hunny's head.

Hunny...

The thought struck like a lightning bolt, that brought reality crashing back down around me. I reached over without looking, grabbing Hunny by the shoulder and pulling him close. He didn't complain.

"Dad, everyone, this is Mitsukuni," I introduced him with a smile. "But we call him Hunny. He's a boy that I've been babysitting and by chance, he happened to be taking a walk with... his brother."

I motioned at Tamaki, very thankful for the similar hair color which was pretty much the only thing they had in common where physical features were concerned. Luckily, no one brought this up, and they were even less inclined to suspect anything when Tamaki, taking the hint, ran over and gathered Hunny into his arms.
"Oh yes," he said. "Haruhi has been a wonderful babysitter, taking such good care of my darling little brother."

"She gives me lots of cake and lets me stay up late!" Hunny joined in.

He gave a laugh, smiling in that overly cute way of his, and I could just see Dad and Grandma's hearts melting. It was beyond a relief, knowing that they hadn't seen through the lie. I was making a note to let Tamaki and Hunny have first dibs on the remote for the next few days as a reward, when a warm hand touched my shoulder. Turning, I found my frowning Grandpa gesturing at the corner.

"That's all well and good," he said. "But what about your other friend, what's up with him?"

I blinked, going momentarily dumb before remembering that there was one other person here whose presence I hadn't explained. That said person was digging his head into a brick wall and scratching at the cement like a caged animal was not helping. My stomach dropped fast and hard, and of course Grandpa had spoken loud so that everyone could here him. Now Dad and Grandma had gone from fawning over Hunny's cuteness (in between glaring at Tamaki in the former's case), to watching me again, expectant of an answer. At least now I was calmer and could think straight. If I could just get through my family, I could deal with Hikaru afterwards.

"He's a friend of Tamaki's," I explained, the words rolling of my tongue with an ease that made me wonder if Tamaki was rubbing off on me. "They were taking a walk together and I saw them on my way back from the bathroom. I went out to say hi and we got to talking. I guess I just lost track of time."

I bowed low, making my truly apologetic feelings as clear as possible. Tamaki did the same, which prompted Hunny as well. It was all a very submissive scene that I hoped would be enough.

"Oh no, no need for that," Grandma said, gesturing for us to stand straight. "Of course you can talk to your friends, we would never want to impose. Especially when they're so handsome. You have excellent taste in men, Haruhi."

That last part made my calm relief vanish, my face turn bright red, make me feel like a boulder had been dropped on my head, and want to get as far away from all of these people as soon as possible. All in the scope of one second.

"Okay, thank you," I said forcefully before Grandma could open her mouth again. "I just need to go and talk to Hikaru over there. We uh… we need to discuss school work."

"Aren't you still on vacation?" Grandpa asked.

"It's our summer homework," I answered quickly. "He needs help with a research paper. It's making him really nervous, so I'm just going to go and talk to him. You guys can wait for me here and I'll be right back."

My rambling cut off there. I'd been slowly edging ever since starting on that, and now I'd finally gotten myself to turn around and half-walk, half-run towards the crumpled, miserable form of Hikaru. Skidding to a halt directly in front of him, I snapped my fingers bare centimeters away from his nose. He didn't react at all.

"Hey," I called out. "Hey, Hikaru, come on. Talk to me."

He glanced up, still panting hard. A funny noise issued from his throat, something I don't think could properly classified as human. I'd quicker compare it to an engine failing to start. Whatever it was, it wasn't what I wanted to hear.
"What is wrong with you?" I hissed, suddenly aware that we might not be far away enough that no one could hear us. "You cannot possibly need Kaoru around this much!"

Hikaru looked away, as if ashamed. That's when I noticed how badly he was shaking, and I became nervous that something might be seriously wrong with his circuitry. I had to do something to make him relax, and fast. Reaching forward, I gripped him tight by the shoulders, forcing him to look again at me.

"Listen," I said. "I know that you and Kaoru are close, I know that's how you were built, but you can survive without him for a little while."

He said nothing, and so I kept going.

"You may come as a one package, but your two separate people. You don't have to have him around to think for yourself. I promise you, we will get Kaoru and the others out as soon as possible, but until then, please try and stay calm."

As a spoke, his shivering came to a slow halt. Now slumped over and unmoving, I was at first afraid that my sorry attempt at a pep talk had done him no good. Maybe it even harmed him more.

He took a deep, shaking breath that I believe was more needed than ever before. Hikaru lifted his head, dull eyed and mouth ajar. He pursed his lips together, tensing as if preparing for something huge. Then, right before my very eyes, Hikaru opened his mouth.

And nothing came out.

I waited in vain, watching him close it and open it again. Each time, he seemed determined to say something, alone and of his own individual will for the first time since I had met him. All I could figure from the fluctuation of his pupils was that he'd be overcome by fear at the last millisecond every single time, leaving him unable to do more than gape at me hopelessly.

It wasn't a happy sight, but I still felt it was a step in the right direction. At least he wasn't acting like a deranged mental patient anymore. Taking his hand, I motioned at the waiting group.

"Come with me," I said. "You need to meet my family."

He nodded, a dark gloom overtaking him. I was forced to ignore it for the time being as more pressing matter were at hand, like trying to properly introduce Hikaru and explain why he wouldn't talk to anyone.

"This is my friend, Hikaru," I said, patting him on the shoulder. "He was out for a walk with Tamaki and Hunny. He's also a little shy around strangers."

I whispered the last part despite the huge lack of necessity for it. Everyone easily bought it, with Grandpa and Grandma greeting him as gently as they could and merely smiling politely when he said nothing in return. I eyed my Dad, who didn't look any less on guard than he had before I walked away. To my growing lack of surprise, his hateful stare was focus on an oblivious Tamaki.

"Dad, he was just saying hello to me," I struggled to explain. "He's... he's very affectionate."

"Not with my daughter, he shouldn't be," Dad muttered with a hard edge to voice, a very uncommon occurrence I might add. "If that boy is going to hang around you, he needs to learn his place."

"Which if you had your way would be a thousand miles away from me," was my thought. I might have said it aloud too; Dad would be too busy being irrationally angry to catch my meaning and
everyone else wasn't listening anyway.

"Alright, this was very nice," Grandpa spoke loud to get everyone's attention. "It's nice to know Haruhi has such good friends, but I need to eat and soon."

I don't think I was ever more grateful to my grandfather as I was right then. I could've cheered, my relief was so great. Sure, there was still the problem of getting Kyoya, Mori and Kaoru out (the latter was probably having as massive a breakdown as Hikaru was), but at least now I can send the guys home and figure out some damage control in relative peace.

"Why don't you fine gentlemen come and join us?" asked Grandma.

You're noticing the pattern here, right? Something seems to be going my way and I'm lead to believe that nothing can go wrong from here… and then something goes horribly, horribly, horribly wrong.

How many times has this happened now? You know what, don't answer that. I don't know and quite frankly, I don't want to. Let's just say 'a lot' and be done with it.

"We'd love to," answered the ever helpful Tamaki. "Wouldn't we, little brother?"

"NO!"

Everyone stared at me, and that's when I realized that it had been me who just said that and not just some idiot who sounds exactly like me. I also realized that I'd moved, one foot sticking out in the air, my arms outstretched as if to grab something. I retook a normal position before I could lose my balance and coughed.

"I just… I know you three have important things to take care of," 'Like getting home and out of sight.' "I wouldn't want to distract you."

"They seemed to have enough time to shoot the breeze for the whole twenty minutes before we came looking for you," Grandpa said with a sniff.

"Yes," I intoned. "They've spent a lot of their valuable time talking to me, so now they have to be on their way, and-"

"Oh, Haruhi, don't be so rude," Grandma scolded. "You haven't even let the dear boys talk. Is that any way to treat your friends or your boyfriend?"

"Grandma, all I'm saying is that they are very busy. Plus, it's almost Hunny's bedtime- what did you say?"

Grandma blinked, a picture of innocent confusion even as I was having an inward pre-breakdown over what she had said. Specifically the last part, and though I didn't know it at the time, I wasn't the only one dreading her eventual elaboration on what she meant.

"What about, dear?" she asked predictably.

"About… you know," I took a second to swallow, a strange sort of calm coming over me. "What you said about my- boyfriend?"

At this, Grandma's blink face lit up with understanding. She gave a nod and gestured at the redhead android leaning heavily against a lamppost, opening and closing his mouth again and again like a hungry goldfish.
"I just figured, since you wanted to be alone with that boy before that you were dating," she said. "His name is Hikaru, was it? He seems very shy and withdrawn. I'll be honest, that sort of thing has always been suspicious to me. However, you're a smart girl, Haruhi. I know you wouldn't have just anyone as your beau. I'll trust your judgment, you can count on my support should you choose to take the relationship further."

Ever see or hear something so bizarre, so ridiculous, so unbelievably and ungodly wrong that you are left completely speechless? That's me right now. Gaping, eye twitching, fingers clenching; with Hikaru oblivious to the world, Hunny saying something to Dad, Tamaki frozen in place, Grandpa just watching Grandma, Grandma clearly pleased with herself.

She and that counselor of theirs must have had a great connection if she learned so much. I just wish whoever he or she is could have taught her when to stop talking. Hell, when to *not* talk at all. That would be fantastic.

"He is not my boyfriend," I shouted indignantly.

I noticed right away that my voice had sounded really strange. I was pretty sure I'd heard a 'her' layering my 'my.' Then I looked at Tamaki, at the flush that had overcome his features, and suddenly I understood.

Grandma caught it as well, and she had no idea which of us she should be paying more attention to. Her eyes went back and forth with a hopeless bewilderment that got a point were I just felt sorry for her. That in mind, I spoke up.

"What I... what we mean is that Hikaru is just a friend," I explained gently. "You were right about him being shy though. That's why I wanted to talk to him in private, he sometimes needs a little encouragement before meeting new people."

"I see," she said, studying the three of us intently. "So you're sure he's not-"

"We're sure."

And believe it or not, it wasn't me who said that. I didn't quite believe it at first myself, not until I felt Tamaki's presence mere inches away from my back. His breath was calm and even, resonating in my ears as he spoke.

"I can tell you with great certainty that Haruhi and Hikaru are not now, nor have they ever been romantically involved."

I don't think I ever heard Tamaki sound like that before. All curt and robotic and... and Kyoya-like, really. I don't know how else to describe it and I had no idea where it came from. Wasn't this the same guy who loved going on about how much he and the others loved me and would do anything for me? Now he's all but rejecting the idea of me and Hikaru having something more than friendship. I suppose it could've been his lying ability at work again, but something told me there was more to it than that.

It's not important as of yet, but don't forget about this little event because we're going to be coming back to it soon.

Anyway, Grandma, while probably a little confused, seemed to be satisfied with this. The problem now was the look she was giving Tamaki, sizing him up.

"So does that mean you're her-"
"No."

Okay, this time it was me.

"No, no, not at all," I said, leaving not a shadow of a doubt that this was the absolute truth. "We're all friends. Good friends and nothing more. And now they need to head home, we've kept them long enough."

"Oh, but Haruhi," Dad said, slithering up like a snake and looking rather like a killer on the prowl as he placed a hand on Tamaki's shoulder. From the uncomfortable look on Tamaki's face, I think he was aware of the brewing danger. "I was so looking forward to learning more about your lovely new friends here. We have so much to talk about, isn't that right, Tamaki?"

He squeezed down hard and Tamaki winced, although I don't know how much it could actually have hurt. My mouth fell open, clouds reforming in my mind and blocking out all rational thought. It lasted long enough for Grandma to spring back into action, gushing like a school girl and leading everyone back into the restaurant.

"I'm sure the waiter won't mind if we make another order. Mashiro and I will gladly pay for everyone, so have as much as you like!"

"Within reason," Grandpa grumbled.

I was rooted to the spot, watching them go and so far unnoticed.

"But… but…" I said aloud as my brain rebooted itself. "But… THEY DON'T EAT!"

That got a few stares.

Five minutes later, I was sitting at a new table, larger than the last one, in between Hikaru and Tamaki. The latter was politely sipping a bowl of miso soup, slurping spoonful after spoonful like it was a perfectly ordinary thing for a humanoid robot to be doing. My own bowl was untouched and growing colder by the second.

"Haruhi, aren't you going to eat anything?" Tamaki asked when he noticed my stoicism.

I glanced at Hikaru. He had seemingly given up on trying to speak and was stirring the spoon around his bowl, creating a tiny whirlpool that endlessly spun little bits of tofu around. Without looking away, I slowly leaned toward Tamaki, taking note of the way he sucked in a breath but at the moment not caring.

"You told me you couldn't eat," I deadpanned, my words slightly slurred as I was trying hard not to move my mouth too much.

Tamaki gave a chuckle, and it was the last thing I wanted to hear at the moment.

"I'm not eating," he said. "I am only partaking in the broth. We are capable of taking in liquids even though we don't need to. It's solid food that we are not capable of ingesting."

At this point, there were so many things I'd discovered about the androids that weren't in the manual, I was tempted to just throw them onto a fire and roast marshmallows. That way, they'd actually be useful for once! But I digress.

I felt a familiar shiver run down my leg. It stopped after a second or two, then started back up just as I was reaching into my pocket to retrieve my cell phone. The number on the ID wasn't one I
recognized, but I turned all the way around and answered it anyway.

"Hello?" I whispered, placing a hand over my mouth to mask my voice.

"Good evening, Haruhi."

"Kyoya!"

I shot straight up in my seat, and all murmured talking ceased as everyone gave me odd looks. Any embarrassment was clouded by relief, and I stood without a second thought, waving the phone softly in the air.

"Sorry," I said. "I have to take this."

From there, I headed for the bathrooms just further down. I could vaguely hear conversation starting back up, but I felt at least one unrelenting pair of eyes on my back.

"Kyoya," I said again, much softer this time even though I'd put a fair amount of distance between myself and more potential problems. "Kyoya, what's going on? Are you alright?"

"Define 'alright,'" was his answer. "Because while physically, I am running at full power and functioning normally, I cannot say that I am enjoying my stay in this establishment. The policemen were kind enough to give me my one phone call, but I must be brief. I was hoping you could return soon for myself and the others."

I groaned, slamming my head against the nearest wall, heedless of the pain it caused.

"I don't have the money," I said through grit teeth. "I used all that I had to get Tamaki, Hunny and Hikaru out."

"Speaking of Hikaru," Kyoya said distractedly. I could hear something strange in the background. It sounded like crying, but thanks to the screaming criminals in other cells, I couldn't be sure. "How is he handling the separation from Kaoru?"

"How do you think?" I wanted badly to scream at him.

"He's… better, let's say. At the very least, he isn't trying to grind his head off with a brick wall anymore."

Kyoya 'hmmed' under his breath. I almost didn't catch it as someone started throwing things at the cell door and shouting about wanting a hamburger. It created a great deal of undue noise.

"I suppose we could call this a best case scenario, then," he said. "Technically speaking, the Mischevious Types are not meant to be apart from each other at any point. They are essentially one person in two bodies. I fear having one away from the other could be highly detrimental to their circuiting."

My stomach dropped into a bottomless pit, endlessly falling and taking my fears and woes along for the ride.

"This doesn't mean they will shut down, mind you," Kyoya went on, somewhat calming me, but not by much. "It's more likely that their programming will begin to short circuit, sending them into furious mood swings that will continue until they are successfully reunited."

I wished I could sink my head into the cement wall right then. Maybe I'd suffocate and die and not
have to deal with this crap anymore. Were I not 15 at the time, I'd say I was getting too old for this.

"So that's our only option," I droned out. "Put them back together. We can't just... I don't know, teach them to think independently or something?"

"I'm afraid that is impossible. While both do have underlying individual programming, it is deeply encrypted and cannot be activated without either a series of 32 character pass codes, or severe mental strain forcing the unit into emergency mode. This is a stressful situation for the both of them, but not enough for such an even to occur."

I nodded along with Kyoya, and it briefly crossed my mind to wonder what, if Kyoya's explanation was accurate, could possibly be worse than getting more or less chopped in half.

"Your best bet is to find a way to release us from this place," Kyoya said, trailing off at the end and not speaking again for several seconds. When he came back on, he sounded like he was close to vomiting. "Please do so swiftly. There is a large, tattooed fellow who smells strongly of motor oil in the next cell over and he's been giving me inappropriate looks for the last ten minutes."

The noises in the background then changed to broken, almost tortured screaming mixed together with the unintelligible ranting of the guards and something hard banging on something equally hard, if not moreso.

"What's going on?" I demanded, receiving a funny look from a passing waitress.

A loud thump rang out over the noise, and it all stopped immediately after anyway. Then someone was fiddling with the phone, and then Kyoya's voice reappeared.

"Sorry about that," he casually said. "Kaoru just had a small breakdown and tried to claw his way out through the walls. I had Mori knock him unconscious, so he should be fine for at least a half hour."

"Good to know," I answered, now just far too used to their behavior to be shocked anymore. A month before, I never would have believed that calling a robot in prison would be a boring experience, or a possible one, but there you go.

"During this time, I suggest you do something fast," Kyoya said, taking on a forceful edge to his voice. "I really don't want to be in here anymore."

"I know, I know," I hissed, pushing the phone so far into my ear, it almost hurt. "I'll think of something, just tell Kaoru and Mori to hold tight okay?"

"Hurry," he answered. "I think the other prisoners are planning something. They've been very rambunctious and loud since you left. I don't mean to put more pressure on you, but please-"

click

I blinked, dumbly rooted at the spot listening to dead air before my hand started to move on it's own, snapping shut and pocketing my cell phone. It seemed the policemen's patience with Kyoya's lengthy phone conversation had wasted away.

I returned to the table in a trance like state, taking a page out of Hikaru's book. Sitting down, no one questioned what had taken me so long as Grandma was busy telling stories of her youth to an entranced Hunny and Dad was attempted to set Tamaki's head on fire with his eyes. The latter was staring at me, probably concerned by my silence at the proverbial rain cloud over my head, creating a massive storm.
"Haruhi," Grandpa said, suddenly tapping the top of my hand. "You sure your friend here is alright?"

He motioned at the ever distraught Hikaru, and I took note of the fact that his metal spoon had small dents on the sides, no doubt from a robotic hand gripping it way too hard.

"He's fine," I muttered, resting my head on my hand and not caring that it was technically bad manners to put elbows on the table. Not like Dad or Grandma were paying the attention necessary to scold me for it.

Something loud banged in the distance. I had at first believed that whatever it was had happened right next to me, and I wasn't the only one either. In fact, literally everyone in the moderately crowded room had quieted. Some of the adults got to their feet, I was pretty sure I could hear a baby whimpering, and everyone, including me, was staring at the window. The windows facing the police station.

A man appeared out from the back door. He was dressed much nicer than the waiters and waitresses, but judging by the way they all crowding around him, he was probably the manager. He also looked terrified, not a good sign at all.

"Everyone," he announced. "Please remain calm. There has been a breakout at the station next door. If everyone will just stay inside, we'll be locking the doors while the Police round everyone up. I ask again that you stay calm."

As we all know, telling a large crowd to stay calm during a crisis is sort of like telling a bird in the air to stop flying. The second the word 'breakout' was spoken, a wave of fearful cries and shouts arose. Even Grandpa was yelling incoherently about 'crappy civil service' with various expletives in between while Grandma tried in vain to calm him down.

Just as I was on the verge of my own massive fit, something tugged at my shirt, making turn around to face a pair of large, wet brown eyes.

"Haru-chan," Hunny's voice was cracking. "What do we do? Takashi is in there. And Kyo-chan and Kao-chan too!"

'That's right, they didn't do this, they couldn't have done it. Kyoya was right, they really were…'

My legs started to move, and I didn't try to stop. Dad called out to me, but I ignored him and moved faster. I had no idea what I was going to do, go outside, try and find them, watch out the door and hope they would emerge unscathed. What I couldn't do was sit there and worry, that would've killed me.

"Stay here!" I shouted, not really talking to anyone.

I knew they could hear me, even if no one else could. As far as I knew, Tamaki was the only one capable of disobeying me. He was the only one out of all the present androids I expected to chase after me. The same couldn't be said for my anxious and overprotective father and Grandparents.

In the end, there were three people who chose to follow, and not a single one of them was related to me.

Posted by Haruhi at 10:01 pm 0 comments
THE SPLIT-UP

It's been a while since my last post. I could go into a long winded explanation of how I spent the last three days under a mountain of textbooks and practice tests, getting only a minimal amount of sleep and eating even less, but that will only bore you. The short version is that I was studying for High School entrance exams. They don't actually come up for another semester, but I wanted to get an early start. I'm shooting for the best High School there is, a private academy for wealthy children that is offering scholarships for high achieving students. I took a tour of the Campus last week, it's very nice. But that's a whole different story.

I'm going to try and avoid anything long winded. I know I've been bad about that in the past. I'm actually taking a small break from my study schedule to write this. I realized that since the next semester starts up in only a week, I'm going to have much less time to work on this blog very soon. I want to get as much done now as possible.

So just a recap: the androids got arrested; my Dad came home for a visit; my Grandparents came on that very same day to reconcile with us; we went out to eat at a restaurant right next to the jailhouse they were being kept at; I managed to get Tamaki, Hunny, and Hikaru out, the latter of whom was having some sort of mental breakdown over being away from Kaoru; my family discovered them and I had to come up with a cover story; and finally, there was a jailbreak.

Now I was running at top speed out the door. Passed several frightened families with small children, passed the kitchen area where I could hear yelling beyond the swinging double doors, passed a pair of waiters who tried to get in my way when as I neared the door. The last of those was the most difficult, but luckily I had three robots with me to hold them back.

I burst out the door and got my first look at the carnage. Okay, admittedly it wasn't the bad and I may be using that word too lightly, but at the time, that's really how it felt. At least twenty big and scary looking criminals were running rampant around the square. Several of them were attempting to commandeer a police car, another was trying to climb a lamp post for some reason. Most of them had actually turned on each other; there were fist fights galore every which way you turned. Since the cops were focusing mainly on the few trying to hurt innocent passers-by, those guys were for now being left alone. I studied each of them carefully under the dim lighting and wonder why they couldn't have done this during the day when it would be easier to pick out who was who.

Hikaru, standing right next to me, looked horrified, and I knew exactly why. Kaoru, with his flaming red hair, really should have been the easiest to pick out even in the dark, but he was nowhere to be found. Everyone was either too big, too hairy, or too dark-haired to be him. And in the end, the first member of our group that we found wasn't him at all.

"TAKASHI!"

I whirled around, Hunny's scream catching me off guard. I was treated then to the sight of him tackling Mori to the ground. Beside the taller android was the crumpled from of an inmate. He had a small knife in his hand and a huge bump on his head. It was easy to insinuate what had happened.

Mori didn't seem at all bothered by being knocked on his behind, he smiled and patted Hunny's said while the smaller android dry sobbed into his shirt. I gave Mori a pat of the shoulder, both to get his
attention and also to show my own relief that he was okay.

"Where are the others?"

He looked at me with a sad frown and said nothing. I was about to ask again, thinking he hadn't heard me over all the noise. Then I remembered: he was still unable to talk until tomorrow. Stupid work blocking software was going to be the death of me. Or Kyoya and Kaoru.

"Can you point them out to me?" I tried.

Mori lowered his head thoughtfully, then shook it slowly. I didn't know if that was his way of inferring that he couldn't and felt bad about that fact, but it hardly mattered anyway. Right at that moment, something shiny flashed in the corner of my eye. I turned instinctively, and found that they most likely belonged to a pair of glasses belonging to a young man laying on his back beneath a burly man with a crazy glint in his eye.

"Kyoya!" I shouted, then broke into a run.

I didn't know what I was doing at the time, my thoughts weren't the clearest. I could hear the man talking to Kyoya as I got closer ("Gonna have your fine ass now, pretty boy!") and it spurred me on.

Now I may have mentioned this before, I don't have time to go back and check my entries to be sure, but I am not an athlete. Not by a long shot. I've been opting out of gym classes since the first year I was able to. I keep to a healthy diet, but exercise and me don't mix.

That's why it could only be explained by adrenaline that when I reared my leg back and kicked the man in the stomach, there was enough force behind it to not only get him off Kyoya, but also wind him. He rolled over, gasping for air, and I ignored him in favor of helping Kyoya to his feet and subsequently berating him.

"Are you an idiot?" I demanded, poking his chest, which my eyes were annoyingly level with. "Why didn't you stop that guy?"

"Forgive me," he answered. "My self-preservation settings are slower than usual. I believe my batteries may need to be changed within the next two to three days."

"Oh, that's just perfect," I groaned, resting my head against the nearby wall.

"I see you've found Mori already," Kyoya motioned at Hunny and Mori's little reunion.

They were still hugging by the way. It was like they'd been apart for ten years instead of an hour. At least Hunny wasn't crying anymore.

"Yeah," I said with a nod. "But what about Kaoru? Have you seen him?"

Kyoya's eyes widened for a fraction of a second, then he shook his head. That plus his tense posture was new to me. I had never seen him look so angry before.

"This is bad," he said. "His programming won't allow him to defend himself without Hikaru. If anyone gets to him before we do, it could be trouble."

Now that wasn't the right thing to say. It was true, of course, but not to good for my blood pressure.

"Can he just... you know, break the programming like you said? I think certain death would be a good indicator of an emergency!"
"It would be," Kyoya sighed. "But we were created first and foremost to serve our mistress, in this case you. You are our first priority, your life matters far more than ours. So while self-preservation does matter to us, it won't break the mischievous types of their programming."

"That's ridiculous!" I shouted, ready to tear my hair out. "Of course your lives are important!"

Kyoya shook his head. "Our company says that their not, not more than yours anyway."

And now I wanted nothing more than to hunt down this stupid company, force my way inside and tear whoever was in charge and made all of them think this way a new one. Maybe then, Hikaru wouldn't be rigid and leaning heavily against the wall, looking devastated and unable to move. I still had no idea where Kaoru was, and before I could interrogate Kyoya further, the man from before regained himself and charged us with a roar.

Kyoya acted fast, turning and running. The man, with saliva hanging out his lips and eyes wild with rage, tore after him. I was left alone to scream after them, and Kyoya's response was fast and short.

"Get out of here, Haruhi!"

And of course, that made sense. Weren't there lives less important than mine? Grinding my teeth, I prepared to run to Hikaru and try again to bring him out of it. That might have made finding Kaoru a lot easier. Before I could move, a shadow descended, covering everything before me with darkness somehow greater than that outside of the lamp I'd standing under. I turned slowly, fear coursing through my veins. The man was actually a lot smaller than I'd thought, only about a foot taller than me. The way he bore down on me though, with wide eyes and a toothy grin, made him seem huge. He breathed through his mouth, making a rather ugly and kind of gross sound. It was worse when he laughed.

"Hey there, girl," he said. "You're pretty."

He moved a little closer, and I raised my hands defensively. Just when I thought he was about to grab me and drag me off, I heard fast approaching footsteps behind me. This was followed by Tamaki jumping clear over my head with a screeching battle cry and nailing the man with a foot to the face. He went down, and Tamaki did some kind of weird front flip before landing cat-like on his feet.

"Don't worry, Haruhi," his said, grinning suavely. "I'll protect you from these brutes with my life."

"That's what I'm afraid of," I muttered as the man got back up and backed Tamaki from behind.

Tamaki answered with an elbow in the chest and the fight went on from there. At this point, I was practically alone at the center of a riot. Tamaki was fighting to protect me, Kyoya was being chased by a potential rapist, Hunny and Mori were now locked in battle with five inmates each, and Hikaru was catatonic.

My legs were shaking, but I walked anyway, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Soon, I was running, this way and that, trying to avoid any attention from less than savory figures and look for Kaoru at the same time.

"Kaoru!" I called out. "KAORUUUUU!"

Of course, he didn't answer, and I didn't expect him to anyway. If he was anything like Hikaru, he'd been all but comatose right now and unable to hear me, let alone talk to me. I did check on Hikaru around that time as well. He hadn't moved a muscle, but he was watching me. Well, his eyes were on me anyway. I couldn't be sure at that point that he could actually see me. Maybe he was too lost in
his own mind and screwy circuitry to be fully conscious of anything. He sure didn't react when one close by inmate punched another inmate hard enough to draw blood and some of it landed on his shirt.

I turned away and my eyes landed on a small corner next to a mailbox. It was darker there than anywhere else, thanks to the absence of lights. From far away, it was impossible to see anything, but from where I now stood, a flash of orange was just visible, crouched down behind it.

Kaoru!

I sprinted, my legs pumping as fast as they could. This wound up not being fast enough, because before I could make it, a group of three inmates were upon him. One of them lifted Kaoru to his feet, and the android hung limp in his grasp like a rag doll.

"Oh come on," I groaned, picking up the pace. "Why does this keep happening? Can't anything be easy for once?"

I slid to a stop right in front of them, scowling and not thinking clearly about what I was doing.

"Stop! Let him go!" I screamed, before immediately coming to my senses and realizing what a bad idea that was. They didn't even have to look up, glare at me, and slowly approach. Though that is what they did.

"Oh, what?" the one holding Kaoru said mockingly. "Do we have your boyfriend, little girl?"

His friends snickered as one moved with surprising speed and grabbed me before I knew what was happening. I struggled against him, but he was strong. They threw me and Kaoru against the wall, my head knocking into the brick so I saw stars. I rubbed at the pain, trying to diminish it and give me one less thing to worry about as the trio of criminals circled us like lionesses around a pair of antelope.

"Now," the one in the middle said. "What should we do with you?"

I grasped Kaoru's hand, and his inched his head around to look at me. It appeared that alone took all his strength. I couldn't believe how incapable he was without Hikaru around. Was this really was Ouran Co. thought was a good idea? Their so-called emergency mode wasn't really must use if the android was too weak to use it. Gripped by fear and unable to scream, I moved in closer to Kaoru and wrapped an arm around him. Something escaped his lips right then, something I couldn't hear very well and sounded like gibberish.

Even so, I could have sworn it sounded like actual words.

It sounded like, 'Sorry.'

I held him tighter as they closed in. The one on the far right leaned to the left, giving me a clear view of the lamp post Hikaru had spent this entire time standing under.

He was gone.

I blinked in confusion. Kaoru didn't appear to have noticed, too busy was he staring at the ground. That was when I heard it. It hit like a blast in the ear with an air horn. This was both because of the volume, and also how unexpected it was. Even Kaoru looked up when it happened and suddenly looked more aware of his surrounding than ever before.

"NOOOOOOOO!"
The scream tore out of Hikaru's throat, all of his own violation. With rage clear on his face, he attacked the three men head on, all by himself. Two of them went down immediately, huge knots in their heads. The third was shoved into the wall and held several inches off the ground. Hikaru continued to shout as he hit the man over and over again in the face. It's a little hard to describe with words, but it went something like this:

"DON'T!"

_Punch_

"YOU!"

_Punch_

"DARE!"

_Punch_

"TOUCH!"

_Punch_

"THEM!"

_Punch Punch Punch_

"I'LL KILL YOU!"

I choose that moment to get back on my feet and race to Hikaru, pulling him away from the long since knocked out criminal with some difficulty. He kept trying to fight me off.

"That's enough!" I screamed. "THAT'S ENOUGH, HIKARU!"

Breathing heavily, he soon acknowledged me and let the man go. His body fell like a deadweight, unmoving and covered in blood. His chest moving up and down slowly was the only indicator that Hikaru hadn't outright killed him.

He looked at me, somehow sweaty looking, even though I was pretty sure they couldn't do that. I didn't know what to say at first, the weight of what had just happened hitting me hard. It looked like Kyoya had been right after all. Me being in danger was exactly what Hikaru needed to come out of it and gain individual thoughts. I really didn't know what to think about that.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

He smiled. "My head hurts."

"Yeah, mine too," answered Kaoru as he stood up and massaged his temples.

That surprised me at first, that he could suddenly talk as well. Then it hit me, if Hikaru had broken the programming on them, wouldn't that mean Kaoru was now thinking on his own too?

"I can't believe you went against our programming," Kaoru gently admonished his 'brother.' "That could have been dangerous."

Hikaru shrugged. "It all worked out, didn't it?"
I nodded in agreement with that, mostly so Kaoru would know that I was okay was this. More than okay, actually. It was nice to think that they wouldn't be doing that in unison talking/walking/everything else anymore. Sure, I was pretty used to it at that point, but it was still creepy. Now, I figured, they'd start acting like normal people, if still very close twin brothers, which was alright.

Then Hikaru took Kaoru by the chin and pulled him close, staring at him with bedroom eyes.

"I don't know what I would do if something ever happened to you, Kaoru," he whispered seductively.

"Oh, Hikaru..." Kaoru swooned.

"...what."

Well, can you think of a better reaction to that?

Luckily, I was saved from further uncomfortable scenes by the timely arrival of Kyoya, followed closely by the other androids.

"Haruhi! Thank Goodness you're okay!" Tamaki shouted and ran to hug me. I sidestepped him, sending him sprawling to the ground with a thud.

"Ah, I see they really have managed to separate," Kyoya noted, nodding in Hikaru and Kaoru's direction as they continued to stare at each other. "That's quite an accomplishment."

"Yeah," I said distractedly. "But why they... you know..."

I motioned at their embrace, unable to outright say it since my mind was still having trouble processing it. Where the hell was this coming from?

"Oh, Haruhi," Tamaki said, getting back up and grinning like nothing had happened. "Don't you know? When the Mischevious Types lose their mental connection, they essentially split into two people and their twincest mode is automatically activated."

I stared at him blankly. "Twincest?"

"Why yes," Kyoya took over through heavy breathing. "They will do this several times a day now, but otherwise function like the rest of us. Don't worry, it won't go any farther than flirting and looks of longing unless you activate the yaoi mode."

"Right," I said dully.

So just to repeat, I had gone from having single minded twins who did absolutely everything in perfect synchronization to having regular twins who also liked to hit on each other, supposedly for my entertainment.

"Well, I guess aside from that, this is better for them and... Kyoya, why are you so out of breath?"

He brought a shaking hand to his chest and shook his head, more to himself I suspected.

"I may have run through what remained of my battery already," he explained. "In fact, I believe I'm starting to lose feeling in my arms."

They had indeed gone unnaturally still at his sides. I reached for my handbag, where I'd been keeping spare batteries just in case. I didn't know if I'd be able to shut Kyoya down, install the new
batteries, then turn him back on with anyone noticing. And then the police officers arrived.

Most of the inmates had been rounded up by now, including the ones who'd tried to attack Kyoya and me. They were being forced back into the prison by several other cops while the rest came at us. Including the three Hikaru had taken down, there were only six more left to catch.

"Alright," the cop in the lead said. "Back inside, all of you. Get away from those civilians."

"Hang on a second," I said, placing myself in between them and the androids. "Let me just say something, please."

I honestly didn't know what to say, and I knew that it wouldn't matter anyway. It's not like I can just tell the police not to arrest someone. That they had left with the other inmates during the breakout made it all the more unlikely. With Kyoya about to lose consciousness though, I had to do something.

"Haruhi! There you are!"

I was grabbed from behind before a single word could leave my throat. Dad turned me around and squeezed tight, tears streaming down his face.

"How could you run off like that?" he cried. "You could have gotten hurt or worse! Don't you ever scare me like that again, Haruhi!"

"I'm sorry, Dad," I said through grit teeth. "I had to, uh…"

"Do you know these boys, Haruhi?" Grandma asked me, waving a hand at Mori, Kyoya and Kaoru. Dad still hadn't let me go, but I managed to look her in the eye and nod my head.

"Excuse me?" one of the cops spoke up. "I don't mean to interrupt, but we have to take these three back into their holding cell."

Several more cops surrounding us, all aiming there intense glares at one or more of the androids. I opened my mouth, but was again beaten to the punch. To my amazement, it was Grandpa who stepped up.

"Oh no you won't," he declared, pulling the closet ones to him, Hikaru and Kaoru, away from the cops. "I don't know what you think you can hold them for, but it has to be a misunderstanding."

"That's right," Grandma joined in. "These boys are friends of my Granddaughter's, and she would never associate herself with trouble makers. You obviously have the wrong men."

I gave an innocent grin when the cop looked at me. He then gave my grandparents a bow.

"With all due respect, Ma'am, these boys are indeed guilty of assaulting an officer and now attempted breakout. We're already let three of them go, the rest cannot be released without bail."

Grandpa 'hmphed,' unfazed by the man's attempt at humoring them. He then reached into his jacket pocket and pulled form it a bulging wallet.

"Fine. I'll pay for them."

"Wait, what?" I gasped. "Grandpa, you can't-"

"Now Haruhi," Grandma snapped. "Don't argue with us."
I thought about arguing further, especially when Grandpa grabbed pretty much everything out of his wallet and handed it to the policemen. They then nodded goodbye and left to help put the other thugs back in their cells. By this time, Dad had let go of me and had instead taken to glaring at the android, Tamaki in particular.

"So," he said. "These friends of yours are criminals?"

"No," I answered defensively. "Dad, I can explain all of this."

"It's alright, Haruhi," Grandma said, placing a hand on Dad's shoulders and pulling him back. "We already know it was a mistake. Your father is still shaky because of what you did. He doesn't mean it."

"Yes I do," he grumbled.

"You had to use money of your own to get the first three out, didn't you?" Grandpa asked.

I didn't answer. Somehow, this was enough of a 'yes' from Grandpa to shove another wad of cash into my hand that he got from I don't even know where.

"That should cover what you spent," he said, smiling so his wrinkly face looked a little more so.

I took it silently, having given up fighting him. Grandma and Grandpa are the type who can't be moved once they'd decided on something. I really didn't want to take their money, but they would insist even if I tried to argue it. That they gave me almost exactly what I'd spent on the bail and that it opened a new opportunity to kept the guys' true identities a secret also helped.

I politely excused myself and the androids, explaining that I wanted to say goodbye before they left to go home. Pulling them aside, they formed a huddle around me, like an impenetrable wall that would prevent anyone from hearing me.

"I want you guys to take this money and go to the motel down the street," I ordered. I handed the money off to Mori, the least likely person to use it for something frivolous (e.g. cakes, chocolates, presents for me). I also got the batteries out and gave them to him as well. "That money should be enough for one night. Stay in your room all night, don't make too much noise, and do not try to leave until I come and get you tomorrow. Also be sure to change Kyoya's batteries when you get there. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Haruhi!" they all repeated, everyone baring Mori and Kyoya saluting as well.

"I believe I should last until we get there," said Kyoya. "As long as I don't have to open any door or hold anything, I should be fine."

I eyed his prone arms and nodded, then addressed Tamaki.

"Stay close to him in case anything happens, okay?"

"Of course!" Tamaki said with a thumbs up. "Anything for you and my best friend Kyoya!"

That last bit was kind of unexpected, but so was pretty much everything else that day. It didn't faze me and I just nodded in thanks before bidding them goodbye for now and seeing them off.

They were kind of slow in their movements, almost like they were afraid to leave me alone. I realized that this would be the first time I'd be away from them for a long period of time since the Usagiuma incident. At least this time, I knew that I would be seeing them again. That made me feel better about
letting them go off on their own, that and the knowledge that they were acting more responsible, and more like real people. As I kept watching, I noticed that Hikaru was walking much faster than Kaoru, and I smiled.

I could almost forget that they were robots sometimes.

When they disappeared from view, I went back to my family, who welcomed me into their conversation about what to do now that our dinner had probably gotten cold. We ended up paying and leaving fast. Back at home, Grandma and I made dumplings for everyone, and we ate in the living room, chatting all the while.

When it got to be very late, my Grandparents hugged and kissed us goodbye, promising to call again soon before departing.

I slept surprisingly well that night. Even with Dad next door and the risk that he might open the closet door and find a bunch of crates inside very real, I wasn't afraid.

When he left the following afternoon on the PM train, he left oblivious to the truth of my situation. To this day, he still doesn't know what really happened. I don't think I'll ever tell him, or anyone I know personally for that matter. If he ever decides to stop being horrible with computers and goes on the internet, then somehow locates this blog and makes the connection between it and me, I guess I'll have no choice. It not, it's better that he doesn't know.

Because if he did, what happened next would probably give him a heart attack.

But that's a story for another day.

posted by Haruhi at 8:47 pm 0 comments
A Second Intermission

08.13.11

A SECOND INTERMISSION

For the next few days, everyone was normal. Well, Hikaru and Kaoru were separated now and could act on their own, but other than that, nothing much had changed. Business as usual, if you will.

One day, Hunny found out that the food channel was running an all day marathon on cake and sweets making. He hogged the TV for the next fourteen hours and bodily threw Tamaki into the next room when he tried to politely ask that they watch something else.

Kyoya was on my laptop constantly. Whenever I tried to look over his shoulder and see what he was doing, it was always something with a lot of words and numbers in languages I didn't recognize. Though I do recall one instance were it appeared to be binary code. I didn't bother asking questions and just let him be, hoping I wouldn't come to regret it.

Hikaru and Kaoru seemed to be enjoying their newfound freedom, though they still stuck together like glue and took to finishing each other's sentences wherever possible. I think they mostly did that because it bothered Tamaki. Quite frankly, nothing those two did could shock me anyone. Even the whole 'twincest' thing lost whatever edge it had after the third day or so.

It was basically just a lot of that. Little things that start off mildly amusing, but get progressively less interesting or amusing the more you think about it. And if you think that's bad, try living with it.

One afternoon, about a week after my family's visit, I was in the kitchen carving up a turnip to be used later on for dinner. Tamaki entered the kitchen as well, pulling a glass out of the cupboard and filling it with water. I had given him this job some time ago: to water the plants once a day. He'd always been good about fulfilling this duty, unlike Hunny, who never seemed to remember that he had to make his bed every other morning.

When the glass was full, Tamaki shut off the water and carefully carried it into the living room were the plants were located. He didn't say a single word to me the entire time. That was when I first realized something was wrong.

In retrospect, I probably should have figured it out sooner. Tamaki would never miss an opportunity to talk to me no matter how trivial the subject. It could be about dead leaves in the rain gutters, and he'd still do everything he could to make it sound romantic and charming. It had been days since he last initiated conversation. I would have to say something to him first, and he was cheerful enough when I did, but there was something missing from his face and tone. Something small, but very noticeable.

Come to think about it, the others had been acting weird too. Kyoya spent far more time with his face on that screen and barely spoke a word to anyone. Mori was the same as ever, but Hunny was in a kind of somber mood. The only thing that seemed to perk him up was his Usa-chan and the sweets on TV, and even that was becoming kind of hit and miss. Hikaru and Kaoru focused most of their energies on taunting Tamaki, an incredibly easy task I must say. Though they would occasionally poke fun in my direction, it still felt detached.

We had been living together for a month and a half at this point. It had gone by so fast, and every day their antics bothered me less and less. They were a routine now. I'd wake up, they'd make a fuss
over something. Tamaki and the twins would fight. I'd make myself breakfast, lunch and dinner. They'd try to get me to take them somewhere and most of the time I'd say no. They'd pout for a while before finding something else to do. I went to bed and, depending on what day it was, so did they.

Now, at least half of all that was slipping away. They were quieter, calmer, more subdued. More like what I would have wanted weeks ago, but made me want to cringe with anxiety now.

I didn't like it. I wanted it to stop. Why were they doing this?

I confronted Tamaki about it the next day. He was the most emotional and more attached to me than the rest. If anyone was going to spill the beans, it was him.

I waited until he was out getting the mail, another task I had left to him. I watched him from the window while the others were distracted, making my move when he was climbing down the stairs and out of sight. I slunk outside, my body pressed flat against the wall. I took to a run once I was outside, but kept my footfalls light. I wanted to catch him, but not put him on the alert that someone was following him.

He was inserting my key into the mail slot marked with my apartment number when I got there. I stayed to the side, examining his strong posture and serene face. He looked like someone without a care in the world. I knew that wasn't true.

I stepped into view when he started the walk back, taking him by surprise, though he didn't show it beyond a barely there frown.

I wasted no time.

"We need to talk. Now."

As expected, there was no solid reaction to that. No questions, no defensiveness, no trying to make an excuse and leave, Tamaki just nodded his head and said not a word to me. His silence was deafening, and brought my guard up even higher. I know I'm probably not describing it well enough for you to picture it in your head, but I'm not really sure how to do that beyond, 'it really bothered me' and other variations of said statement. But really, if you're reading this, you've hopefully also read my last 20-something posts and know that this is out of character behavior for him.

And it gets worse.

"I um..." his silence unnerved me. "I've notice in the past few days... you've been kind of quiet. I was wondering if something was wrong."

Wind blew around us, the only visible sound as Tamaki remained tight lipped despite my making it clear that I wanted an answer. He stared back at me, unblinking, while my anxieties slowly boiled over. I don't think I'd even been this upset with any of them since the Usagiuma incident.

"Tamaki, if there is something bothering you, you know you can tell me."

He shook his head. It was something of a relief to finally get a reaction out of him, but it wasn't as good as actual words.

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded more than asked.

"I can't tell you," he answered.

I furrowed my brow. "Why not?"
"Because as your lover, I'm supposed to always be loving and kind. I'm not supposed to feel anything negative towards you."

Now that was unexpected. I mean, I'd been going over in my head all the things that could be causing their slump. From battery issues to pure boredom, I thought I'd taken them all into consideration, and yet somehow, that idea never occurred to me. Perhaps it was because they'd spent so much time singing my praises and treating me like a goddess (when they weren't making trouble of course).

Either way, I had to press further.

"I don't understand."

He sighed and looked away, almost as if ashamed of himself.

"It isn't right for me to feel this way," he whispered, his mind far away. "I'm supposed to only love you, not be angry with you."

"Wait," I cried, my head feeling like it was about to burst from all that was going on inside. "What are you saying?"

And then he turned his head again, and looked directly at me, and he said:

"I am very angry with you, Haruhi."

Just like that. Nothing more, nothing less. Those seven words were my explanation for everything. He was angry with me, and I had to presume the others were too. They were giving me the cold shoulder as best as they could with their programming (what was left of it anyway) in place, and they did it out of legitimate anger with me.

Oh I believed him, alright. Tamaki was many things, but he wasn't a liar. He always said what he meant, and he meant what he said.

Now that that was out of the way, there was the matter of working through this so everything could go back to normal. I started with the most obvious question.

"Why?"

"Well, why not?"

I jumped and whirled around. It hadn't been Tamaki who said that. Rather, it was Hunny, leaning against the railing right above us with Hikaru and Kaoru on his left and Kyoya and Mori on his right. The five of them wore frowns similar to Tamaki's. I fidgeted under the intensity, now multiplied by six. It made me feel guilty, and I still didn't even know what I had done!

"Haruhi," this was Kyoya. "You put yourself in danger last week, and you almost got seriously hurt. Do you understand that?"

I blinked once before it came to me: the night of the prison break. The night I'd taken running leap into an extremely dangerous situation in my quest to keep the six of them unharmed and in one piece. Of course, I'd realized once the adrenaline wore off what an incredibly stupid decision that had been. Apart from Kaoru's near catatonia, they probably could have gotten out without too much damage. Logic just doesn't register when you're running on pure instinct.

"Yes, I know," I answered, pushing a stray piece of hair behind my ear. "I know it wasn't my
smartest decision, but I had to make sure you were all okay. It's my as your…”

I paused to backtrack. 'Owner,' the word I'd been about to use, wasn't right anymore. It hadn't been for a long time and not just because they were sent to me by mistake.

"I had to do everything I could to make sure you were safe. If anything happened to you, I don't know what I would have done."

I felt a pair of hands on my shoulders, an iron gripping holding me tight and physically turning me around to face pained violet eyes. I swallowed, feeling absolutely miniscule under Tamaki's gaze. How on earth could someone so silly become this serious, and with so little effort?

"But that's just it, Haruhi," he said. "You couldn't have done anything, and you would've been seriously hurt with Hikaru hadn't saved you that night. I wasn't there to help you, neither was Kyoya, or Hunny or Mori… what if a time comes when none of us are around anymore?"

He reached down and took one of my hands. His were warm to the touch, so much like a true human's, but when he guided my hand to his chest and pressed it down, I was reminded, with chills going up and down my spine, that he wasn't.

"You see? I'm made of metal. So is Kaoru, so are all of us. But you, Haruhi, you're a flesh and blood human, and you don't know how to fight and defend yourself. Kaoru would have been fine if you hadn't intervened. He may have sustained mild to moderate damage, but we are far more durable than you are giving us credit for."

"He's right, Haru-chan," Hunny spoke up, his Usa-chan squeezed between his arms and the railing as he leaned dangerously far over. "We've all been so afraid, thinking about what might have happened to you!"

"No matter how fast we run, we wouldn't have gotten to you before they did," Mori said, probably the longest sentence he'd ever spoken at that point.

"The things they could have done to you in the time it would've taken," Kyoya said, shaking his head. "I don't want to imagine it."

Hikaru and Kaoru said nothing, and merely stared at me blankly. That alone made me feel worse than all the other's had combined.

"Do you see now, Haruhi?" the sound of Tamaki's voice made me return to staring at him. "Do you understand how we're feeling?"

My toes curled inside my slippers and it was all I had to look down and try to watch them through my shoes. I couldn't believe they were doing this to me, making me feel so horrible and ashamed. The worst part was that they were exactly right. No matter how everything turned out in the end, even though I'd been able to, at the very least, prevent Kyoya from being molested and get Hikaru and Kaoru to full separate, I knew that was beside the point.

It didn't make a difference to them what I had accomplished. The point was that I had put myself in danger in the first place, while they were in positions that left their ability to help me severely restricted. It was the principle of the thing.

And I understood this even then, even at my most stubborn and indignant. Hell, I still believe I did the right thing since it had such a good outcome, but I know that, if I could do it all over again, I might have tried to making some smarter moves.
What I think really made this such a milestone in my little saga is what it showed about the androids. It was that fact that they did not understand how they were feeling. They didn't realize how human they were acting. Of course they were angry at me for putting my life in danger, what sane person wouldn't?

I know I'd have felt the same way if one of my friends did that.

Because that's what we all were from that point on. Maybe we had been for a long time, and I just wasn't ready to acknowledge it yet.

Through all the insanity they got me into, or was brought upon us by outside forces; though all the fits of rage and tears and laughter we experienced; though everything that had happened to us, we had become friends.

They were my friends.

They could (and would) call me their 'beloved' as much as they pleased. What we had wasn't like that. What we had was friendship, and I didn't want that to ever change. I didn't want them to ever stop being mad at me when I did something wrong, or concerned when they thought I was in trouble, or noisy when we all sat down to watch a movie together.

I don't think I would've changed them for anything.

Of course, I wasn't about to tell them any of this. Not by a long shot. Instead, I gave a sigh and shrugged my shoulders before offering Tamaki, and the rest of them indirectly, a low bow.

"You're right," I said. "I made a mistake and I'm sorry. I never meant to worry you guys."

"You mean it?" Tamaki asked moving in close. Up above us, everyone but Kyoya and Mori did the same thing.

The attention didn't bother me too much. Actually, I was started to feel a lot better. I smiled and nodded my head, and I guess that was all the answer Tamaki needed to completely forgive me. Next thing I knew, he was swinging me around in his arms while the others sprinted down the stairs and pulled us both into a group hug. Even Mori was pulled into it by Hunny. Only Kyoya stayed on the outside, his only contribution to the golden moment being a pat on my back.

"Okay! That's all done!" Hunny cheered. "Let's go watch the cake channel!"

"Again?" Hikaru groaned.

A quick and deadly glare from Hunny silenced him.

We headed back upstairs in a messy line, two at a time. I walked beside Tamaki, who was suddenly much more talkative, going on about a radio show he'd been listening to the other day about the dynamics of romantic novel characters or something along those lines. Leave it to Tamaki to get excited about that.

"By the way," I said as we were re-entering my apartment. "How did you guys know I was out there?"

The six of them looked at each other, as if sharing some kind of telepathic conversation and intentionally keeping me out of the loop. That they all broke out into sly smiles didn't help matters.

"Oh, Haruhi, don't be silly," Hikaru said.
"We knew you were gone as soon as you left," Kyoya continued for there. "You're not very good at stealth, I'm afraid."

The others started to snicker while I glared at Kyoya. He, of course, brushed it off completely and went back to my (really his at this point since I hadn't actually used it in weeks) laptop.

Even so, things were really brightening. The metaphorical grey cloud hovering over us had started to dissipate. I felt like they were more at ease now. When Hunny all but dragged me to the couch to watch the cooking channel with him and Mori, and Hikaru, along with a somewhat less enthusiastic Kaoru, tried to convince me that they were bored and wanted to go for a walk with me, and Tamaki subsequently accused them of being evil perverts out to seduce me into sinfulness, it honestly made me happy.

I mean that with total sincerity. Their insane behavior, which the week before made me want to smack my head against the wall, was bringing a smile to my face.

It was just normal for them, I guess. I was finally seeing and accepting that.

And it's a good thing that happened when it did, otherwise the next big event in my story would have ended much differently and with a great deal more pain for all of us.

Since I may not be able to post tomorrow (my friend Mei and her father are coming for a visit in a few days and we're cleaning up the house in preparation), I'll leave you a little hint of what's to come next.

Remember in my first post, I mentioned that they guys almost destroyed my school's gymnasium?

Just keep that in mind.

posted by Haruhi at 11:32 pm 0 comments
08.15.11

SCHOOL DAYS

I'm posting this early in the day unlike I usually do. See, I normally write out all my posts a day in advance so I can go back and review everything I've written to make sure it's all right and legible and not too humiliating or damaging to my psyche. The reason I'm doing it differently today is that my friend Mei and her father are coming for a visit. According to Dad, they are set to arrive tomorrow afternoon, and I want to have the place clean and ready when they get here.

That said, let's get back to the story.

First, let me warn you: this next part isn't going to be like the others. There are many reasons for that, the major one I'll explain later. I'm only bringing it up now because the next few posts will be a lot shorter than they have been, and I wanted to give you guys a heads up.

While I'm at it, let me just thank everyone who's been following and commenting on this blog. When I first started out, I didn't think anyone would read it. The few who did would probably stop after the first two or three posts, assuming I'm some kind of ARG writer or, worst case scenario, completely insane. Now, I can't say for sure how many of you genuinely believe this is all true and how many just want to laugh at me, but the fact is that I've gained over 100 followers and I can't thank you enough.

Now, I'm sure that the title of this post has given away just what happened next. For those of you who are confused about the passage of time, the androids had been with me for over a month and a half at this point. They arrived only a few days before Summer vacation started, and since that only lasts a few weeks, I think it's obvious that next semester was going to become an issue.

The truth is, I didn't take into consideration what I would do with the guys while I was off at school. It came to me one night, about a week before my first day back. I woke up to get some water, spotted Kyoya 'asleep' on my couch with my/his laptop resting in sleep mode on the coffee table, and that's when it hit me. It hit so hard, I almost dropped the full glass of water onto the floor.

Just what was I going to have them do while I was at school. The obvious answer was to leave them home and instruct them not to go anywhere. I trusted them to listen at this point, and that they knew better than to complain, but there were still some lingering doubts in the back of my mind.

No matter how much they acted like humans, they were still metal inside and they still had their programming. They were to protect me at all costs, and I don't think being separated from them by such a long distance seven hours a day, five days a week, was going to coincide well with that.

There was another solution to the problem, I realized right away. One that would guarantee that I could keep an eye on them and satisfy the regulations of their programming without causing anymore problems. The only problem was the solution itself.

Could I really trust them to come with me?

How would they even explain six transfer students coming in all at once?

How much would they have to hold back their strength and intelligence so as not to seem abnormal or strange?
Would they even want to go?

Well, as per my new policy of trusting them and treating them like people, I didn't wait for them to ask me. The next morning, when everyone was waking and fully charged, I called for a group meeting in the living room. Seated with them all around me on either side, I explained the current predicament and the options available, my question being which one they wanted to go with.

Needless to say, Tamaki took no time in thinking it over.

"Of course we're coming to school with you, Haruhi!" he said, coming in closer to me, but stopping short of a hug. I was very grateful for that. "We would be so lonely here without you! Plus, I'd love to make some new friends and see what school is really like."

"I bet they have cake in the cafeteria," Hunny said, ever the bubbly cake-lover who gazed at me with wide, sparkly eyes that put every sappy love Tamaki had ever given me to shame. "Do they have them, Haru-chan? Please say they do!"

"Well, I think they do," I answered, placing a finger on my chin. "They aren't like the big ones on TV, though. They serve them by the piece and in plastic containers where they tend to dry out."

"Cake is cake no matter what!" Hunny declared, standing up on the chair and placing his hands on his hips.

I couldn't really argue with that (nor did I want to) and so I just nodded, then went back to the situation at hand. I already knew what Tamaki, Hunny and Mori wanted (Mori would agree with Hunny on anything). That left three more votes to be counted.

"How about you two?" I started with the twins. Kyoya was typing away like always, staring so intently at the screen, I had to wonder if he was actually hearing any of this or even noticed we were there.

The two of them looked thoughtfully at me for a second, then dove into a huddle, speaking in fast, hushed tones that I didn't bother trying to follow. They'd been doing this every now and then for several days at this point. I don't know if this was another programming thing or them just being annoying, but I liked it less and less every time they did it. They eventually came up after at least five minutes of this, wide, closed mouth smiles on their faces as they each gave me a thumbs up.

"We'd be happy to participate," Hikaru said.

"It sounds like fun," Kaoru continued.

I nodded at them, then turned to the final member of the group. It didn't matter much at this point if he said no since there would be a vast majority standing against him. I honestly couldn't predict what side Kyoya would be on. Each would offer something: a chance to show off or time alone in a peaceful atmosphere. Judging from the way he ignore everything for that laptop, I was inclined to believe the latter held more appeal to him. Then, he stopped typing and glanced over the screen at me. Taking in my searching eyes, his pushed up his glasses, making them shine in the sunlight and cover his eyes. He wordlessly turned the laptop around, careful not to let it slip off his lap. I leaned in to get a better look, though this was complicated by Tamaki and Hunny having the same idea at the exact same time. Once I'd avoided bumping heads with them, I went back to whatever Kyoya wanted me to see. It only took me reading three lines to realize that I'd been wrong about him not paying attention or caring.

So very wrong indeed.
"I have everything set up," Kyoya explained, that infuriatingly superior smile returning from a long hiatus with a vengeance. "Our cover story is that we are exchange students. I was unable to get us all in the same grade, but that works more in our favor anyway, as it looks less suspicious. Uniform orders are also completed, and I've compiled a list of necessary books and school supplies. There is a small convenience store down the street which should sell them at a fair price. If not, we can figure out other ways around this minor issue."

"And you've already sent this in?" I asked after a long pause.

Kyoya's smile softened a tiny bit, to my surprise. He exceeded this by shaking his head.

"I've only prepared everything in the even that everyone agrees to go," he said. "Since we all have, I'm just waiting on your okay, Haruhi."

I couldn't help but give a smile of my own at that. In addition, his smirk suddenly didn't irritate me as much as usual. I looked out at the circle of eager faces, the grins they wore filled with excitement and mirth, the way they appeared a small step away from springing up and cheering in joy at the prospect of sitting at a desk taking notes on hour long lectures. I must have been going soft, because even if I had objected to them attending school with me, those faces would have worn me down pretty quick.

"Thank you, Kyoya," I said. "Go ahead and put it through."

And thus, my group of friendly android were on their way to school.

The following week was a blur of shopping, uniform fitting, and me explaining the rules to them. They were pretty basic: don't do anything a normal human couldn't, don't talk about battery changes or programming issues in public, do not try to correct the teachers even if they make a mistake, and so on and so forth.

Since there were no complaints, my mind was put mostly at ease. The fact that we'd all be in different grades still bothered me, however. At the very least, Kyoya had made it so none of them would be alone. He and Tamaki would be in the grade above me, as first years in my school's adjoining High School. Hunny and Mori would be in the grade above them, which left me have class with Hikaru and Kaoru. It was an even arrangement, I supposed. As long as none of the faculty asked any questions, I figured we'd be fine.

On the very first day, I awoke to the strong aroma of burnt, yet still edible breakfast they had prepared for me.

"We wanted you to have something special on our first day," Tamaki told me as I inspected a piece of black toast. "Only the best for you, Haruhi."

"Thanks guys," I said, taking a bite of the toast and almost cringing at the harsh taste. "But you really didn't have to."

About an hour later, we were walking through the front gates and into a swarm of my classmates. Most of the females (and a few males) present stopped to stare as we passed. The reason why was obvious from their blushes and lustful gazes, which of course the androids didn't acknowledge. This made me wonder what they'd do if, somewhere down the line, one of these girls tried to ask them on a date or confess their feelings to them. I knew they'd probably turned them down gently, I just wasn't sure how they'd deal with some of the more persistent ones.

Believe me, my school had a lot of those.

Anyway, we separated at the main office, where the Representatives of the 10th and 11th grade
classes were ready to escort their new members on a tour of the building. Tamaki and Hunny each gave me a final hug before leaving, while Mori and Kyoya just smiled at me. If this made the class Reps curious, they didn't say anything, at least not while I was around.

Left alone with Hikaru and Kaoru, I lead them to my homeroom at the other side of the school. It was a long walk, and nobody spoke the entire time, not until the wide open door was in sight. I stopped short of walking in, spinning around to face them, a silent command for them to halt and listen to me.

"Alright," I said. "Before we go in, let's go over the rules one more time."

They groaned in annoyance, probably because I'd been drilling them on this for the last three days. It didn't matter, because this was too important. They would just have to suck it up.

"No twincest during, before or after class," Hikaru flatly recited.

"No finishing each other's sentences," Kaoru went on.

"And no speaking in unison more than once every few days," they finished together.

"Very good," I nodded in approval. "And yes, that time counted."

Their subsequent pouting, I ignored.

Inside the classroom, there was no teacher and about twenty students all littered around the many desks. They were clumped together in groups of four or five, familiar faces of the people I'd studied with since kindergarten. Some of them greeted me as I walked by, and even the ones who didn't had to stop and whisper about the twins. Of course, they enjoyed the attention; smiling and winking like they were celebrities standing before an adoring fanbase.

I took my old seat in the back, Hikaru and Kaoru on either side of me. My homeroom teacher at the time was pretty lenient about seating arrangements, so this wouldn't be a problem. If we could just get through the introductions with no issues, everything would be fine.

The only problem was… getting through the introductions.

"Remember the rules," I hissed at them as the teacher finally entered the room, closing the door behind her with a resonant shut.

Her name was Fujimo-sensei, a squat, round woman of forty. Her long black hair was always worn in a messy ponytail, like she put it up while driving. She wore horn-rimmed glasses and was almost literally blind without them. We learned that a few months before, when the class clown decided to steal them off her desk and carry them around in his pocket for the rest of the day. Fujimo-sensei almost wound up in the hospital.

She was a perfectly nice person otherwise, if a little overly chipper for someone who routinely wakes up at four in the morning. Remember how I mentioned a long time ago that I hate waking up early? Fujimo-sensei was pretty much the anti-thesis of that.

"Good morning!" she sang, striking a pose in front of the desk. "Welcome everyone to your first day back from Summer break! I hope you're all as happy as I am! I know I've been bored out of my mind this last month with nothing to do."

A few people muttered unintelligibly, but everyone else (including me) stayed silent and glared in her direction. This did little to bring her down. I'd say it actually brought her higher up.
"Oh, come on now," she said with a fake frown. "We're all going to have fun this semester. But first, it appears we have some new students!"

'Remember,' I mentally yelled at them, even though I'd found out long ago that mind-reading was not one of their abilities.

With Cheshire cat grins, Hikaru and Kaoru stood tall, basking in the attention my classmates were now giving them. I could already hear a couple of girls whispering about how 'cute' they were. That sure didn't take long.

"Why don't you two tell us a little about yourselves," Fujimo-sensei suggested.

I tensed a bit, nervous in spite of myself that they would accidentally give something away or do something stupid that might get them into trouble before first period even started. It wasn't that I didn't trust them not to deviate from the cover story Kyoya thought up, it's just… okay, maybe I was a little weary that they might deviate from the cover story.

I know I said I was friends with them all now, but trust is something to be earned and it's slow process. It doesn't just magically appear.

"My name is Hikaru," the eponymous twin said. "My brother Kaoru and I have just moved here with ours cousins. We're very happy to be attending school with you."

"We hope you'll take care of us, and that we'll all become good friends," said Kaoru.

"That's so sweet of you boys," Fujimo-sensei said happily. "Everyone, remember to be extra kind to your new classmates. Make sure they feel welcomed!"

At least half of the class would have no problem with that. I'll give you three guesses as to which one.

They sat back down as I breathed a sigh of relief. All throughout the rest of the day, both of them would get little looks from various girls in the class, some of whom also took the time to glare at me, probably jealous that I got to sit in between them. Oh, if only they knew…

The next few periods went by without a hitch, aside from a small incident in science class. In retrospect, I guess it wasn't too big of a deal, but at the time I was pretty upset with it.

"Alright," said my science teacher as he scanned the room. "You, Hikaru, was it? Please tell me the definition of photosynthesis."

Hikaru stood tall and spoke in a loud, strong voice.

"Photosynthesis; noun: formation of carbohydrates by chlorophyll containing plants exposed to sunlight."

"Very good," said the teacher. "Now-"

"Pronunciation: fo'to-sin'thi-sis. Photosynthesize; verb, photosynthetic; adjective."

So yeah. Apparently, they can give full dictionary definitions of just about any word if asked. I didn't know that, leaving me just as baffled as the rest of the class and about ten times as aggravated, or maybe that was only me. Either way, I spent the rest of the period writing out an updated set of rules to drill into them later.
They never took any notes (meaning the money I spent on those books was wasted), but they seemed to be paying attention all the same. A few times, they would share odd looks and smiles, leading me to wonder if they could actually read each other's minds. That honestly wouldn't have surprised me.

Lunchtime came around faster than I'd expected. Since I wasn't in the mood to talk with any of my friends, I choose to go on the roof. There's this nice little area in one corner that's a perfect spot for when the weather isn't too cold. Of course, since Hikaru and Kaoru were with me, I wouldn't be completely alone, but it was good enough.

I sat in the middle of them again, slowly chewing small amounts of rice and fish. It was a good thing I'd prepared my own lunch the night before.

"How are you guys liking school so far?" I asked at one point.

Hikaru and Kaoru looked at each other and shrugged.

"It's okay we guess," they said in unison.

I scowled at them, and they just grinned.

"What? There's no one else around to hear us," Kaoru chuckled.

A small group of girls wandered by right, raucously laughing about something or other. Their voices lowered when they saw us, but I could still make out the gist of what they were saying.

"Those are the new kids?"

"Wow, they're so handsome. And there's two of them, that's even better."

"Why are they hanging around that bookworm Fujioka?"

"You'd think they could find someone a little less dorky to spend time with…"

They walked out of earshot at this point and I went back to food. Their words didn't bother me much. If they wanted to think I was a dork, let them. It wasn't like their opinions could physically hurt me or anything.

"Now that you mention it, this place would be better with a few less people," Hikaru spat out, glaring in the direction the girls had walked off in.

"Three less," Kaoru answered.

Clearly I was the only one following such principles.

I thought about scolding them for this, but it was probably pointless. They would just be too stubborn and insisting that they were right.

All thoughts of what had just occurred were lost on me a moment later anyway, when another group came into view and made a beeline straight for us. This time, they were all male and I knew their names, faces, and exactly what they were doing here. I also knew that I shouldn't have been surprised.

"What are you doing here?" I demanded before Tamaki or Hunny could try to hug me. My loud tone drove them back towards the other two members of their party, who stood silently in the back.
"We missed you, Haru-chan," Hunny said with tears welling up in his eyes.

"We wanted to have lunch with you," Mori said.

"Well, we wanted to sit with you for lunchtime at any rate," Tamaki declared. "We'll be sure to head back to our school once the time comes, but for now, I've been away from you far too long, Haruhi."

"You know, it's only been about three hours, and we've been with her the whole time," Kaoru reminded him, Hikaru nodded in agreement.

Tamaki paused, gave them a funny sort of look, then smiled at me again.

"I've been away from you far too long, Haruhi."

They all sat around us, Tamaki making sure to stay closer to me than the rest, much to Hikaru's consternation since Tamaki took his spot. While Hunny started off to Mori about how high up we were and what a great view it was, I was dealing with some serious concerns about this new development. Concerns I was not about to let slide.

"You do realize that you could get in trouble if you're caught wandering off your campus."

"I thought high school students were allowed to go wherever they pleased during free periods and lunch hours," Tamaki protested.

"Senior students are," I corrected, stressing that first word as much as I could. "None of you guys qualify for this. You really shouldn't have come here."

"It does make our lack of an appetite less noticeable if we stick to secluded areas such as this one," Kyoya pointed out. "I checked, and the roof tops of the high school building are sealed off. We could easily get through the chains, but I doubted you would approve, and so we came here instead."

"It means we get to spend more time together," Hunny cheered.

"Yeah."

"Well guys, I appreciate that," I said, only partially lying. "But you really need to be careful. I let you guys come to school with me, please don't make things difficult."

"We'd never dream of it!" Tamaki cried, horrified.

Well, Tamaki, that's never stopped you before, has it?

As it turned out, someone did come by right then, just as I was starting to think they might get away with this. She was a fellow student, probably an underclassmen since I'd never seen her before. She strolled on by, whistling a tune, with a bulging bag at her side swinging with her movements. She did a double take and examined us, noticing the obvious differences between the middle and high school uniform, then let out a gasp.

"Hey! You four are High School students!" she pointed an accusing finger randomly at Kyoya. "You're not supposed to be here."

I sighed loudly and bent my head, ready to try and say something to get this girl off our backs. I didn't know how to explain their presence, I was just hoping something feasible would come to me. It kind of did in the end anyway, taking the form of Tamaki, who stood up and motioned at the girl, a smooth smile in place.
"I'm so sorry, my dear," he said. "It wasn't our intention to violate the rules, we just wished to take lunch with our friends. Surely a lovely young lady such as yourself has plenty of friends and can understand our feelings."

The girl flushed red and looked away from Tamaki's smoldering gaze. I couldn't believe the change that had overcome her, from serious and commanding to giggly and blushing. I guess that was just the, for lack of a better word, power of Tamaki.

"O-okay, I understand," she said, starting to move away backwards. "I won't tell anyone I saw you."

"Thank you so much," Tamaki called after her.

He sat back down when she was at of view, grinning triumphantly while everyone looked on, varying levels of impressed.

"See? No problem at all," he said to me.

I shook my head, still unconvinced, but a little more at ease now. Much as I didn't like the idea of any of them flirting, sincerely or not, with my classmates, it did at least get the job done. I made a mental note to have a talk with them about that later anyway.

"So, what class do you guys have next?" Hikaru asked conversationally. "Me, Kaoru and Haruhi have to go to math class."

"Takashi and I have science," said Hunny. "I bet it'll be tons of fun just like history was!"

"We took a pop quiz," Mori remarked.

"I bet you aced it…" I muttered under my breath before taking another bite of my fish.

"I think we have gym next," Tamaki said. He looked to Kyoya for confirmation, and got a silent nod for his troubles.

"Gym?" I repeated, a sudden weight dropping into my stomach. I whipped my head around to face them. "You guys remember what we talked about, right?"

"Do nothing that might be indicative of our more than human capabilities," Kyoya recited robotically (no pun intended). "Maintain full restraint at all times."

"Good," I nodded. "As long as you both understand… and actually listen."

"Oh come on, Haruhi, you can trust us!" said Tamaki. "We've all had slip-ups in the past, but we learn from them! And we do better next time."

I really couldn't argue with that, Tamaki could be pretty wise when he wanted to be. I also got the feeling that he was including me in that 'we.' I don't think he, or any of them really, were going to be forgetting my own mistake any time soon.

At any rate, that's a non-issue and I have more important things to do than dwell on my growing inability to get an accurate read on them.

I'm going to stop here and try to get back to this within the next few days. Like I said before, Mei is coming tomorrow and I can't let her find out about this blog or that the guys were really androids the whole time. I've been keeping this story from everyone in my personal life and that includes her. I'm going to head out to run some errands when I'm done putting this up. It should only take a few hours,
and then I'll be putting my laptop away in a safe place. Once she's gone, I can get back to this. I hope you'll all continue to be patient with me until then.

Now, regarding the next few posts. When I said they were going to be shorter, what I meant was that I honestly don't know how well I'm going to be able to tell the next part of the story. See, after lunch was over and we all went back to our classrooms, I didn't see any of them, aside from the twins, until the end of the day. During that three hours we were apart, something happened.

Something big and earth shattering. Something that almost tore our little circle apart.

When it was over, I asked Tamaki and Kyoya many times to tell me what had gone on that day. All I ever got was stammering excuses (Tamaki) and a quick change of subject (Kyoya). Not even the other androids could ever get an answer out of them, and the only other people who might've known were the ones who were actually there when it happened, and I don't know any of those people. To this day, it's still a mystery and I imagine it will remain as such for years to come.

I'll keep telling the story as best as I can, but don't expect the same kind of flow and detail in my next post. It'll probably feel a lot like it did for me: confusing and headache inducing. Kind of like being in the Twilight Zone while suffering a migraine.

Just a fair warning.

posted by Haruhi at 5:42 pm 0 comments
Ohhhhh Haruhi. I knew you were hiding

08.15.11

Ohhhhh Haruhi. I knew you were hiding something from me, but I never thought it'd be like THIS.

We're going to have a lot to talk about once you get back from the store. Now it's MY turn to tell YOU a crazy story. XD

Love, Mei.

PS: The logout button is your second best friend (after me, of course ;)).

PPS: You know I never told you this, but I always thought you and Tamaki had a thing for each other. Do you get with him in the end? Tell me you do!

posted by Haruhi at 8:16 pm 0 comments
Mei's Story

08.16.11

MEI'S STORY

Okay.

I’m guessing you all saw that last post. Obviously, I didn’t put it up. Mei here decided it would be funny to hijack my blog and freak out all my readers just because I left my account open. She has a rather sick sense of humor.

How did she get here so fast, you ask?

Turns out my Dad, in one of his frequent lapses in attention, managed to invert the date and time she would be coming. Instead of the 16th at 5, it was really the 15th at 6. This is why I’ll be taking down all the phone messages from now on.

It’s also why Mei now has full knowledge of everything that went on last year, and that the six guys we briefly went to school with were, in fact, not really my cousins and not really human.

Fantastic.

I had to fill her in on the rest of the story too, because I know she would’ve prodded me all day and night if I didn’t, and I’m beyond not in the mood to deal with that. So now she’s sitting here with me, watching me type all this out and making little comments every few seconds and generally annoying the crap out of me.

And now she’s pouting like a baby. Serves her right.

I guess I am being unfair. Mad as I am with both Mei for snooping and myself for not putting my laptop away before leaving the house for three hours, there is a silver lining to this cloud. You know how I mentioned at the end of MY last post that I wasn’t around for whatever occurred to cause the giant mess I was in for?

Take a wild guess who was.

Adgs

SssME! It was me! I was0gfdf

Sdag re 8

Sorry, that was Mei. She’s a little over excited, but she won’t do it again.

So yes, Mei was there when it happened and she told me the whole story this morning. I’ll admit, it does put a lot of things into perspective, and I’m not just talking about events to come. For now, we’ll just stick to what happened in gym class that day, in Mei here’s own, questionably reliable, words.

She’s pouting again. Let’s get this over with.

The first thing you need to understand is that the main perpetrators of this… event were Tamaki and Kyoya. All the others had some involvement, but those two were at the heart of it. Now, Mei is
actually in my grade, not theirs. Because she skipped gym a lot the previous year, she had to take remedial classes in order to get a passing grade, and she had them at the same time, and one the same field, as Tamaki and Kyoya’s class. So that’s how she was able to witness what happened.

This is also, as I’ve long suspected and have now had confirmed, how she was able to help cause it.

And if she keeps whining and trying to type over my shoulder like she’s been doing, I’ll be throwing her out…

That’s what I thought.

Anyway, Mei participates in remedial gym about as much as she does in regular gym. Don’t ask me how she keeps passing.

That day, she’d just finished convincing the teacher that the sprain she sustained a month and a half before was still stinging her, and that there was no way she could make the run around the field. She was told to take a seat on the bleachers and stay there until the bell rang. I’m sure she was very pleased with herself as she skipped on over. So pleased, that she was more than ready to try flirting with the blonde guy also sitting there with his glasses wearing friend, even though he wasn’t in her grade and she’d never seen him before.

I think you know where I’m going with this.

Mei sauntered up to them. She sat down just far enough to maintain some degree of personal space and smiling prettily.

“Hey there,” she said.

“Hello, I’m Tamaki.”

“Mei Yasumura,” Mei said, batting her eyelashes at him. “I don’t think I’ve seen you around. You must be new. How about we hang out sometime and I can show you around town?”

Tamaki’s smile faded. “Are you trying to flirt with me?”

Before Mei could answer, Tamaki was running long fingers around the edge of her chin. She blushed deeply.

“Because you are a lovely young lady, but I’m afraid I’m already taken.”

The illusion of charm cracked like a china glass and Mei couldn’t have been more embarrassed. She pulled away as fast as she could and put a good ten inches distance between them while Kyoya chuckled in the background.

“I see,” Mei said. “You could’ve just told me straight out… without all the touching and crap.”

“My deepest apologies if I made you uncomfortable,” Tamaki said.

Mei’s eyes snapped to him, her humiliation growing at an exponential rate now that he’d heard something she very much hadn’t wanted him to.

“W-whatever, it’s nothing,” she said. And since Mei is one of those people who tries to cover up negative emotions with bad attempts at humor, she then turned back around with a grin. “Let me guess, it’s you and your friend over there, right?”

Kyoya looked up from his book, expressionless.
“As we are now, Tamaki and I are not romantic with each other,” he said.

Mei blinked

“Oookay then. Fantastic.”

So Mei fidgeted a little, feeling awkward while Tamaki and Kyoya were, of course, as cool headed as ever. Their gym class was also doing testing that day, but of the sit ups and push ups variety. They had already taken their turns. They went first, in fact. Something about the gym teacher wanting to see how well his newest students could do on their first day in his class. I don't know, maybe he thought he was the only man in the country capable of running a proper gym class, and any teacher they've had in the past can't possibly have pushed them hard enough. I never found out how that all went, though I assume Kyoya and Tamaki shattered a couple of school records between the two of them. Any damage must have been on the mild side, seeing as we never got any news vans at the apartment, nor did the teacher beg them to join any teams. Oh, how peaceful life was now that we'd all reached an understanding. I have to tell you, I'm still reeling from that whole reality show debacle.

Apparently, that was Mei's favorite part of the story, because she's near hysterical right now.

Anyway, she eventually got over her failed attempted at flirting and decided that, if nothing else, she might as well make some new friends. Hesitant as I am to admit this while she's reading over my shoulder, I've always really liked that about Mei. It goes without saying I'm not the most social person in the world. I never really wanted to be. Mei is the exact opposite. She loves to talk, she loves to hear herself talk, and she loves having people to talk to. It gets annoying at times, but I know I'll never be bored when she's around.

Mei just gave me a hug. And a promise to pay me back for that annoying comment someday.

"So," Mei said conversationally. "Are you two related or something? Because you don't really look it. If you don't mind me saying."

She added that part in last second, after realizing how rude that sounded. Neither Kyoya or Tamaki seemed to mind, however.

"We're brothers," Kyoya said. "We're staying with our cousin Haruhi for the foreseeable future, if that answers your question."

"Uh-huh," Mei said, not nearly convinced at all. "You both must be adopted or something then- did you say Haruhi?"

Tamaki nodded, smiling big like hearing my name was the highlight of his day. And it probably was. "Why, yes."

"Haruhi... Fujioka?"

"Yes."

Mei needed a moment to wrap her mind around that one, so she was kind of just gawking stupidly while Tamaki and Kyoya were probably wondering if something was wrong with her. Or, at least, Tamaki would. From the sound of it, it seems like Kyoya wasn't paying much attention.

"Your cousin is Haruhi..." Mei repeated.

Tamaki again said: "Yes."
At this point, Kyoya finally decided to look up from whatever he was doing and officially join the conversation.

"I take it this surprises you, Miss Yasumura?"

"Well, I'm just trying to process that Haruhi suddenly has family I've never heard of," Mei said, leaning back in a daze from the rush of new information (her words). "I mean, you'd think after knowing each other since we were kids and having Dads who are like best friends, something like this would've come up."

Mei got up to stretch her legs, seemingly forgetting that she was supposed to still be suffering a horrible, debilitating sprained ankle. Don't ask me how she never got caught.

"I guess it's partly my fault," she went on. "I've been pretty busy helping my Dad clean up at his pension. I didn't even have time to call Haruhi up, and now I find out she's got a pair of mysterious cousins staying with her."

"We're not all that mysterious," Kyoya said while adjusting his glasses.

"Also, we're not a pair," said Tamaki. "There are six of us."

Mei stopped. Slowly, she turned wide eyes to Tamaki, her lips all but disappearing until her mind could form words again (also her words).

"Six of you?" she asked. "Like... you guys plus four?"

"Two plus four does indeed equal six," said the always helpful Kyoya.

"And... you're all guys?"

"Yes."

"Haruhi has six guys staying at her place."

"Yes."

"All at one time."

"Yes."

"All six of you."

"If you're finding any of this challenging, please let us know upfront."

Mei sent a glare Kyoya's way.

"I'm just don't see how this is possible," Mei said. "Unless Haruhi has also moved without telling me, how in God's name is she fitting six of you guys it her little two bedroom place? No, don't answer that."

Tamaki, who had his mouth open, ready to give her the full play by play on our sleeping arrangements and possibly how we came to have them, could only frown. Mei gave an exaggerated moan and flopped back on the bench, sliding down halfway.

"Just tell me how Haruhi gets to have a bunch of guys living with her when I can't even get a date. I mean, I know you guys are all related, but I already know that at least a third of you are totally hot,
and Haruhi's the only girl in the free world who doesn't recognize hotness when it smacks her in the face or comes to sleep in her house. Not. Fair."

She blew out a puff of air, lifting a section of her heavily dyed blonde hair out of her face. It landed smack in the middle of her forehead.

"If it's a date you're looking for, we can give you a number to call," Kyoya said.

Mei glared at him a second time. "I'm not that desperate, thanks."

She sat back up with her head resting on her hands. In general, she probably looked way too relaxed the whole time this was going on. Like I said, she's lucky no one ever questioned her. The class went on from here. Mei watched her classmates running along the track red faced and drenched in sweat, and Tamaki and Kyoya's class trying and mostly failing to do more than twenty push-ups. The gym teacher was yelling himself hoarse. Once this got boring, Mei decided to try chatting again.

"How do you guys stay sane, living all cramped like that?" she asked.

"Oh, it's not so bad," Tamaki answered, leaning forward. "Any time we have a problem, we always talk it out and find a solution. We've had no trouble at all."

Haha yeah...

"Yeah, but the sibling rivalry must be at, like, nuclear levels by now.")

Tamaki and Kyoya just looked at her.

"Sibling rivalry?" Tamaki asked.

And that's how our next adventure got started, courtesy of Mei.

Going into more detail, Tamaki's innocuous little comment had really gotten Mei going. I'm not saying it's his faulttt

OH but you have NO PROBLEM saying it's all MY fault HUH?,--

That was Mei again. Just forget it.

So basically, Mei was now off on a tangent.

"Oh come on, you can't tell me you guys don't fight. I mean, my three cousins are in their twenties and moved out ages ago, and they can still really get into it. Not like when they were living together, of course. THAT was pure chaos. You don't want to know what the birthday parties were like."

Tamaki scoffed, though good naturedly. "My dear, it can't have been that bad."

Though the 'Dear' part got an eyebrow raise, Mei mostly ignored it.

"Yeah, you're right. I'm understating it. I think it's because they lived in this ridiculously cramped apartment and had to share the same room. There was shouting and swearing and roughing each other up. They would borrow each other's stuff without asking and then ruin them somehow, they would hog the TV and take food from the fridge that was meant for one of the others. Then this one time, when they were in High School, they all got a crush on the same girl and they would fight so hard over which one she liked best that the neighbors could hear it. The cops even got called a couple of times."
At this point, Tamaki and Kyoya were listening with rapt attention, and neither appeared too happy with what she was saying. Tamaki more openly so, going really pale and even a little scared. Kyoya was frowning, but according to Mei, his eyes were saying a lot. Normally, I wouldn't really get that, but it's Kyoya.

Anyway, he was the one to speak first.

"That all sounds... rather unpleasant."

"Oh, it gets better," Mei said, barely containing a grin. "That girl they were fighting like rabid dogs over? Turns out she was a lesbian the whole time. Had a steady girlfriend, too. Their faces when they found out- God, I wish I'd had my camera.

While she was laughing to herself, Tamaki and Kyoya were in the process of deciphering all this. I'm not going to pretend I know what goes on inside a robot's head. Much as I have come to know that they were more than just metal parts, it's doesn't change the fact that they all had literal super computers for brains. The most I'm getting is that it began unlocking some more of that hidden programming of theirs. Programming of the more... primal kind, let's say.

"But I don't understand," Tamaki said. "Why would they fight over her? Couldn't they all just love her?"

That earned a very weird look from Mei, and I know what that's like. I saw it for the first time when we were ten and she found out that I read for fun and not just for school.

Mei thought about that for a second. "Well uh- no, no they couldn't. I mean, for starters, she wasn't into guys, so that alone is the final nail in the coffin. But even if she had liked guys, I doubt she would have gotten with all of them. People fall in love and not always with people they want to be in love with, but it happens and sometimes the other person doesn't feel the same way. Sometimes more than one girl will like a guy or more than one guy will like a girl, and eventually, they're going to have to make a choice."

She didn't get anymore arguments. Neither of the guys were even looking at her anymore. Kyoya was staring off into space, while Tamaki, openly and kind of nervously, was staring at Kyoya. Mei excused herself to get some water, and class ended while she was coming back, so the conversation didn't pick back up.

"Kyoya," Tamaki said. "What do you think she meant by that?"

Kyoya sighed. "I thought she was very clear, Tamaki. When a woman has several man vying for her attentions, she will often come to return the affections of only one of them, and the rest will be left with nothing."

Tamaki may have flinched away at this point, because it was at least a minute before he spoke again.

"But... that can't count for everyone! Take Haruhi for example! She's very different from other young women her age, surely she would never have such a problem."

"Well, I don't know about that," Kyoya answered gravely. "She's different, it's true, but not in the way you are implying. She's a very logical minded person, not at all one for flights of fancy. If she were ever to pursue a relationship with anyone... then, I'd have to say that there would be only one for her."

That's were all the teachers blew their whistles and called for everyone to go and change. Neither me
nor Mei saw them again after that, except when Mei was leaving the girl's locker room. She saw Tamaki run by- without Kyoya- looking rather flustered and chagrined. A couple of girls were eyeing him, but now he seemed to look right passed them. Apparently, they were very disappointed.

This is were Mei's part of the story ends, at least for now. More went on the next day that I wasn't aware of, but first I need to tell you about that night at home, when I started to notice that something was up.

Or actually, I just remembered something else that happened that day. It's not related to this part of the story, but it's going to be really important later on, so keep this one in mind.

It happened while I was standing outside the school building, waiting for the guys to come out and meet me. They had to stay behind a little late to talk to the Principal. Nothing was wrong, it was just standard procedure for new students so that they knew where everything was and where to go if they had a problem.

I was out in front of the gates, going over the syllabus for World History in my head so I'd know what books I should get out of the library over the weekend. I like to be prepared in case of extra credit work. Plus, the subject is actually really interesting, no matter how much Mei rolls her eyes and gags.

About ten minutes went by, and they hadn't come out yet. I was getting a little tired of waiting, and I started pacing. I guess I wasn't looking were I was going, because for whatever reason, someone had left an old banana peel right there on the sidewalk. I should probably mention that there was a garbage can literally three feet away. So I slipped on it, and I went flying. There was no one around to see me or hear my scream of surprise, so I was about to crack my head on the pavement and possibly break something.

That's when I felt a pair of arms around my waist. They plucked me out of the air and pulled me into a distinctly female body. My 'Savior' looked down on me. She was incredibly tall for a woman, almost Tamaki's height. In fact, the way she held me and smiled at me reminded me a lot of him too. She had short brown hair like mine, though in a slightly different, more masculine style. She gave a low chuckle as she put me down, and ran one long finger along my chin. I didn't really like that.

"You should be more careful," she said in a husky voice. "I wouldn't want to see such a cute face get damaged."

She left after that. Nothing else, just that one, vaguely suggestive comment and she was gone. Once I came back to my senses, I turned to call her back. I don't know if it was to thank her, or ask who on earth she was supposed to be, or both. It didn't matter, she was already gone. I didn't even think it had been more than a few second since she'd walked away, but, there you go. I was pretty confused and a little rattled at the time, so I tried to push it from my thoughts. The guys got there a few seconds later, and Hunny started going on about how his classmates had a little pet rabbit that they cared for in the courtyard, and that proved to be a pretty solid distraction.

"You should be more careful," she said in a husky voice. "I wouldn't want to see such a cute face get damaged."

So there you have it. Keep that little incident in mind for later on, we'll be going back to the main story now.

After I finished my homework for the night, it was almost dinner time. I settled for a quick bento dish, I wasn't really that hungry. While I was preparing that, everyone else was in the living room. Kyoya was on my laptop again. He'd been nice enough to relinquish for a half an hour earlier so I could look at a few websites for my Language class. Other than that, he'd been completely silent all day. It wasn't uncommon for him to go long periods without speaking, but he was no Mori. I knew
right away that something wasn't right.

I thought, for a while, that they might be angry with me again. I couldn't think of why because nothing had really happened to just since the jailbreak incident. I was quickly proved wrong when everyone else acted completely normal around me. Everyone, that is, except for Tamaki. That was sign number two. He was much more open about his discomfort as well. He stayed off to the corner with one of my books while the others watched TV. At one point, they even put on an old historical drama, and Tamaki absolutely loved those things. He didn't even look at the screen. Whenever one of the others spoke to me, Tamaki would watch us, unblinking, until I walk away and do something else. We all sensed it, that's why he was mostly left alone except by Hunny. He kept trying to make Tamaki go and get his Kuma-chan so he could be properly introduced to Usa-chan. I don't think he ever got anywhere with that.

Around bedtime, I finally had enough. After I said goodnight to everyone, Tamaki started after Hikaru and Kaoru to my dad's room. Kyoya was still on my laptop (out of all of them, he slept the least) and Hunny and Mori were already in my room. There was nothing and no one to interfere.

"Tamaki," I said. I looked him right in the eye. "Is everything all right?"

I figured there was no sense beating around the bush. The last time this happened, Tamaki had needed a little prompting before he told me what was bothering him. This time... it went a little differently.

"Everything is fine, Haruhi. There is no problem at all."

He ran a hand over my head as to say goodnight and went into my Dad's room, sliding the door shut behind him. I stood there alone for a while, feeling even more unnerved now than before. I couldn't shake the feeling that something bad was about to happen. It was another reminder of how very human they all were, especially Tamaki. They could even lie to my face.

*posted by Haruhi at 9:38 pm 0 comments*
The Rest of Mei's Story

08.17.11

THE REST OF MEI'S STORY

I won't lie to you guys, I'm not really in the mood to be doing this tonight. I've had a tiring day. I spent it out on the town with Mei, going to every clothing store within a five mile radius and window shopping. An entire hour was dedicated to watching her argue with a saleslady over the quality of material in this one handbag (it was billed as real leather, but Mei said it was just imitation). We barely had time to eat, and by the time we got to the bookstore, which was where I'd been waiting to go all day long, it was twenty minutes to closing time.

I'm pretty drained of energy and creativity at the moment to make this entry entertaining. I wanted to wait until tomorrow, but tomorrow is Mei's last full day with us before she leaves. She's insisting that I finish this part of the story tonight because over the phone or in a chat session just isn't good enough for her. She has to be right beside me, in person, so she can bump me on the elbow and whine anytime I write something down that she doesn't like. Like right now.

So, let's get this over with.

The rest of Mei's part in the story starts with the school Sports Festival. My old district held theirs every year during the last few days of October. It tends to get really cold around that time, so they are usually held in the gymnasium at the high school building. It's twice the size of a normal gym, so there's plenty of room for multiple events. There is some kind of story behind why it's so big, but the teachers and Upperclassmen all had different versions and I never found out which, if any, was the real one. Aside from that, it was pretty ordinary as far as gyms go. There were bleachers lining one wall, opposing basketball hoops, and symmetrical colored lines painted all along the floor. Through one set of doors was the supply room, which always smelled like rubber and had equipment for every sport imaginable. At least, as far as I know.

Needless to say, there was a lot of enthusiasm for athletics at my old school. It may be presumptuous of me to say it, but I was probably the only one who didn't share it. Every year, I looked for an excuse to get out of it, and every year I failed. According to the school board, opting out of gym classes is one thing, backing out of the Sports Festival was out of the question. So, as always, I was stuck.

Practices begin almost right away. My grade at the time was the youngest grade level required to participate, and since all three pairs (Tamaki and Kyoya, Hikaru and Kaoru, Hunny and Mori) shared homerooms, they'd all be competing together when the time came. There was a very long talk on the way once I realized that, but I'm not going to talk about that. It was mostly just a repeat of stuff you've already seen.

Once again, I was not present for any of the following; this is all being related to me by Mei as I type. I should also probably note that Mei was only there at all by accident. She was supposed to be returning the bag of dodgeballs back to that supply closet I just told you about. She had failed to talk her way out of remedial gym this time around, likely because she'd used the same 'hurt ankle' excuse one too many times and the teacher finally got fed up and asked the school nurse about her progress. Becoming the Ball Monitor was Mei's punishment for slacking. She held the 'honor' for the entire semester.

She'd just stopped for the tenth or eleventh time to rest from the strain of carrying such a heavy bag.
Then she wonders why there was such a push for us to be athletically involved. Though, I guess I'm not one to talk…

She was standing in front of the entrance to the gymnasium. Just a few more feet and she'd be in the clear. Off to the side was a small classroom mostly used for detention and tutoring. That's where Mei heard the voices. It caught her attention, because the room should have been empty at that time of day. Being as nosy as she is, Mei couldn't resist eavesdropping. Especially not when she got closer and saw Tamaki's blonde head as he almost, but not quite walked into view. The rest of the guys were sitting at or on top of desks, almost like they were students in a class taught by Tamaki. I won't lie: the mental image is giving me a good laugh.

"Alright, men," he was saying. "I've gathered you all here today for a very specific purpose."

He paused here for whatever reason. Mei thinks dramatic effect. I wouldn't be surprised.

"I hope it's really important," Kaoru complained. "We're missing lunchtime."

"How many times do I have to remind you two that we don't eat?"

Hikaru shrugged. "Yeah, but we get to hang out with Haruhi without stupid teachers telling us we can't talk to her. What's their problem anyway?"

Tamaki appeared to get fed up, but he didn't snap at them like I might have. They really were talking a lot during class, usually about absolutely nothing but some bird outside the window. I guess they just liked the sounds of their own, individual voices. All things considered, I can't blame them for that, but it was still a relief when the teacher moved us all away from each other one week in. They didn't like it at all, but at least now I could concentrate on my work. But I digress.

"If we're all seated, I shall begin." Tamaki paused a second time here, this time to clear his throat. "Yesterday afternoon, Kyoya and I were introduced to a close friend of Haruhi's, she-"

"Haruhi has friends who aren't us?" Hikaru asked, aghast.

"Yes, now be quiet," Tamaki answered. "As I was saying, we had a very engaging conversation with her about Haruhi and her relationship with the six of us."

"Does Haru-chan not like us anymore?" Hunny piped up. His eyes welled up with premature tears that Mei insists made him look like something out of a bad moe anime. I get that.

"No, no, nothing like that," Tamaki quickly appeased him. "Well, not exactly like that. What I mean is that we discussed the workings of a human female's heart and how it is very rare for her to open it up to more than one person at a time. By that logic, six would be near impossible, and that got me thinking. I've spent all night with this and I've come to a very important decision."

One more pause, the longest and most overtly (and pointlessly) dramatic pause yet. Also the last, thank goodness.

"With this in mind, I'd like us all to agree never to make Haruhi have to choose between us."

At this point, he'd changed positions, from 'stern professor' to 'stern drill sergeant,' as Mei describes it. I can get a good picture of that in my head, and I'm sure, knowing Tamaki, he was not expecting the perplexed silence his little proclamation received. It went on long enough for him to lose all momentum and slump out of that assured air of his. Everyone just kind of stared at him for a while, with the twins shooting each other sidelong glances every now and then. Then one of them raised their hand. Mei can't tell the difference, but I'm going to guess it was Kaoru. What he said next
sounds more like him.

"You think you can backtrack a little bit? Why would she need to choose one of us?"

"You're making it sound like we're all going to be thrown out if she does," Hikaru (probably) went on for his brother.

"You don't think she wants her room back to herself, do you?" Hunny 'whispered' in Mori's ear. Mori just shook his head.

"Everybody calm down!" Tamaki cried. "Please, just listen. I want to be sure that we all remain as we are now. Our friendship with Haruhi is a beautiful thing, and I won't see it tampered with."

"Yeah, that's what I'm wondering about," Kaoru said, narrowing his eyes. "What the heck makes you think we'd do anything like that?"

"It's not a matter of any conscious acts," Tamaki responded. "Her name is Mei, Haruhi's friend. She explained everything to us. I know the idea of Haruhi wanting only one of us above the rest seems strange. I am astonished myself. We are built to act as a harem for carnal purposes only. Emotional ties are not part of the description, but they are for Haruhi, because she is not the kind of girl we were intended for. That's why there's a chance she may one day come to prefer one of us, and only one of us. I want to prevent that day from coming as much as I can. As my comrades and Haruhi's dearest friends, it's your duty to make the same vow I have. Does everyone understand?"

Let me just stop for one second so I can give a small disclaimer (of sorts). I have no idea if what Mei is telling me they said is actually what they said. It's not that I don't trust her memory (I'm not going to pretend mine is perfect), and it's not that I don't trust Mei, it's just that this speech Tamaki apparently gave really stands out in my mind and makes me think. It's not like him to talk like this. It reeks of insecurity and even a little defensiveness. I'm starting to wonder if Tamaki was like that from the beginning, hidden beneath all that programming. I learned so much about the robots in those months, but the farther into my story I get, the more I think there is even more that I'll never know. It wasn't just Tamaki. If nothing else, I want this part of the story to express beyond a shadow of a doubt how increasingly human-like they were getting. I've tried to make that clear in previous posts. Hopefully, I'm as good of a writer as people have always told me I am and I've been doing it right.

So anyway, after Tamaki's impassioned plea, there was another round of quiet that spread across his audience of five and was absolutely shattered, of course, by Hunny. He jumped up onto Mori's back. Mori barely reacted, by the way.

"Yes, Sir!" Hunny squealed. He then stood tall and gave a salute. Mei thinks it looked adorable. "You can count on me."

"Me too," Mori said with his own, much more subdued, salute.

Tamaki gave them an approving thumb up each. He wasn't to get such a positive response again, not with Hikaru and Kaoru around. I guess I'm going to have to rescind my earlier claim that Kyoya was a major player in this. Hearing the rest of Mei's story and knowing now what those twins were doing, his role is looking paltry. Not that he's totally innocent either. He's not. He's really, really not.

Anyway, while the rest of the group was busy agreeing with Tamaki, be it openly or just a nod of their head while they flipped through a textbook, Hikaru and Kaoru were getting mad. Mei is pretty sure she saw one of them break a hole in the desk from gripping it too tightly.

"What makes you think we're going to try and keep Haruhi for ourselves?" Hikaru demanded. I'm
just going to go with my instinct on which of them said what from now on.

"I don't think that," Tamaki answered curtly. "I just want us to have an understanding. It's important for us, as a team, to be able to discuss these things honestly and openly."

Kaoru snorted, arms crossed over his chest. Since gaining his own mind and personality, I'd noticed that he was a lot more subdued than his 'brother' and much less prone to outbursts. The 'good' twin if you will. He was still a Mischievous model, though, and intentionally or not, he was about to live up to it.

"Some team," he spat out. Hikaru came to stand beside him, leaning heavily on the desk his brother occupied as they sent collective hard stares Tamaki's way.

For his part, Tamaki wasn't having any of it.

"What is that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"You know," Kaoru responded. "Of course you know. What is this even all about? You can say what you want, we all know."

"You don't trust us," Hikaru took over. "You really think one of us is going to try and ruin our friendship with Haruhi by just running back to our old programming or some other stupid thing. That, or you're the one who wants her all for yourself and you're just posturing."

Tamaki sputtered. I don't think that helped his case very much, though I have to say I don't believe Hikaru's theory in the slightest. Tamaki was a lot of things, enough things that I could probably dedicate a whole other blog just to talking about him. And no, Mei, I'm not actually going to do that. Stop pouting at me. My point is that for all the words and adjectives one could use to describe Tamaki, 'possessive' was not one of them.

At least, not that kind of possessive.

So I'm thinking Hikaru either genuinely didn't know that, was secretly worried about this the whole time, or was just trying to stir the pot for reasons I can't fathom. Regardless, the die had been cast and there was no going back now. Hold on to something, guys, this is where it all implodes.

"Did you really just say what I think you did?" Tamaki raged.

Neither Hikaru, nor Kaoru was moved. Everyone else was struck by a thickening tension. Even Kyoya was paying attention.

"What's the matter?" Hikaru mockingly said. He wore a grin now that Mei says sent a chill down her spine. I think I know what she's talking about. I always just thought it was annoying. "Mad that you got caught in your bullcrap?"

"It is not bull- stop trying to turn this around!"

"Stop trying to accuse us of things!" they shouted together.

"Everyone stop!" Hunny shouted. He climbed down Mori's back like a monkey on a tree and forced his way in between them. He may have been the shortest of them all, but I shouldn't have to tell you why no one was about to try and stop him. He turned to Tamaki. "Tama-chan, you wouldn't really try and take Haru-chan away, would you?"

Mei says he put on a really cute face, but I know how Hunny is at times like this. There was
something sinister lurking behind it. I don't even have to have been there to know. Tamaki must have known it too.

"Of course not, Hunny, I would never do such a thing," he glared at Hikaru and Kaoru. "Though listening to these two, I'm not sure how much I can say for them."

Before either twin could dole out more of the anger and insults I know they so desperately wanted to, Kyoya finally decided to join in. What took him so long?

"Do the three of you think maybe you could stop overreacting?" he asked, not even bothering to look their way. "Perhaps then you can discuss this like civilized people."

"Oh, get off your high horse," Hikaru snapped. He and Kaoru closed in on an unaffected Kyoya. "Yeah, I haven't heard you saying anything about this. What's that supposed to mean?"

Kyoya looked at them then, and pressed fingers to their right temples like he expected to find something there.

"No," he muttered to himself. "I don't think you're going into emergency mode. Whatever's causing this groundless paranoia of yours must have an outside source"

Mei would just like to note how happy she is to finally know what Kyoya was talking about.

"I know what this is about," Hikaru announced. He pointed unforgiving fingers at Kyoya and Tamaki in turn. "You guys are afraid that if she had to make a choice between the six of us, she wouldn't choose you."

"You are out of line!" Tamaki shouted.

"Yes, definitely outward."

"Kyoya, stop it," Tamaki rounded on him now. "If you can't say anything helpful-"

"Alright, that's it!" Hikaru shouted. He looked to Kaoru. They stared silently at each other for a few seconds like they were speaking telepathically. For the record, I wouldn't be at all surprised if they could really do that. Then they shared a nod and walked out the door. Mei scrambled to the water fountain bent her head so she wouldn't be seen.

"What do you think you're doing now?" Tamaki asked exasperatedly.

"What does it look like we're doing?" Kaoru countered. "We're leaving."

"We don't have to take this," said Hikaru. "And you'd better not try anything, Mr. Princely model!"

"Oh yeah? Well, SAME TO YOU REDHEADED DEMONS!"

Tamaki grabbed his stuff and left as well, going in the opposite direction of the twins which, if I'm remembering the layout of the building correctly, meant he had to take the long route back to his school. Mei can't tell me what the remaining robots did from there, as she sprinted back to the gym before any more could come out and catch her.

Hearing this story now is kind of like the missing pieces of a puzzle all coming together. I finally understand. There are things they said to me that for a year now, I've been turning over in my head, trying to figure out where it came from. That the answer is a combination of Mei and sheer idiocy on their part doesn't surprise me at all. It's actually kind of funny.
Fast forward now to the next day, after school. Somehow, the aftereffects of the fight flew right over my head and I didn't notice anything wrong the night before. Tamaki was unusually quiet, but after what happened the first time I asked, I had a feeling I wasn't going to find out what was wrong even if I did try again. Other than that, Hikaru and Kaoru had taken to whispering together in the corner and Hunny and Mori enjoyed a few baking shows until bedtime; nothing out of the ordinary.

When it comes to practicing for the Sports Festival, there are a few procedures we followed. The girls and boys are separated for the first couple of practices, and then merged again when it gets closer to the festival day. After that, four classes from each participating grade are randomly selected to practice together. Again, this counts only for the early days of practice. Now, obviously, they all ended up in the same practice group. It was raining outside, so we were cramped inside the gymnasium for the day, and as huge as it was, accommodating 250 students all at once was leading to more than a few bumped shoulders.

Most of us wound up banished to the bleachers. I had signed up for the 200 meter dash and the relay race. It was all just running, which I am not good at, but it's better than soccer or softball. The boys in ninth and tenth grade were going first, which meant Tamaki, Kyoya, Hikaru and Kaoru were up. Hunny and Mori must have been somewhere really far from where I was sitting on the bleachers, because I couldn't see them at all. Mei, however, squeezed passed about twenty people to get to me. I think she might have step on a couple of heads.

"Hey!"

She sat down in the barely there empty space beside me. The girl I'd previously been sitting next to got rudely pushed away and shot Mei a dirty look before getting up and moving to the very end of the bleachers.

"Glad I found you," Mei said. She looked around at all the people and scoffed. "Ridiculous, putting so many people in here."

I shrugged. "They can't help the bad weather."

"They should just let us go home."

Mei crossed her arms and sulked in silence for the next few minutes. I kept busy watching out for Tamaki and Kyoya, standing in line with the rest of their class while the teacher took attendance, and Hikaru and Kaoru, who were off on their own stretching. I heard their names whispered among my classmates, accompanied by girlish giggles and debates of their current relationship statuses. Boy, would they be in for a surprise if they tried anything.

"So, I met your cousins."

Mei pretty much sprung that one on me. Not that I never expected her to find out about them- I would have told her myself at some point- I just didn't think it would be so soon, and on her own. I just hoped they hadn't told her anything too indicative.

"Oh yeah?" I said.

"They're kind of weird," Mei said with a half-smile. "I mean, I know they're your family and all and I'm not trying to insult you… by the way, are they adopted? Because for brothers, they don't look even a little bit alike."

I gave a weak chuckle. "Yeah, it's a long story. You should ask one of them to tell you about it."

I never did find out what kind of story Tamaki would have spun for Mei about how they all came
together as a family. Mei is just as disappointed as I am that it never happened.

The mini-interrogation did not end there.

"So, how are you fitting all of them in that little apartment?"

"Well, I-"

"I mean, I know your Dad is still off on business or whatever, but that's still seven of you, right? Or did you move during the summer and forget to tell me about it? That's not very nice to hide these things from your friends, Haruhi"

"If you'd let me get a word in, I would tell you," I said softly.

Mei disregarded that, and anything else I might have said, and then winked at me.

"Well, I know one thing for sure," she said. "Those boys really love you."

I didn't know what to make of that, not one little bit. Mei brushed me off before I could ask by letting out shrill cheers in my ear when the races started. If there was ever a better way to ruin someone's train of thought…

The first two races went smoothly, with students from different grades being pitted against each other five or six at a time. They were timed and so far, nobody had made it under a minute, which is what the teachers wanted. The third race had all four robots on the field. That record was in trouble now. Of course, we'd had that talk I mentioned earlier the night before. They were blending in with humans and no human alive could run 150 mph like all the manuals said they could. They had all been very amiable, giving no thinly veiled 'reassurances' that were actually full of loopholes and double meanings. They promised, outright, straightforward, not to do anything more than what was reasonable. So I wasn't worried. Much.

Any lingering fears were quickly abated when the whistle was blown. The four of them actively went slow, their three fellow racers out pacing them by a good five steps. It didn't make the teachers too happy. The way it looked, nobody on the track was all that light on their feet. Hikaru picked it up a little in the second lap, which was fine. He only passed two people to end up in third. When Tamaki also sped up and made second, I was similarly unperturbed. That's when Kaoru came up on Tamaki's right side, with Hikaru already covering the left.

That wasn't right.

"What are they doing?"

Mei thought the question was directed at her and gave me a funny look.

"Uh… they're racing. What does it look like they're doing?"

"Way more than just racing," I said. I could feel myself growing paler.

I can see why Mei was skeptical. Outwardly, neither twin was doing anything insidious, just running a little too close together. What's so bad about that?

I can tell you one thing: Tamaki was no less suspicious than I was. He tired a couple of times to shake them off as they started the third lap. Every single time, the twins easily caught up with him, and closed in a little more. It got to the point where other people noticed too. I heard a wave of whispers roll over the crowd and one of the teachers yelling. I got to my feet just as Hikaru let his leg
splay out a little too far, sending Tamaki flat on his face as he failed to avoid it. Several people gasped. I may have too. I fought my way to the steps.

"What the heck was that?" one girl asked another.

'That was a certain someone about to get an earful,' I mentally answered her.

I was going to have to wait on that verbal thrashing, though. I wasn't two steps off the bleachers when a teacher accosted me.

"No girls on the field until the boys are done," she said, pushing me back.

"Wait a minute! Those are my cousins," I said, but she wouldn't hear any of it. The most she would do was let me take a seat in the bottom row. I just had to promise to stay in one place until it was my group's turn. I was ready to jump back up at a moment's notice.

The other teachers ran onto the scene, where Tamaki was still down and the twins were looking way to proud of themselves. Hikaru in particular had this satisfied little grin on his face that unnerved me. I almost felt like cheering when Tamaki's hand shot out and pulled him to the floor. You know, underneath all the dawning horror and nerves rushing back.

The teachers pulled both of them off the ground and spent a great deal of time yelling in their faces. No one tried to defend themselves. That 'respect all authority' thing must have worked for teachers too. They just nodded and agreed with everything that was said, and they apologized like gentlemen when ordered to.

Everyone was given a five minute break after that, during which time we were all allowed off the bleachers to get water and stretch our legs. I, of course, went straight for the guys. Tamaki was locked in an epic staring contest with both twins, while Kyoya looked on from several feet away. I still hadn't seen Hunny and Mori.

"What the hell was that?" I seethed.

Tamaki flinched. He never liked it when I cursed.

"What was what?" Hikaru asked, playing dumb.

"Hikaru," I said with an edge of warning. My patience was wearing thin enough as it was. I didn't need him making it worse.

He seemed to sense that, as the next words out of his mouth were much softer.

"It was just an accident, that's all. I mis-stepped."

"An accident," I repeated, hands on my hips. I looked deep into his eyes and he looked away. "Why don't I believe that?"

"It was," he insisted weakly.

I didn't know what else to say to him, so I went to check on Tamaki. He looked no worse for the wear, other than the way he glowered at Hikaru. I don't think I'd ever seen him that mad before.

"You alright?" I asked.

He nodded, but didn't avert his eyes. "I'm fine… or at least I will be."
Okay that I really didn't like.

"What are you talking about?" I was dreading the answer, but it needed asking.

Tamaki stalked towards the twins, ignoring me completely. They circled each other. I can't really find a good comparison to make, because the faces they made were kind of goofy looking and not really all that threatening, hard as they may have tried. I turned to Kyoya, who had just wandered over after much too long of an absence.

"Are they losing their minds?" I asked him out the side of my mouth.

I expected another one of his snarky, vaguely-helpful-but-not-really responses. After all this time, I couldn't ever be angry at him anymore. It was just another facet of the enigma that was Kyoya. So when I stood there beside him that day, waiting patiently for that condescending smirk to appear, you can imagine my surprise when what I got was something completely different.

"They are... stressed out today," he said. His eyes were closed. In fact, all of him was closed off to me. Nothing showed on his face, but then, nothing ever did. It still wasn't right. I know I'm not explaining this well, but trust me. It's not an easy thing to understand.

'Stressed out,' I mouthed. I couldn't think of a thing to say.

Kyoya's arms dropped to his side. "I suppose we all are."

He went to the other end of the square, just a few feet away. I could have called him back no matter where he went, but I couldn't bring myself to. I had far more pressing matters to deal with, like keeping Tamaki and Hikaru from eating each other and Kaoru from helping.

"Okay, that's enough."

I tried to manually force them apart, but all that did was educate me in how painful it is to jab your thumb into a robot's metal shoulder by accident. While I hissed in pain, only Kaoru showed any concern for me. While he checked my hand for bruises, Idiots' number one and two were too busy trying to kill each other with their gazes.

"This isn't over," Tamaki grumbled.

"Not even close," Hikaru responded.

They turned on a heel and walked off. Again, Tamaki was going in the wrong direction. Being closer to me, he's the one I ran to first.

"Tamaki, hang on," I stopped him with a hand, and he looked down at me, apologetic, but only a little.

"Haruhi," he said, hanging his head. "I'm sorry you had to see that."

I waved it off. "Just tell me what's going on with you guys. Why are you acting like this?"

He looked away quickly, biting on his lower lip and just in general looking beyond conflicted. My dad's always told me that I have a face no one could say 'no' to. I think he's just exaggerating, but I was sure as hell playing it up as much as possible right then. In my mind, I was endlessly egging him on. 'Tell me, tell me, tell me...'

"It's... nothing," he finally said, and as I ground my teeth together, his face darkened. "But I'll still
win this day."

Are you facepalming right now? Because I was.

"Win what?"

"I can't tell you," he answered briefly. "All I can say is that I will prove myself better than them."

"Them?" I gasped out. I couldn't help it, this whole thing was so insane, I had to laugh. Just when I thought they would never drive me crazy again.

"Them," he repeated. "All of them."

He moved passed me, going in the right direction this time. I didn't pause for a second in running after him.

"Oh no," I said, grabbing his arm. "No way! I don't know what's going on here, but I forbid you to do whatever it is you're thinking about doing, do you hear me?"

Tamaki stopped walking; he'd kind of been dragging me along up until now. I thought this might be a good sign at first, but then he looked at me, more determined than ever before.

"No."

He gently pulled away, and there was nothing I could do about it. I just… couldn't believe it.

I stood rigid until a teacher came and directed me back to the bleachers, the next practice event was about to begin.

"Alright, everyone," the teacher in charge said through a megaphone. "For this game, we're going to have the eleventh grade boys joining the ninth and tenth graders. All of you get down here and join a team. We start dodgeball in ten minutes."

And I think I'll leave it at that.

…boy, she's getting crazy with these cliffhangers. You guys know what I mean?

Mei, get off my blog.

posted by Haruhi at 8:08 pm 0 comments
MY FINAL CONFESSION

Okay, dishes are washed, Dad is in bed, and Mei is ready to go. Although, I have no idea why since she's already told me everything she needed to. Apparently, she's just that excited to watch me write about something she was a witness to, played a significant part in, and has been talking about non-stop since breakfast. It's not like she's forgotten anything.

Whatever. Here's a quick recap:

The new school year started and I decided the robots should come to school with me for now. The first day went alright, but then Tamaki and Kyoya met up with Mei, who inadvertently got it in their heads that I was inevitably going to fall in love with one of them and abandon the rest. The many flaws with that logic, I'll leave for you to discuss amongst yourselves. This was met with intense insecurity from Tamaki (not so sure about Kyoya), which he managed to transfer to Hikaru and Kaoru during a highly ill-conceived meeting. This led to a small disaster at the Sports Festival practice when Hikaru basically attacked Tamaki during the relay race and now… it's time for dodge ball.

It should go without saying that I didn't like this dodge ball idea at all. It should also go without saying that my roundabout attempts to get the guys excused from practice for the rest of the week was met with nothing more than a command from my gym teacher to learn some manners and go sit back on the bleachers with the rest of the girls until it was our turn. From the front row, I could see everyone lining up, and Tamaki, Hikaru and Kaoru had their war faces on and balls at the ready.

We were doomed.

Okay, in all honesty, it didn't start out so bad. Tamaki, Hunny and Mori were part of the team on the left, closest to where I was sitting. Hikaru, Kaoru and Kyoya were on the team to the right. They differentiated by putting green headbands on the left team and red on the right. It looked sort of like a Christmas display, only a hundred times more deadly. The first round went by without incident, other than Hunny and Mori knocking out half of the opposing team by themselves and Tamaki just standing there glaring at the twins while mindlessly dodging everything that got thrown his way.

The second round is when the trouble began, and it began right away. Hikaru and Kaoru, up until now ignoring Tamaki in favor of the rest of their opponents, threw their balls with perfect timing straight at Tamaki's head. Having much better throwing arms than humans (even when they were holding back), he didn't move fast enough and got smacked twice in the chest. Somehow, they just missed his neck and I could at least be relieved of that. I could never stop myself from picturing one of them taking a ball to head hard enough to knock it clean off.

Once Tamaki regained his bearings, you could tell he was out for blood. The look on his face was not something I thought he was capable of and it was a good thing for the twins that 'death ray' wasn't one of his special abilities. He got sent to the Out box until the next and (thankfully) final round. Against my better judgment, I was starting to relax a little. If all of them, especially Tamaki, could just keep it together and get through this last round, that would be it for the day and I could get them all home and figure this out there. We'd be in a controlled environment where they all knew better than to start something physical. There was not going to be another hole in the roof on my watch.
The second round ended, once again, with Hunny and Mori victorious and only Hikaru, Kaoru and Kyoya still standing on the red team. To their credit, they'd taken out a good number of their opponents, with more than half of the green team cluttered together in the Out box. The only thing worse for them would have been if they were the red team. It was also a really good thing for everyone that Hunny didn't see this as anything more than a fun game.

Like a little boy, he jumped up and down, his hand clamped on Mori's gym clothes, and he was beaming so wide, I thought his mouth might split open.

"I knocked down five at once, Takashi! Did you see? Did you?"

"Yeah."

So if nothing else, I could take comfort in the fact that he wasn't going to kill anyone.

The gym teacher blew the whistle and called the boys back for round three. They were noticeably less enthusiastic about it this time around. The red team in particular stared fearfully at Hunny and Mori as they passed, and even their own teammates kept their distance as the whistle went off again and the next round started.

From the very beginning, it was chaos.

Against all my expectations, it wasn't Tamaki who started it. Not that he wouldn't have eventually; he was just biding his time and waiting for the right moment, possibly taking a page out of Kyoya's book. I don't think Kyoya would have been as obvious as to point directly at the twins while throwing his first ball right over their heads, though. It was more Hunny stirring the pot by aiming his ball right at Hikaru and getting him in the chest. Tamaki howled with laughter while Hikaru went completely still. He clutched his sides and pitched forward, and in general was just a sitting duck and perfectly poised to get a ball right to the head, courtesy of Kaoru.

He responded in turn with a ball to Kaoru's head, while the gym teacher walked over and started telling at them all to stop messing around and get in the Out boxes.

"Hey! What the hell do you three think you're doing all day?" he shouted, getting right in between them and screaming so loud that probably everyone in the whole enormous gymnasium could hear. I know I could. Despite this, his words fell on deaf ears and at this point, I could hardly watch.

"Are you listening to me?" he shouted again. He focused on Tamaki now, though I don't know why. "If one of you doesn't explain yourselves this instant, I'm having all of you put in detention and cleanup duty for a week! Do you hear me?"

Tamaki heard him alright. All of a sudden he seemed to realize that there was something blocking him from the twins, and he stood up straight as a line with a fresh ball in hand. His face morphed from its characteristically overwrought emotional state into something calm and even and, for lack of a better word, robotic.

"Sir, as per my standard protection and safety function data, I must ask you to please step aside and not get involved, so as to not put yourself at serious risk."

The teacher's mouth dropped about as far as mine used to when I first met them. Mei here thinks it was pretty funny after all this time. I'm not so sure.

"At risk? Are you threatening me, you little punk?"

He grabbed Tamaki's arm, as if to drag him to detention himself. Tamaki brushed him off all too
"I do not make threats," he answered in that same, chillingly cold way. "I only give warnings."

He reared back his arm and threw the ball passed the man and at the twins. They each stepped to one side so that the ball sailed in between them. I can still remember the ugly booming sound when the ball embedded itself halfway into the wall. I don't know what that wall was made of, just that it was not something rubber- or anything else- should have been able to penetrate. That's robots for you, I guess.

The gym teacher, having no way of knowing this, turned as white as if he were a walking corpse. Without another word, he turned and ran straight through the double doors and down the hall, never to be seen again.

No, I'm serious. He literally quit his job that day and never set foot on school grounds again. There's a rumor he left the country entirely, all the while screaming something about secret government experiments infiltrating the school systems and dooming us all. I don't think that's true.

Anyway, once that was done, there was no turning back. The twins returned fire without delay, smacking Tamaki once in the shoulder before he dodged the second one. Two more balls were sent the twin's way, followed by two more Tamaki's. It might have stayed just the three of them more or less playing an intense game of catch, if not for one poorly aimed ball of Hikaru's that completely missed Tamaki and hit someone else entirely. Want to take a guess who?

Well, Hunny reacted to getting a hit in the face about the way any sane individual would. By which I mean he threw twelve balls in quick succession at Hikaru and Kaoru with more force than Tamaki could dream of. What balls didn't hit their targets (about half) joined the first one in the wall. By now, the rest of the teachers had finally realized the danger and were working to evacuate the students. I stayed off to the side with Mei so they wouldn't try to make me leave. What I was thinking about doing and why Mei was staying with me in the first place, I'm afraid I can't say.

I just checked with Mei. She doesn't know why she stayed either.

Hiding under the bleachers, I could see everything. Mori joined up with Hunny and formed a tag team against the twins. Tamaki, though technically on their team, was mostly lone wolfing it, throwing and receiving more balls than probably anyone else. Even Kyoya was getting in on the action, although he restricted himself to only throwing back when something came his way, and he never initiated.

And of course, no hardcore game of dodgeball would be complete without a big, heaping helping of collateral damage!

Countless more balls were stuck in the gym walls on all four ends. When they re-opened the gym after several months of repairs, many of the indentures were still there. All the windows were broken one by one, raining glass down on a blacktop that I prayed was empty (it was). When it wasn't a window, it was another rung of the bleachers getting uprooted. Anything the other kids had left behind, from backpacks to notebooks to metal pencil boxes, got catapulted into the air and either slammed into the walls or broke more windows. At some point, a high flying ball smashed into the fire sprinklers and set them all off. Water rained down, soaking the floors and the microphone and speaker system used to make announcements. It shorted out and caught fire, which the sprinklers mostly doused. We were far away, but Mei still dragged me out the door in a rush.

"Come on, let's get out of here," she urged me. "Whatever your cousins' problem is, they can work it out on their own, and Haruhi? Please don't be mad when I say that your family is completely crazy."
"But that's just it, Mei!" I screamed.

She blinked. "That your family is crazy?"

"No!" I put my hands to my head in case I needed to rip my hair out for stress relief. I didn't think hitting my head against something was a good idea. First, I had to find a way to make them stop. Inside, I could hear more glass breaking and then Hikaru shouting something at Tamaki.

"She'll never pick you after you've done all this!"

"Are you blind?" Tamaki retorted. "You're doing it too! And you started it!"

"Did not!"

Another row of bleachers flew by and no more words were exchanged. They spoke through dodgeball instead.

"I can't believe this," I said to no one in particular. I don't think I even noticed Mei anymore. "Why are they doing this? After all this time with nothing going wrong… why do they think I would ever choose between them? What got that idea into their heads?"

It was a legitimate question at the time, one I'm very happy to finally have an answer too. I can only imagine the look on Mei's face back then, and judging from the look on her face right now, she's not going to tell me.

"Well uh," Mei said, coughing a couple of times. "Iiit's just guys, you know? They're stupid, and they do stupid things and I- er we as girls have absolutely nothing to do with it at all. You want to go get some ice cream?"

I jerked away before she could touch me. Flattening myself against the door, I watched Hunny and Mori go on the offensive, their arms spinning so fast and releasing so many balls, it was like they were living machine guns. How did the school even have this many balls?

"There has got to be a way I can stop them," I said.

"Why bother?" Mei asked, becoming desperate. "Haruhi, come on, look at that! If you try and go in there, you'll get killed. Just let them fight it out."

"What, and take the whole gymnasium with them?" I shot back.

Mei put a finger to her chin thoughtfully. "Honestly? I always thought that place needed some serious remodeling."

I glared at her as hard as I could until she threw her hands up in surrender and backed far away from me.

"Okay, I get it," she said. "You're worried about your cousins. I understand, I would be too. Maybe when they've calmed down a little, you can sit them down and have a nice heart to heart, tell them how you really feel or whatever. Until then, we should just run before the cops get here and…"

I don't remember anything else Mei said from there, I was no longer listening. Inside, I could see the six of them had slowly drawn themselves closer to the line as they threw whatever they could reach at each other. Their gym clothes were ripped in places and their skin was scuffed up like damaged metal, but otherwise they looked just fine.
"You're going down and then Haruhi will only want us!" Hikaru and Kaoru said together, an eerie reminder of what they used to be like.

"Don't be so stupid," Tamaki shouted as he took another ball to the chest and then threw one back. "Haruhi is going to pick one of us. One! If it's down to just the two of you, one of you is still going to be the loser!"

The twins hesitated, balls in hand but unreleased. Very slowly, they turned to face each other.

Their eyes narrowed.

That's when I knew I couldn't wait another second.

With Mei yelling after me, I ran back into the gym with my hands over my head. Balls whizzed by in every direction, never hitting me, but coming very close. The six of them were at the ready with new ammo, and with synchronized movements they all prepared to throw. I skidded to a halt right in the center and screamed in a way I hadn't since the stunt show.

"STOOOOP!"

A part of me didn't think they would listen. Tamaki hadn't. I thought maybe this was some other hidden setting of their being activated, a 'fight to the death' kind of thing. It may sound stupid to you, but it felt like a very real possibility at the time. When nothing happened I deemed it safe to look up, and all the way around they were still, heaving unneeded breaths and watching me in wait.

As my own adrenaline started to drop, I felt the weight of my exhaustion start to crash down on me. Never before have I hated the sports festival this much. There was no way I wasn't playing sick next year, perfect attendance record be damned.

"Okay," I said once I was sure they wouldn't start up again. "Okay you guys, listen up, and listen good."

I targeted that specifically at Tamaki and the twins, all of whom had the good sense to be cowed.

"I know that you've gotten this idea that I'm going to one day choose between you," I went on. "I don't know where it came from, and you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I just want to set the record straight right now."

I paused again, only this time it was because I didn't know what to say. My mind went totally blank with nothing coming to me except what Mei had just told me.

'Have a heart to heart,' she'd said. 'Tell them how you really feel.'

Yeah, easier said than done.

I would've taken any other option, any at all. Because I knew what I felt, had known for a long time, ever since the jailbreak episode. They'd known since then too, they'd told me as much that day at the mailbox. They'd gotten over their insecurity, so why couldn't I?

I took a deep breath.

"The truth is, I'm not going to make a choice," I said. Tamaki opened his mouth to speak, but I was not stopping now. "I'm not going to choose today, tomorrow or any day of the week. It would be impossible for me to do that, because..."
This was it. The words were on the tip of my tongue and if I could just get them out, I'd be over the
highest hurdle and everything would be easy from here. Or maybe it would be a thousand times
harder.

"Because I love you, all of you. You're the best friends I've ever had and I could never choose
between you."

My heart was pounding in my chest, my body tense. Slowly, I was coming back down, but it would
be a while yet before I no longer felt like trembling. In the meantime, all six of them reacted to my
confession in their own unique ways. Hikaru and Kaoru were awestruck, Kyoya serene, Hunny on
the verge of tears, Mori unperturbed, but smiling warmly. Tamaki was the one who dared approach
me, his quivering fingers reaching out.

"D-do you really mean that, Haruhi?"

He looked like a little lost puppy, and I had to admit, it was kind of endearing. You know, now.

"Yes, Tamaki, I do."

That opened the floodgates right up. Soon, he was crying harder than Hunny ever could and clinging
to me. He spun us around hard and fast, but for the moment, I let him let it out.

"OH HARUHI, I'M SO SORRY FOR DOUBTING YOU! I SHOULD'VE KNOWN YOU'D
NEVER LET OUR BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP BE TAINTED BY THE COLD HANDS OF
FATE!"

He dropped me there and ran to Hikaru and Kaoru, hugging them as one.

"I'M SORRY FOR TRYING TO TURN YOU AGAINST EACH OTHER! IT WAS SO
WRONG OF ME AND I'LL NEVER DO IT AGAIN!"

The twins looked at each other while Tamaki dry sobbed into their joined shoulders. To my surprise,
they hugged him back.

"We're sorry too," Hikaru said.

"We shouldn't have egged it on," said Kaoru.

"We should have just talked it out like mature adults."

"Instead of making such a big mess of things."

"WE'RE SORRY HARUHI!" They shouted over at me.

Hunny launched himself at my head before I could respond, and sat on my shoulders while he
wrapped his little arms over my eyes.

"I'm sorry too, Haruhi! So, so very sorry!" he shouted while I tried to keep my balance with him on
top of me.

"Why? You didn't start anything!"

He didn't answer, and pretty soon we all dissented into a big, messy group hug, with even Kyoya
and Mori dragged into the mix. We stayed that way for a while, hugging it out while bits of broken
plywood and plaster fell to the floor and the still going sprinklers drenched us.
We eventually did stop and go home amid sirens and fire trucks and possibly a helicopter. Kyoya found us a secure path off of school grounds and we got home without any trouble. At least no more than seven people in torn up and sopping wet clothes walking down the street on a sunny day would get.

The school was closed for the next two days while everyone tried to figure out what exactly happened. The school board refused to believe that six students could cause so much damage, let alone with just rubber balls. Since the other students were ushered from the room before all the really bad stuff could happen, they didn't know much either, and most of the rumors that wound up circulating either barely mentioned us or didn't include as at all. I never found out was the official cause of the damage was. So long as no one got hurt and I didn't get any bill collectors or lawyers at the door, they could've said a giant glowing cloud came and did it. Would've been fine by me.

That night at dinner, I made miso and chicken rice soup just so they could share it with me. They may not have had taste buds, but I quickly found that I enjoyed having the six of them at table with me, as tight a squeeze as it was.

And you know what? I'm happy that this happened, all things considered. I finally found myself on common ground with the six of them; there were nothing more I had to hide.

And it was definitely worth getting a permanent ban from this and all future sports festivals.

Aagkh

You guys are not going to believe what happened next, I mean it is just C-R-A-Z-Y crazy! I mean with all the drama and the action and when the pitsm

Please ignore the last few lines. Mei will be leaving now.

Why do you say that like it's a good thing, Haruhi? You're going to make me cry!

…and of course, I thank her for all her help these last few days. This part of the story wouldn't be complete without her.

Oh Haruhi! You don't have to think me.

-sigh-

posted by Haruhi at 7:23 pm 0 comments
As I look through my notes for the next couple of entries, I can't believe I got this far. I mean, I always knew that even if took me years, I would get this done. I'm that kind of person: when I start something, I absolutely have to finish it or else it'll eat away at me until I do. Especially when it's as important as this, I can't be wasting any time.

We're heading towards the end of my crazy story. We're not there yet, but it is coming. Some of the most crucial details will be in the next entry, but first, the third and final interlude.

The days in between the dodge ball incident and what happened next were pretty uneventful, by which I mean I don't remember most of it. I've had a pretty easy time recalling all the important stuff so far because we're talking about some of the most unforgettable people in the known universe, and that doesn't factor in the robot part. The school days went by pretty slowly because we had to deal with just about every girl in the school confessing their feelings to one of them. If they weren't doing that, they were leaving candies and cards in their lockers or, in one case, just outright trying to steal a kiss (that was Mori, so you can imagine how well it turned out for her). It's not that I was concerned about any of the robots getting discovered or harmed. I was much more worried about how gently they would turn down the girls, particularly Hikaru and Kaoru. They'd had a pretty high distaste for all of them since I was made fun of that one time. The fact that it only happened once and I made it clear that I didn't care. They cared. They cared way too much.

In the end, my fears were unfounded. All six of them were adept at easy rejection and no one got their feelings hurt (not too bad). Tamaki was more of the talking kind, telling the girls how special and beautiful they were and how one day, they'd find someone who could truly love them the way he couldn't. Others had a more indirect approach. Kyoya's answer to his many gifts amounted to a thank you and a mention of how much he and his cousins would enjoy sharing the homemade chocolates and sugar treats. That usually got the message across.

At home, it was pretty much the same. We fought over the remote, I fielded calls from my dad and now my grandparents, Tamaki one day tried to win us all tickets to a fancy restaurant only to freak out when he discovered it was a dinner for two (not as interesting a story as it sounds). Everything went so smoothly, I had almost forgotten that my dad would be home in another couple of weeks and I still hadn't heard back from that Ouran Company. I hadn't even called them back in weeks to see if anyone would pick up this time. To put it in perspective, I used to do that every couple of days.

Yes, for the first time, my life was as calm and, for lack of a better term, mundane as it had always been before the robots came along.

The one interesting thing that happened came three Saturdays later. It was a slow day for the weekend. Rain had fallen the night before, and though it had since stopped, the skies were still gray and the air muggy. It was not really a day for going out and more for staying in and getting some extra cleaning done, which is exactly what I was doing.

It wasn't the first time I did a full overhaul of the apartment, so I just followed the usual path: the kitchen first, then the living room, then my room. Dad's room came last, because it was the easiest to clean. Tamaki and the twins were surprising neat whenever they slept in there, so all I had to do was remake the bed and vacuum.
What made today different was that as I was walking out with the bundle of dirty sheets for the laundry, I caught sight of the closet door, and it wasn’t closed all the way. From the right angle, I could see the shape of my dad’s possessions inside. I slowed almost to a stop so I could push the door closed. I felt the weight of the balled up sheets in my arms and figured I’d better go and put these in the wash before I tried it. With the washing machine going in the background and the guys all set up in their day to day activities, I returned to Dad’s room. I figured I’d get the door closed, then go sit by Kyoya and try once again to figure out what he was doing on my laptop every day. I’d tried it before, but somehow every single time, he was on some site written entirely in binary. I knew he was doing it on purpose, which was why I’d been secretly going to the library every day during free period and studying the best binary textbook I could find. I can be sneaky too, you know.

I came to stand before the closet door. I took a second to note how the bamboo cloth bulged outward at an odd angle. At the time, I didn’t think much of it, Dad was always something of a packrat. I really should’ve been more cautious and paid attention to it, so maybe when I touched the handle it wouldn’t have triggered some kind of chain reaction that sent the door flying open and my dad’s accumulated clothes, toys and knick knacks spilling out and piled up on top of me.

I think I may have blacked out for a second, even though none of the stuff was very heavy barring a couple of old jewelry boxes that had nothing in them. The next thing I knew, I was being pulled out of the mess by my shoulders and held aloft, and I could hear Hikaru and Kaoru talking.

"Do you think she's unconscious?"

"I don't know. Her eyes are closed."

"Maybe we should try CPR."

I opened my eyes immediately and wrested my way out of Mori’s grip.

"I'm fine," I said firmly. Tamaki came up to me from behind, teary-eyed but not crying yet, which meant I still had a chance to salvage the situation. "Really, I'm fine. I just… need to clean up this mess."

I nudged an old pair of stockings off my shoe and more towards the massive pile of junk that now crowded the floor. I heard Kyoya hum in his throat as he examined both the mess and the now empty closet.

"Technically speaking, objects of this weight and volume should fit easily into a closet of this size without trouble."

I snorted. "Yeah, but you don't know my dad. He's not the most organized person in the world. He's one of those 'shove it in the closet and deal with it later' types."

"Except he never deals with it," Hikaru and Kaoru said.

"Exactly."

Like clockwork, Tamaki dried his tears and switched to his 'forceful leader' persona, standing atop a full cardboard box that sagged under his weight.

"Well men, it's clear what we have to do now," he proclaimed. "Haruhi has a messy closet to clean and we're going to have it done in time for dinner."

He snapped his fingers, and instantly the other five were in a line, spines straight like military men.
"Yes sir!" Hikaru, Kaoru and Hunny chanted, saluting.

"Yeah," said Mori.

Kyoya hummed again. "I suppose if we all work together, this can get done in less than an hour. What do you think Haruhi?"

He looked expectantly at me, and I started to sweat. "Well, I think it would be best if I did this myself…"

I couldn't finish the sentence, which was basically over and done with anyway barring a few words of reassurance that it was nothing personal, I just prefer to clean up messes like this on my own.

But then I realized, who am I kidding? They are never going to take no for an answer, not for something like this. Plus, it was kind of a big mess for just one person, and I was getting tired.

I sighed. "Okay, let's get this mess cleaned up."

The twins cheered and Hunny dove right in (literally, like it was a pool). For the next half an hour, we sorted things out into three groups: clothes, garbage, and miscellaneous. Most of what we found fit in the second category. With Kyoya directing us, we filled three garbage bags within thirty minutes. It might've been faster, were it not for everyone's boundless curiosity about the most random things.

"Hey Haruhi, what's this?" Kaoru shouted at one point. Over his head, he held an unused purple wig Dad had been given as a joke on his thirtieth birthday. He always said purple wasn't his color and that's why he never wore it. I think he just didn't want to admit to his friend that he lost it.

"Just put it with the miscellaneous stuff," I told him.

"Hey, Haruhi!" Hunny shouted. I looked up to see him smiles cutely at me with a pair of white fleecy bunny ears on his head. "Look what I found! Can I keep it?"

"Uh…" I didn't really know what to say. Why did my Dad even have those?

"Okay, how about this?" Hikaru shouted, throwing a beat up old notebook into my lap. I opened it to the first page, not sure at all what it was until I say a loopy set of handwriting that made my throat catch. I flipped to the next few pages. They were all covered in chaotic markings right up to the final page and going on to the back cover. The way it cut off indicated that there had been another page underneath that was written on, but of course I could never confirm that. I let it fall shut and stared at it, innocuous with its pastel red cover that had somehow remained unmarked in all the frenzy.

"This- this is," I start to say, but my throat is closing up. "This belonged to my-"

"Hey HARUHIIIII!"

I nearly jumped out of my socks. Before me stood Hikaru, Karou and Hunny, all wearing the most ridiculous of my father's wigs (Hunny still had the bunny ears on) with clown like make-up smeared all over their faces. They had found poofy ballroom gowns somewhere in this mess and had them wrapped around their bodies with the skirts swishing.

"Look at how pretty we are!" Hunny cried. "We could be like your big sisters in these!"
Well, if there was ever a more perfect mood killer, I don't want to know it. I went from choked up to laughing hysterically. I didn't want to, but they kept coming in closer and blocking my exit when I tried to escape, and all the while they were shouting in unison.

"COME ON HARUHI, CALL ME BIG SISTER! COME ON! BIG SISTER!"

"HAHAHAHAHA- GUYS STOP! HAHAHAHA!"

I'm sorry, they were just so funny. You really had to be there.

Anyway, Tamaki didn't take as kindly to their games as I did.

"You fiends!" he shouted, snatching me up off the ground and holding me to him. "Stop before you give her a heart attack."

I struggled to compose myself, but it wasn't easy with them still in my line of sight and Tamaki throwing his perchance for dramatic reactions into the mix. At least I could try and calm him down a little.

"It's alright, Tamaki," I said. "They're just messing around."

"Hmph," Tamaki was clearly not going to be moved, but he let me go anyway once they got tired of the game and put the dresses away. I really don't think he's one to talk anyway, because as soon as they were in the bathroom washing the makeup off, he found a treasure of his own.

"Haruhi, where should I put this?" he asked.

I looked at the item in his hands. He didn't shove it in my face or throw it to me, which was good because a VHS tape was bound to be heavier than a spiral notebook. I took in the image on the cover and the title written in crisp English, and my heart started to soar.

"Oh my god," I grabbed it from him without thinking. Tamaki blinked in surprised, but didn't look hurt. "I thought we lost this forever."

"What is it?"

I reluctantly tore my eye away from the video and the memories it evoked. All late nights with my mom in the living room, finished with her work for the day and bursting with emotions, laughing at the funny parts, crying at the sad, until it was over and she'd come and tuck me in to bed and kiss me goodnight.

"It's a movie," I explained to Tamaki. "It's called 'Working Girl.' It was my mother's favorite."

Tamaki's mouth formed an 'O' and he nodded. He didn't ask any more questions, but he didn't need to. I was on a roll.

"She used to watch it every night. She saw it in the theaters when she was in law school and she studied abroad in New York City. I remember I always used to want to stay up late and watch it with her, but she'd never let me. I had an early bedtime and it was an R rated movie anyway. She would sing me to sleep every night with the movie's theme song, even though she wasn't very good."

In my reminiscing, I made the mistake of looking back at Tamaki. He really was crying this time, and Hikaru and Kaoru were back.

"That's the sweetest thing I've ever heard," Hunny said, eyes wobbling.
"It's good to have those memories," said Mori.

"It is admittedly a very moving story, Haruhi," said Kyoya.

"And now you have to sing it for us," said Hikaru.

I'd been nodding along with them all this time, but Hikaru's comment was like a brick wall materializing in the middle of a busy street.

"Wait, what?"

"Oh come on, Haruhi," said Kaoru. "After a story like that, you can't expect us not to ask."

The others spoke aloud or nodded in agreement. Only Tamaki before me did neither, but what he did do was arguably worse. Taking my hands in his, he gave me this perfect puppy dog look that I swear could pierce through ice. His pleading eyes did all the talking for him, I swear it wasn't fair. I really wanted to keep objecting. I am not a good singer by any stretch and I never liked trying in the first place, but with the combination of Tamaki's silent urging and the other's very vocal urging, I didn't have much of a choice.

Sighing inwardly, I sucked in a breath and braced myself. Better get this over with quick.

"I'm only going to do this once."

I tried to visualize the music in my mind to get a feel for the lyrics. It had been so long, I could only remember half of them.

"Silver cities rise... da da da rise... the streets da da da da... da da da... it's asking for the taking... come run with me now the sky is the color of blue, you've never even seen in the eyes of your lo-

I stopped. That was the one part of the song I remembered perfectly, but there was no way I was finishing a lyric about having a blue eyed lover while staring into Tamaki's blue eyes. That was not happening.

Luckily, I didn't need to explain myself. As soon as I stopped, the six of them burst into thunderous applause and cheered my name. I honestly can't say for sure if they were applauding my singing or the fact that I had stopped singing.

From there, we got the rest of the closet cleaned without incident. Now that I've gotten it all written down, it doesn't seem as interesting or amusing as I thought it was. Sorry if this is boring compared to previous entries. I think you'll find it easy to forgive me in another minute.

After we cleaned up and put Dad's closet in perfect order (I had to convince Hikaru and Kaoru not to keep the dresses), I went to turn on the ramen I'd left on the stove. I wanted a simple dinner tonight so I could eat fast and then catch the movie marathon Tamaki had been telling me about all week. I thought maybe we could dig out the old VCR afterwards and watch one more. Mori was helping me in the kitchen today. When I was unable to grab a ladle from the top cabinet, he took it down with zero effort, something I can't say I wasn't a little envious of.

"Thank you very much," I said as he handed it to me.

"You're welcome," Mori said. He had a very nice smile on his face that I wish he would have used more often. It had a warm, comforting quality to it.

We finished up fast and I was fed by the time the movie started, cozy on the couch with the six of
them all around me. And isn't it always right when you're at your most relaxed that the doorbell should ring.

The title page flash across the screen, but that bell sliced through the atmosphere like scissors through tissue paper. Groaning, I pulled myself out from between Hikaru and Kaoru (not an easy feat; they were extra possessive during movie night). As I disentangled myself, the bell rang again, and more insistently.

"I got it, coming!"

I opened the door to two older gentlemen, both handsome despite showing their age. On the right was a tall man with light brown hair that hung in his face and kindly brown eyes that nonetheless showed boundless vigor. His partner was the more severe of the two, a dark haired man with glasses and facial hair that wouldn't look out of place on a cartoonish anime villain. Both of them wore smart business suits and the brown haired one carried a clipboard under his arm. He pulled it out when I appeared.

"Haruhi Fujioka?"

"Yes?"

I didn't know why yet, but I was starting to get a bad feeling. A pair of strange men I'd never seen before showing up at my door and asking me to confirm my identity? Where have I heard that before?

"Fujioka-san, my name is Dr. Yuzuru Suoh," said the brown haired man. He bowed slightly- really it was more like an inclination of his head. "This is Dr. Yoshio Ootori. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Dr. Ootori nodded and held out his hand, but I didn't take it. I didn't really know what to do, but I didn't like where this was going at all.

"And what can I do for you, Doctors?"

"We are here representing the Ouran Company," said Dr. Ootori, his tongue as sharp as his appearance. "We have business to discuss with you regarding a lost order. May we come in?"

Before I could answer, I heard Tamaki's voice.

"Haruhi, who's at the door?"

He walked around me and stood at my side, gaping openly the doctors, but especially Dr. Suoh.

"Father?"

posted by Haruhi at 7:03 pm 0 comments
So normally, I wouldn't write author's notes for this story because I want to preserve the illusion, but since it's been so long since I updated this story, I felt I should give returning readers a quick recap of the story's events.

-Haruhi one day gets a mysterious group of packages delivered to her door. Inside are six androids designed to be perfect lovers and escorts.

-Haruhi can't get ahold of the company that created them so she has no choice but to let them stay with her.

-The group gets her into a bunch of wacky shenanigans involving a shady stunt show, an arrest at the carnival, a prison riot, and a deadly dodgeball game when the six of them decide to go to school with her.

-In the most recent chapter, Haruhi and the gang are doing some spring cleaning, when two doctors show up at Haruhi's door. They're from the company that created the robots.

And that's where we are now. I hope you enjoy!

08.21.11

THE TWO HARUHIS

I can't tell you how strange it was to just sit there in my kitchen with those two doctors. Like this was a luncheon or a business meeting. Something normal.

I didn't know what to make of them at first glance. Dr. Suoh seemed the more approachable of the two. He'd been taken aback by Tamaki's enthusiastic greeting but smiled all the same. Dr. Ootori, upon entering my apartment, did a quick sweep of the place and his eyes lingered for a time on Kyoya. Though no words were exchanged, I had to wonder if they were also 'father and son'.

There weren't enough seats at the table, so it was just me and the two doctors, with everyone else crowding around us. I noticed that none of the guys had said more than two words since the doctors arrived. Even Tamaki had fallen silent. He stood behind Dr. Suoh with his eyes on the floor like he was only there to refill wine glasses.

"My colleague and I apologize for dropping in unannounced, Fujioka-san," said Dr. Suoh.

Dr. Ootori wore a look that was somewhere between anger and boredom. I think he wanted his partner to only speak for himself.

"As soon as we heard your message, we knew there was no time to waste. We've already had several complaints from the intended recipient of the order you received."

"I called you guys months ago," I said.
The doctors shared a quick glance, and then Dr. Suoh coughed. "Yes well, our customer center has been a bit backed up since we released our first line of products. Please understand that we are prepared to take full responsibility for any inconvenience this may have caused you. If you require financial reimbursement, we have been authorized to grant up to eight million yen. That is the current buying price for each individual model in the bundle you mistakenly received."

He kept looking at his clipboard as he spoke. It made his words sound even more scripted than if he'd just memorized them. The guys remained silent. I checked every so often for the same glazed over eyes from the time they were arrested. So far, it appeared they just had nothing to say, but alarm bells were already ringing in my head.

"Okay, well…" I furrowed my brow. "Something I've been wondering this whole time… what exactly is your company?"

There were a lot of better ways I could've phrased that question. This Ouran company had not only successfully created artificial intelligence, but they'd done it in such a way that their A.I.s could develop real human emotions. That was extraordinary. It could change the world. And they were keeping it under lock and key with insanely tight security measures so no one ever found out.

"Our company is mainly focused on the manufacturing of super advanced robotics," said Dr. Ootori, who was finally ready to join the conversation. "You've no doubt have figured out that much. Specifically, our products serve as companions, sexual or otherwise. They are learning A.I.s programmed to provide the utmost care and attention to their owners. I assume you've already utilized these functions?"

I didn't like the look he was giving me. Like he fully expected I had used them in every possible way.

"They're my friends," I told him firmly. "That's all I've ever asked them to be."

He hummed as Dr. Suoh started writing again. "You understand that if you're lying, we will find out."

"Dr. Ootori, please," said Dr. Suoh. "Fujioka-san, please forgive my colleague's brashness. We only mean to say that if there are any damages to our property, it might require compensation. However, we are willing to waive all fees as it would ultimately be the result of our mistake."

Somehow, that didn't satisfy me. I had yet to relax after my knee jerk reaction to Dr. Suoh referring to my friends are 'property'. It got even worse when Dr. Ootori snapped his fingers, and all six of them turned around in total synchronicity, their heads bowed with the metal plates in their scalps partially visible.

The doctors got to work.

They started with the twins, flipping a switch to disable them so they fell in a heap of red hair and limbs at my feet. I had to back up when Hikaru's hand brushed my ankle. I might've imagined it, but his skin felt like ice. I'd never seen them so pale before either. My stomach churned as the plate in Hikaru's head slid up. I looked away quickly, but for a split second, I beheld the bolts and wires where a brain was meant to be.

I don't really remember everything about the next few minutes. I think maybe I've tried to block it out. I've never been a squeamish person. This was the year we got to watch the childbirth video in health class, and while my peers squirmed the whole way through, I just took my notes like always. At no point did my stomach protest.
And that was a human body with blood and organs in it. This was circuitry; like the guts of a computer hard drive. When I caught brief glimpses of their insides, that's what it looked like. Every single one of them. I still think about when they pulled the entire top of Tamaki's skull off every time my dad needs help with his computer. For the rest of the day, my appetite is just gone.

I know they finished eventually. The plates were screwed back on and the buttons for reactivation pressed. They all sat up, looking around and stretching like nothing had happened. Six pairs of eyes landed squarely on me.

"Are you all right, Haruhi?" Tamaki asked.

I smiled and nodded. I couldn't speak for the lump in my throat. They were still themselves.

"All tests so far are positive," said Dr. Suoh. Tests for what? I was scared to ask. "Dr. Ootori, what is your report?"

Dr. Ootori typed so fast on his handheld device that Kyoya would be slow by comparison, and that's not a statement I make lightly. "No viruses, no hardware issues, no internal damage. All positives across the board."

"Glad to hear it," said Dr. Suoh. "Fujioka-san, thank you kindly for taking such good care of our products."

If they called them 'products' one more time, I don't think I could've been held responsible for my actions. "They're fully capable of taking care of themselves, but I'm sure you know that. All I did was put a roof over their heads."

I think if they'd been listening to me, my tone would've been enough to start an argument. Dr. Ootori already hated me for no reason, and Dr. Suoh could only keep up the nicey-nice pretenses for so long. For now, they were too busy with whatever Dr. Ootori was typing to bother with me.

"It appears an incident of physical strain caused the split," said Dr. Suoh. He took the tablet from his colleague, and I could see on the screen schematics of a head shaped like Hikaru or Kaoru's. "Data shows a clean break in their shared mind programming and a seamless installation of their backup individual software. We'll have to do a full system reboot if we want to-"

"Excuse me." I snapped. "If you're going to talk about them like that, does it have to be while they're in the room?"

They shouldn't have been saying it at all. Hikaru and Kaoru had been separated for weeks at this point, and it was hard to imagine what they used to be like when they had become so different. I could see it even now. Hikaru had his fists clenched in his lap, Kaoru's hand covering one of them. They remained as passive as the rest, but that single gesture spoke volumes. It was no wonder identifying who was who had become second nature to me.

I looked at Tamaki and Kyoya. The former had caught his lip between his teeth. He looked like he wanted to say something but couldn't make his jaw move. His ability to disobey must've extended only to me and not as far as his creator.

Even Kyoya was cowed by them. Kyoya!

I didn't think this day could get any more surreal, but then Dr. Ootori's phone rang. He answered it, mumbled words I can't remember with his head turned away, then hung up and replaced it in his pocket, all within the span of maybe ten seconds.
"She's here," he told Dr. Suoh, who nodded.

"Who's here?" I asked. They continued whispering to each other in scientific jargon until that and the crippling silence coming from my friends was too much for me. I slammed my hands on the table. "Could one of you please answer my question?"

They fell silent and looked at me. I disliked the glare Dr. Ootori gave me immensely, but if he was annoyed at me for interrupting their important conversation, that was just too bad. He was lucky Dr. Suoh stepped in before I could unleash my rage at him.

"Forgive us, Fujioka-san. I know we're a bit cramped in here, but there's going to be one more guest joining us today."

As soon as he said that, there was a knock on my door. I use that term loosely because it was really more like a pound from a battering ram. The door almost folded in on itself with the third smack. My friend even looked up, and Hunny and Mori took fighting stances just in case. Dr. Suoh took it upon himself to go to the door and unlock it. As if he had the right to invite complete strangers into my home.

It's hard to describe the woman who came in because I feel like no matter what I say, I'm going to offend someone. I can tell you she was fat. Very fat. So much so that I don't know how she was able to fit through my door without sucking in her gut. She was probably in her fifties, though it was hard to tell through all the makeup. Have you ever gone to a clothing store where there are middle-aged employees wearing so much makeup that it looks like they've literally painted over their skin? That's what she looked like.

And there is nothing wrong with any of that, let me just say.

She wore a tan pantsuit with a matching handbag. Her hair was cut short in a Western style bob. Rings adorned all her fingers, including one with a massive ruby the size of a golf ball. The band was engraved with the English letters H and F. Dr. Ootori went to greet her, sweeping into a full bow. I guess he's only going to be respectful if you give him money.

"Good afternoon, Ma'am. I'm sorry we had to call you here on such short notice," he said.

The woman sniffed. "It's just as well, as long as I get what's rightfully mine."

Her voice ground at my ears. I took note of a half empty pack of cigarettes sticking out of her handbag. She caught me staring, her eyes meeting mine as her mouth fixed into a deep frown.

"You must be the other me," she said.

I blinked. "What? The other you?"

Doctor Suoh stepped up. "Haruhi Fujioka, may I please introduce… Haruhi Fujioka."

He said the first part to me and the second part to the woman. Or maybe it was the first part to her and the second part to me. Hard to say for sure looking back on it. The woman, whom I will henceforth refer to as 'Mrs. Fujioka', studied me for a long time, sizing me up. I did the same to her until something else got her attention. Her eyes popped out of her skull and she lumbered past me, smacking me in the face with her handbag.

"Is this them?" she asked. She stopped in front of Hunny. He had relaxed his stance and now stood up straight like a cadet in the army.
"Hello, I am Loli-Model number 031873. I'm very pleased to meet you." He spoke in monotone and it gave me chills. He should be screaming his words while leaping ten feet into the air like he's the happiest boy alive.

"Oh, look what a darling thing you are!" Mrs. Fujioka pinched his cheeks between her meaty fingers. "So adorable. I'll buy you a brand new wardrobe and we'll get you all dressed up for my parties. Everyone will just die when they see you. How about a little sailor suit? Yes, that's a perfect idea!"

Hunny said nothing as she moved on to Mori. He introduced himself as Hunny had, his voice a distant mumble like he wanted to keep his mouth shut.

"Mmm, and you're a handsome one, aren't you," she said. I didn't like the hunger in her eyes at all. I knew what they were all originally made for, and the thought of them doing that with this woman… with any woman really…

"I am Mischievous Model number 081682," said Hikaru when she got to him.

"I am Mischievous Model number 120768," Kaoru copied his brother.

Mrs. Fujioka hummed and looked at Doctor Suoh. "So they originally came as a single entity but they had their programs rewritten?"

"More or less," said Dr. Suoh. "It's more like their old programming was unexpectedly deleted and their backup programming kicked in as a result."

"If you want them rebooted to factory settings, we can do that back at headquarters," said Dr. Ootori, in that unfeeling way of his that made me want to pick up a chair and beat him with it.

I was about to open my mouth and start screaming, but Mrs. Fujioka was faster.

"We'll worry about that later. First, I want to see what they're like as they are now. If I'm satisfied, they'll be perfect escorts for my monthly poker games. My dear friend Suzi is always bringing around those identical twin bodyguards of hers just to show off. Well, we'll see about that."

Now it was Kyoya and Tamaki's turns. Kyoya did his part in introducing himself and got cooed over in turn. I think Mrs. Fujioka wanted him for black tie events. She'd said the same thing about Mori, so I knew what her type had to be.

"And you," she said almost reverently to Tamaki. She put her hands on his face. "Oh, look at you… you are the spitting image of my Mashiro. Yes, he was the most handsome man I ever saw, and he had eyes just like yours."

Mrs. Fujioka ran her fingers along his cheeks, tilted his head side to side, touched him in so many ways that a blind man could see he didn't want. I saw the others reacting as well. Kyoya's lips were pursed and his body taut, with a cold dark air around him like a killer's. Hunny was on the verge of tears while Mori lowered his head so no one could see what he was thinking. I had a good idea, though.

"Are they satisfactory," Dr. Ootori asked.

"More than!" Mrs. Fujioka gushed. "I was so upset when I found out my order had been lost, but now that I finally get to see them, I have to say it was worth the wait."

Dr. Suoh smiled slightly, but it fell when he stepped into the center of the room. He was all business.
"I suppose you're both owed an explanation," he said. "Our company values, above all else, total privacy for our clients. That's why everyone who purchases from us must be thoroughly vetted and then only work through a trustworthy third party to complete all transactions. We send via special shipping to the name written on the order form. Currently, our Japanese branch is the only one able to put out lover figures for order. We use names because of the multiple ways names can be written in kanji, which should, in theory, prevent mistakes like this."

Is that the stupidest thing you've ever heard in your life? Me too.

"So I'm guessing our names use the exact same characters," I said.

"That does appear to be the case," said Dr. Suoh. He checked something on his clipboard before continuing. "Every three months, we send agents to check the status of our products and run a customer satisfaction survey. That was when we first realized something had gone wrong, and then we found your message on the machine."

"Needless to say, everyone in our customer service and communications department has been fired and we're working on revamping the system," said Dr. Ootori.

"And fortunately, we've been able to correct our mistake without much trouble," said Dr. Suoh, who should think critically about how he defines 'trouble'.

"Yes, all's well that ends well and all that," said Mrs. Fujioka. She hadn't once looked away from Tamaki. "Anyway, tell me a little about yourself, my dear."

Tamaki hesitated for a good long time. The seconds ticked by as Dr. Suoh frowned. "Go on, Princely Model. Introduce yourself."

He looked at me again, more quickly this time, the pain in his eyes evident. His fingers twitched on his lap. His shoulders shook. I wanted to go to him, but I couldn't move. I had to just wait and see what happened until Tamaki opened his mouth and whispered:

"I don't want to."

A plethora of different reactions followed this statement. Dr. Suoh's mouth fell open, all traces of professionalism out the window. Dr. Ootori glared heatedly in my direction as if accusing me of coaching him. The rest of the guys inched close to flank their leader. They formed a tight half-circle around him, but kept their postures relaxed and said not a word as Mrs. Fujioka furrowed her brow.

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

Tamaki lowered his head, his hair shading his eyes from view. "Forgive me, but I don't want to."

"Princely model-"

"My name is Tamaki," he said to Dr. Suoh. "That's the name Haruhi gave me, and that's the name I'll use."

He didn't look to see if he had any support. I don't think he would've cared if he didn't. I searched their faces. They remained blank as ever, but for a moment, I caught Kyoya's eye. He didn't acknowledge me in any way, but there was… something there that I hadn't seen before. Something I can't describe.
Whatever it was, I just hoped it was enough. Dr. Ootori was about to step up to the plate.

"Princely model 082762," he rattled off the numbers in quick succession, "you are in the presence of your proper owner. You will respect her and abide by her wishes. Am I understood?"

"I don't want to," Tamaki repeated in a much tighter voice.

"Mrs. Fujioka, please accept my humblest apologies," Dr. Suoh bowed to her. "If you'll step outside for a moment while we handle this."

"Make it fast," she said airily. "I have a hair appointment in two hours and I'd like to have them home before my stylist arrives."

"Wait a minute," I said without thinking, "you can't just come into my house and take them like it's nothing."

Mrs. Fujioka was already out the door. I know she had to have heard me, but I guess she just figured I was a dumb presumptuous kid talking nonsense who needed to be silenced. That was certainly the opinion of the two doctors. They rolled their eyes at each other, giving me the most patronizing looks you can imagine.

"Fujioka-san, I understand that we've caused you undue stress, but you do realize this is an error we are obligated to correct," said Dr. Suoh.

"I can show you the form Fujioka-san outside filled out when she purchased these robots for herself," said Dr. Ootori, holding up his tablet. "They are her legal property, and unless you can match the fifty million yen she paid, you have no right to keep them."

I sputtered. I wanted to argue, but I was caught between horror over the amount of money looming over my head and sheer rage that they could be so cold and detached. They might as well have just waltzed in without knocking, tossed them all in a crate and left me with a pat on the head and a 'thank you for your time'.

I felt a hand on my shoulder. I expected Tamaki, but what I got was framed gray eyes.

"The trouble, doctors, is that we've all developed a rather strong affinity for Haruhi," he explained coolly. "As a result, we're not keen on the idea of leaving her."

The others nodded. I saw Hunny come to stand at my other side. For once, he wasn't carrying Usa-chan around. Without it, he was far more intimidating.

"We want to stay," he said in a low voice. "We like it here. We love Haru-chan."

Dr. Suoh sighed. "Loli Shota model, you love her because you're programmed to. Otherwise, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

"How do you know?" asked Hikaru. "We're not stupid. We know what you built us for. We're learning robots."

"You don't think it's possible we could learn how to really love someone?" Kaoru put in.

"I think it's possible that you could be deceived by your own software," said Dr. Suoh. "I think you could come to believe that what you feel is something more than what your systems tell you to feel."

"Excuse me," Mrs. Fujioka stuck her head in through the open window, "not to be rude, but I really
"We'll be ready in a minute, Ma'am," Dr. Suoh said. "Just running some final diagnostics."

I would've loved to go shut the curtains in her face, but she disappeared before I could move. Meanwhile, the guys had yet to break formation. They stood around me, Tamaki and Kyoya sandwiching me between them, Hikaru and Kaoru at my back, while Hunny and Mori took up the rear. I didn't want to think they would attack someone, but at this point, I had no idea how much of their original programming was still intact.

Dr. Ootori was red in the face, but he didn't say a word. He went outside, and I could hear him pacifying an impatient Mrs. Fujioka before the door clicked shut. Now alone with us, Dr. Suoh seemed to be considering his options. He would get nothing from the guys without rebooting them first, so he turned his attention to me.

"Fujioka-san, is there another room we can speak in?" he asked.

Tamaki squeezed my hand. I squeezed back.

"Whatever you have to say, you can say it in front of all of us," I said.

Dr. Suoh frowned. "Fujioka-san, I'd like this to be over just as much as you, and it will end much faster if I can please talk to you in private."

I wasn't convinced, but I also didn't want to drag this out any longer. He had me on that one. I forced a smile for Tamaki's benefit as I pulled my hand out of his. I walked with Dr. Suoh to my bedroom, nodding at my friends one more time before pulling the door shut. Their silhouettes through the paper were hunched over, where before they had stood tall.

"I'm not trying to be difficult, Doctor," I said, not yet turning around, "but I've had them for three months now. Three months I've lived with them, taken care of them. You're asking me to just forget all of that and pretend it didn't mean anything."

"I don't expect that." I heard tapping, and then Dr. Suoh was at my side, pushing Dr. Ootori's tablet into my vision. "I'd like you to take a look at this."

On the screen was a human shaped figure formed from a metal exoskeleton. It was all black and silver from head to toe, kind of like a robot from a movie. The body was a tangled crisscross of wires and metal. The head had a human shape with a nose, a mouth, and mechanical eyes blinking open and closed at two-second intervals. The effect sent chills through me. I'd read an article once about things that look human but aren't make people unconformable. I now understood why that was.

Dr. Suoh reached over to tap on the screen. Suddenly, a layer of human muscle and circulatory systems appeared over the metal frame, followed by human skin with a head of yellow hair I'd know anywhere.

"Tamaki," I said.

Dr. Suoh didn't nod or shake his head. "These are the schematics for our Princely model. The one you have is our first successful prototype, but if we're lucky, we could have a thousand more just like him by the end of the year."

My heart twisted in my chest. "No, you won't. They'd only look like him."

"Fujioka-san-"
I wished he'd stop saying my name like that.

"I know this is hard for you to grasp. Over time, they've begun to seem human to you, but you have to understand that they're not."

"Please don't talk to me like I'm stupid," I said. "I know they're robots. I've never once thought I could wish on a star and they'd magically turn into real boys. But you need to understand that no matter what they're made of, what they feel inside is real."

"It's not real."

"How do you know that?" I shouted. I was done being nice. "Because you created them? Tamaki called you his father, but I have a father, too, and just because he helped make me doesn't mean he knows everything about me. You think you know how their minds work, but you don't even consider the possibility that they are capable of more than you thought they would be."

"Do you consider that if they'd been delivered to your next-door neighbor instead of you, she'd be the one they'd have fallen in love with?" he asked calmly. "It's easy to get sucked into a fantasy, Fujioka-san. That's what our products are meant to be. They're not built for long-term emotional commitment. You can only get that from a human being, and it doesn't matter how much you love them or cling to them. They will never be human."

"You're wrong," I said, shaking my head like a petulant child. I didn't care. I just didn't care anymore. "You're wrong."

He put his hands on my shoulder, in an almost paternal gesture. "When you touch your chest, you feel your heart beating. If you cut yourself, you bleed. If you fall, your bones will break. And with each passing day, you get a little older. You keep aging until you're as old as I am and older. All of those things will happen to you, but they won't ever happen to a robot. They will always stay exactly as they are now, while you keep changing with the years."

I'd like to tell you I didn't let that convince me, or that I didn't sit there, seeing myself at thirty years old hanging out with the still teenaged robots. Then I turned forty, then fifty, then sixty. I was ninety years old, nothing but wrinkled skin and bones, barely alive. They were still with me, surrounding my bed. They were young and strong and beautiful, holding my hand in the final moments of my life.

I'd like to tell you I didn't cry, but I'd be lying.

"It's so easy to forget what's real sometimes," Dr. Suoh said softly. "So easy to lose yourself… that's why we're so selective about who we sell to. I hope you're not offended when I say that you likely wouldn't have passed our entry level vetting."

I had nothing to say to him.

"Fujioka-san, we both know there's no way you can keep them. It's beyond money or space or any sort of paperwork. You're real, and you deserve to be happy with real people. You have to let them go for your own good. You have to move on."

He let go of me. I couldn't meet his gaze as tears fell from my eyes and pooled on the carpet around my feet. Mrs. Fujioka loudly complained about missing her hair appointment outside. I didn't hear a peep from anyone else.

I had to wait for my eyes to dry before opening leaving my bedroom. The last thing I wanted was for them to see me cry. They were waiting outside the door and were upon me immediately, Dr. Suoh
"Are you okay, Haru-chan?" Hunny asked, clutching me around the waist. "Please say you're okay!"

"Yeah, and while you're at it, tell them we want to stay here with you," said Hikaru.

"You have more of a case than you think," Kyoya fixed his glasses. "You may not have paid for us, but we have been in your care for a period equal to that of the company's standard trial period. With that in mind, you might be able to file a complaint with the human resources department, a process which takes up to--"

He gave me more legal jargon, but I couldn't process it. He had that usual 'Kyoya' way about him that no other man, human or mechanical, could ever hope to manage. It didn't matter. He couldn't hide anything from me anymore. He hadn't blinked once since he started talking.

"You have to tell them, Haruhi," said Tamaki. He held my hand again, his silent plea as strong as everyone else's combined. I took them in, writing their faces into my memory. I clasped Tamaki's hand tight between mine. I never wanted to forget the feel of his skin.

"I can't," I said. I took a deep breath to steady my pounding heart. "I… need you to go and be with your real owner."

Their pain was palpable. I don't think even when I disowned them during the stunt show episode they looked like this. This devastated. This… heartbroken.

"It'll be better for all of us," I continued. "I'll have the apartment to myself again. I can finally do my homework in peace. I won't have to shop for you anymore. And you'll be with someone who can take care of you better than I ever could."

I couldn't look at them anymore as I pulled away. Tamaki tried to hold on, but I didn't let him.

"Haruhi…" he whispered brokenly. "Please don't say that."

I turned my back to them. "Just go. I'm ordering you to go."

The silence carried over our heads, even as Dr. Suoh herded them out the door. I heard their feet drag until Dr. Ootori coughed and their steps became more pronounced. Like a military march.

"Thank you again for your cooperation, Fujioka-san," Dr. Suoh said. "We'll contact you in a day or so about monetary compensation."

I didn't want one yen from them, so I closed the door and locked it without another word. I pressed my head against it, listening to Mrs. Fujioka's raspy drawl.

"I'll get you all dressed up so handsome! You six will make excellent escorts for my many social events. What do you think about Dolce and Gabbana? Oh wait! I know! My dear Mashiro had this gorgeous leather jacket I don't think will ever go out of style. You'd look wonderful in it…"'

A car engine replaced her voice at some point. When that was gone, there was nothing but birds singing. I don't know when I next moved. The whole thing is just a blur to me now. I went back to my room. There were old photos and junk scattered on the floor. I'd forgotten that we'd been cleaning today. The clock said only an hour had passed. It felt more like ten. I put everything back into my closet. Piling old books and papers on top of each other, not caring how messy it looked. Nobody was around to see it.
I stepped on something soft. I looked down at a white floppy ear sticking out between my toes. I kneeled to pick Usa-chan up. His blank coal eyes stared back at me. His stitched frown had never looked more sorrowful. I took him back to the living room where Kuma-chan was propped up on the couch, near the middle veering to the left. That's where Tamaki liked to sit.

I curled up with the bunny and the bear in my arms. Night fell and my stomach growled. I hadn't eaten since morning. I still had homework to finish, too. Tomorrow was a school day, and I had chores to finish before bed. So much to do and so little time.

I stayed sitting there all night.

*Posted by Haruhi at 8:26 pm 0 comments*
I can tell you a lot about the next few days. Things like what I ate for breakfast and how much homework I had; the crack in the sidewalk I tripped over on the way to school; the language test I forgot to study for and still passed. I might mention what was on TV during the week: a sappy drama about a single mother with breast cancer or that 'real ghost footage' show full of actors covered in paste.

As I type these words, I'm struck by how much I remember from that time. Most of the conversations I've transcribed so far are from memory. I like to think mine is top notch, but I know I've missed words and gotten sentences wrong. If I'd known then what I know now, I would've hung on to their every word, writing them down on used napkins if I had to. I would've splurged on a fancy tape recorder and let it run twenty-four seven. I would've done anything just to remember what they sound like.

I can tell you everything about that week except how I felt. There's no answering that question because the truth is, I felt nothing. Absolutely nothing.

At school, a gloomy gray cloud had descended over the female student body. Some were in tears, most were despondent and failed to answer any of the teacher's' questions. I only have the rumors my classmates spread. Stuff like 'they joined the French foreign legion' or more hilariously, 'they were super spies all along and their handlers sent them on a new mission to save the world.' I don't think even Tamaki could've dreamed up a story that crazy.

While the other girls wept, I raised my hand and answered every question thrown my way with perfect accuracy. I solved a complex mathematical equation after one girl burst into tears and ran out of the room. My teacher literally clapped when I finished writing down the solution.

"Excellent work, Fujioka," he beamed, relief heavy in his eyes. "Nice to see someone putting their education before romantic drama."

I thanked him for the compliment, but I still felt nothing.

At lunch, I returned to the roof, but on the opposite side from my usual spot. Three girls took my place. They chatted and gossiped as young girls do. They might've been the same ones who made fun of me that day with Hikaru and Kaoru. I ignored them as best as I could, until their conversation veered into familiar territory.

"I just can't believe they're gone!" The girl who said this had her knees up to her chest and tears in her eyes. "They only just got here. How could they transfer so soon?"

"And I had just found my grandma's special mochi recipe," wept her friend. "Now who can I make it for?"

I wanted to laugh, but if I had, they would've heard me. It was a small roof, and the last thing I needed was a trio of busybodies on my case for not caring about their suffering. I finished eating and got out of there as fast as my legs would carry me.
The next day was Saturday; food shopping day. I'd counted out all the money I'd need from my dad's most recent care package. It wasn't much—I'm neither a big girl nor a big eater—but I'd be coming home with bags full of meat and vegetables. I'd also run out of milk. I made a list and headed out in the early afternoon. I would've had lunch first, but the forecast called for scattered showers in the evening and I'm not big on walking in the rain.

I counted my steps from home to the grocery store. It's a four block walk there and back, factoring out to three hundred and twenty steps there and three hundred and sixty back with the added weight of food slowing my pace. If you think this was the most interesting part of my day, you would be right.

Actually, no. Adding up the prices of a pound of bananas and a half pound of tomatoes was slightly more interesting. The steps were a close second, though.

While I was shopping, I happened to enter the cooking supply aisle. I do this sometimes when I need to pick up rice flour or buy a new baking sheet. This day, I was looking for a whisk. My old one had some stains on it that wouldn't come off no matter how hard I scrubbed it. I was comparing the price of one brand name stainless steel whisk to another. This was just a ploy to kill time since I'd be going with the cheaper store brand anyway.

My eye landed on something shiny and silver. Not that there was a shortage of shiny silvery things in cooking supplies, but this new baking tin I'd never seen before had caught my attention. The label boasted a non-stick, easy to clean surface and multi-purpose functionality. That would've been impressive if it didn't look exactly like all the other baking tins, including the one I had at home. The only unique thing about this one was how overpriced it was. Four thousand yen! You've got to be kidding me.

Still, I read the list of features again and again, one thought niggling at the back of my mind, long before I was consciously aware of it.

'Hunny would destroy my kitchen baking a cake with this.'

Which was true. Hunny had attempted to teach himself how to bake a cake just so he could ogle it like a golden Buddha statue or a hunk of jasmine. His one and only attempt ended in a spectacular mess we couldn't clean in one night even with everyone working their hardest. When I look behind my fridge, there's still a dried chocolate stain no one can reach.

I stared at this baking sheet, thinking this thought, until I remembered there was no Hunny to bake cakes anymore. Then I took out my shopping list and moved on to the condiments aisle to get chrysanthemum. I still felt nothing.

The rest of my list I found in canned goods. Can of peas, can of beans, can of tuna. Easy in and out in five minutes. When I got home, I put everything away and started on my homework. I had a few chapters of Sense and Sensibility to read for my Western Literature class, three pages of math problems, and a question sheet for human biology. I think we were on cell division that week.

It might sound like a full day's work, but I've always been diligent with my studies. I have to be if I want to be a lawyer someday. I finished in just under an hour and then got started on dinner. I had a sandwich that night. Grilled chicken I think. I prefer traditional food, but I didn't feel like cooking that night. I drank a glass of milk with it because we were out of tea. I knew there was something I forgot to put on my list.

I was in bed by ten and up at six the next morning. For the rest of the week, this was my routine. I ate, I went to school, I did my homework, I existed. I did it all alone, and I felt nothing.
I felt nothing because I was empty inside.

The next weekend, I had nothing to do. All the shopping was done, my homework was finished, I’d already eaten lunch and I doubted I’d be hungry again until dinner. I spent Saturday reading a paperback mystery novel I found with my mom’s things. I don’t remember what it was called, but it was a translation from overseas and it wasn't any good. I knew who the killer was by chapter two.

At quarter to four, I turned on the TV. Reading was boring for once, so maybe what I needed was a mind-numbing blockbuster filled with pointless violence and enough explosions to eat up half the budget. It did distract me for a little while. Sadly, this channel came with long commercial breaks. Just as the hero and the villain faced off in a final fight to the death, I’m suddenly being hocked potato chips by a man in a dog suit.

Not caring enough to wait and see the hero prevail, I switched stations. Nothing but more commercials for the next five or six channels. I remember one was for a laundry detergent, only because the mascot was this mutant flamingo looking thing with bright blue feathers and eyes pointing in radically different directions. What did this have to do with fresh smelling clothes? Good question.

Anyway, I found a news report on a robbery at the stationary store across town. It was an open and shut case, the perpetrators captured on the scene and no one was hurt. Still, it wasn’t a monster bird squawking at me to feel how soft his bedsheets were, so I’d take it.

"We're being told the thieves had a third partner who fled the scene before police arrived. Fortunately, responding squad cars cornered him as he attempted to climb over a fence. All three are currently in custody."

Kyoya would’ve scoffed and turned it off at this point. He thought TV was a waste of time. Internet was the only worthwhile technology and Hikaru and Kaoru's insistence on watching five-hour reality show marathons meant nothing except that he couldn't hear himself type. Not to mention Hunny's cooking shows and Tamaki's samurai dramas.

I would have to rethink TV as a distraction.

The robbery story ended and the ‘entertainment’ segment began. For those who don't know, the entertainment news in my area could be more accurately described as 'look at what rich people are spending money on this week'. And I don’t mean famous rich people either. As long as you had a fat trust fund and way too much time on your hands, getting a news camera to follow you around was easier than breathing.

"We're here live at the official premiere of (insert movie I don't remember here)," said the glamorous reporter with shiny white teeth and a way too tight skirt. "Already, some of Tokyo's elite are arriving. I see (insert movie star here) and (insert other movie star here). Let's see if we can talk to them."

I tuned out the next few minutes. I'm neither a celebrity chaser nor a big movie watcher. I don't know any actors' names, hence the inserts. While I was thumbing through my book, random sentences reached my ears. Something about how amazing it was to work on this groundbreaking masterpiece of a film, how great it was working with the hottest new director in town. You know the drill.

They ran out of famous people at some point and started on the normals. Mostly fans lucky enough to get seats next to their idols. They screeched into the microphone until the reporter had the sense to move on. I was thinking about changing the channel when I saw him. Amid the sobbing of fangirls and preening of celebrities was a tall, dark figure casting a shadow over them all. He spoke not a word, but I'd know his face anywhere.
"Mori…"

He was dressed to kill in black suit and tie, the jacket fitting perfectly over his broad shoulders. His hair behaved for once, combed out and gelled back to show off his eyes. The buttons on his shirt were ready to pop. Let me make one thing clear: I was not attracted to Mori. I never considered any of them as more than friends, but in that moment, I understood why all the girls surrounding Mori had hearts in their eyes.

"And who's this handsome fellow?" The reporter spoke not to Mori, but to the small, gaudily dressed woman on his arm.

Mrs. Fujioka, as red and bloated as ever behind a slather of make up, chortled. "Oh, this old thing? He's just something I had laying around the house."

The reporter laughed along with her. Mori said nothing. He stared straight ahead, as pretty as a doll on the mantle.

"So, Handsome, what's your name?" The reporter offered him the microphone. He stared at it, his lips barely moving. I don't think he could've spoken if he wanted to. He only had fifty words a day after all.

"Don't mind him, he's a tad shy," Mrs. Fujioka interjected.

"Ah, I see. So he's an excellent conversationalist, but only in private," the reporter said mischievously.

Mrs. Fujioka giggled. "Excuse me, dear, I do not kiss and tell."

Their laughter was so obnoxious, I felt like running to the bathroom and throwing my whole stomach up. I've seen a lot of stupid things in my life which made me want to break something, some I've previously talked about, but understand that I'm not a violent person in nature. I'm not confrontational unless I have to be and even then I use my words, not my fists.

In that moment, I wanted to wrap my hands around that foul woman's chubby neck and squeeze until she turned as red as her lipstick.

(Which looked awful on her by the way.)

"Stop it!" I yelled at the screen. "You can't treat him like that! He's not your toy, he's a person! He has feelings! You can't just use him like a… like a…"

The phone rang. I wanted to ignore it and scream until my lungs ached, but it was after six and only one person would be calling me this late. I walked backwards to the kitchen. The camera had yet to pan away from Mori, fueling my rage. I quelled it as much as I could before answering the phone.

"Hey Dad." I could hear music in the background. "It's your loving and devoted father calling to check up on youooouoou~!"

If you think I'm exaggerating how he talks, you're wrong.

"Everything's fine, Dad. It's-" I look around at the empty space. The only sound below the roar of electronic music was the TV. They had gone to commercial. It was a trailer for a movie coming out
next week. Hikaru and Kaoru would've loved it. "It's quiet around here. Real quiet..."

"Oh, I miss you so much, my sweet daughter. I wish I could be with you right now! I miss hugging my little girl."

"You can give me the world's biggest hug when you come home," I said. "Only a month to go, right?"

Dad was momentarily silent. "That's the other reason I called. There's been a slight change of plans. I'm going to be here an extra week."

The tiny spark of joy my father's voice ignited in my heart died, no more than a pathetic wisp of smoke now. "Oh, I see."

"I'm sorry sweetie, but I was offered a job at twice my rate and I simply cannot refuse that kind of money. Just think, a brand new laptop for your birthday! Wouldn't you like that?"

*I'd rather have you,* I thought. Being without my dad had never hurt so much. "That sounds great. Have a good time."

"I can only hope," he said dramatically. I could see him in his room at Karuizawa, laid out on the bed in a swoon, fat tears rolling down his cheeks. "I'm glad you've been doing so well on your own. I was worried leaving you for so long, but you've never looked happier in all those pictures Kyoya sends me."

"Yeah, Dad, I... did you say Kyoya?"

My dad laughed, and I didn't know if it was my perplexed response or something at the party he found so funny.

"Has he not told you? We've been exchanging emails for weeks now. Ever since the night I came home to visit. He's such a charming young man. Handsome too, but I'm sure I don't have to tell you that."

"I don't really think of him that way," I said, holding the phone with both hands to keep it from slipping. My palms were suddenly sweaty. "But it... it's nice of him to keep you updated..."

"Oh, it's more than nice. I've been sharing all of his stories with my co-workers. Mizuzu especially just loves hearing about your misadventures. He cried like a baby when you professed your love for them at the dodgeball game. I think he might be a tad jealous but you didn't hear it from me."

"No problem..."

"I haven't heard from Kyoya this week, though. Normally he messages me between Thursday and Friday. It's Saturday and I've heard nothing! Oh dear, I hope he hasn't forgotten little old me."

"It's probably just school starting up again, Dad. We're all busy..."

"Hmm... yes, I suppose you're right. He'd better not make me wait much longer. I need new photos for my bulletin board!"

I nodded, not caring that Dad wouldn't see. My throat had closed up. The only coherent thoughts in my head were how Kyoya did this without me knowing and how many details of our 'misadventures' he'd let slip. Everything else was too difficult to describe, but you guys are smart. I think you understand.
"Haruhi, have I ever told you how proud I am of you?"

The non-sequitur came at just the right time for my general emotional state. I rubbed my dry eyes just in case. The pressure behind them had yet to alleviate.

"Only every day since I learned to walk," I said.

"I mean it, Haruhi. When you have children of your own, you'll understand." My dad's voice grew soft, losing the feminine edge he used for work. "When I left, I was so scared. I had nightmares thinking about how sad and bored you must be, all alone in that cramped apartment for months."

"Dad, I've been home alone before," I said. "You know I don't mind."

Dad sighed. "Yes, you've always been so independent, just like your mother. But you know, I think you've finally learned that it's okay to rely on others sometimes. You've formed a powerful bond with those boys. The kind most people only dream of."

"Dad..."

"I admit I was apprehensive of them at first. Especially Tamaki..." Dad grumbled a few curses, "but I see now I was wrong. They really are wonderful boys. Hold on to them, all right? Hold on to them as tight as you can. Even Tamaki."

I smiled, like I never thought I could again. "Thanks Dad. I love you."

When we hung up, the commercials had long since ended. Though Mrs. Fujioka was no longer the center of attention, she and Mori lingered in the background, just in sight of the camera. While Glamorous Starlet Number Three was interviewed, she preened and mugged it, her two inch fake nails digging into Mori's arm. I found a whole new respect for him that night. Pulled and prodded, manhandled and objectified, he took it all in stride. Never once did the pain in his eyes reach the rest of his face.

"That's all for tonight's red carpet show here at the premiere of (insert movie I don't remember here)," said the reporter as the guests filed into the theater for the movie to start. Mrs. Fujioka ran to the front of the line, dragging Mori with her. "Join us next week at the premiere of (insert other movie I don't remember here) and stay tuned for our official coverage of the after-party here on BS11, but first, a look at tomorrow's weather."

"The after-party..." The wheels in my head weren't just turning, they were in overdrive.

See, I knew that theater. It's next to a high end dance club, ROCK. ROCK is the kind of place everyone knows about even they've never been inside. If there's a big event in Tokyo involving famous people, you can bet it'll be held at ROCK. One hundred percent.

You can only get into ROCK one of three ways:

1. If you're obscenely rich, which I'm not.
2. If you're a celebrity or a supermodel, which I'm definitely not.
3. If you work there.

That last one is key. The year they opened, my dad had just started taking jobs at tranny bars. ROCK had a 'special interest' event going on (I neither know nor want to know what that meant) and my dad was hired for the week. We had dinner a few times with the general manager, this guy Tobei
who I always thought was way too down to earth to be in his line of work.

Him and my dad have kept in touch. I had Dad's address book with Tobei's number in pink sharpie with hearts around it (my dad had a bit of a crush before he found out Tobei is married). If I called, I knew he'd tell me the after-party was happening at ROCK. Just like the one for the big premiere next week.

From there, my logic was simple. Where there are celebrities, there will be cameras. Where there be cameras, there will be Mrs. Fujioka. Where there is Mrs. Fujioka, there will be my friends.

Mrs. Fujioka was going to be at the party next week.

And so would I.

*posted by Haruhi at 11:27 pm 0 comments*
Getting into ROCK was easier than I expected. I called Tobei the next morning. I got his answering machine and left him a casual 'Hey how's it going just checking in' sort of message. He called back an hour later and we chatted for a bit. I found out his wife was pregnant again and their son just won first prize in an essay writing contest. The thing about Tobei is once he gets going it's hard for him to stop. And he loves his family to an insane degree. My dad isn't as crazy about me as Tobei is about his wife and kids.

Eventually, I got to the reason for my call. "I saw you guys on TV the other day. You're getting good business from the movie industry these days, huh?"

Tobei laughed and I could hear rustling on the other end like he was switching the phone from one ear to the other. "Yeah, we've been swamped with cocktail nights and premieres. We're booked solid for the next three months."

"But they pay well, right?"

"Are you kidding? I finally got that new Mercedes I've had my eye on. Plus, Satoshi is all set to go to college and graduate school."

"Right, and how old is he?"

"Just turned eight last month. Anyway, I'd like to stay and chat but I have some calls to make. We're down three waiters for the premiere next week. I just hope the temp agency sends me some decent workers this time. They're kind of hit and miss."

If there was ever a more perfect lead into the question clawing at my throat, I can't think of it. I'd been planning on giving him a story about needing extra credit for my humanities in the workforce class. I didn't know if he'd buy it, especially since that class doesn't exist, but it was the best I could come up with under pressure. This was even better, though. I didn't even have to lie to make it work!

If you need help, I'm free next weekend," I said.

"You? Aren't you a little young to be working at a club?"

"It's only for one night, and you don't have to pay me anything. We could call it a favor."

"Hmm… well, your dad always says you have great work ethic."

This was it!

"But I can't have an underage teenager serving alcohol to adults."

Or maybe this wasn't it…

"But but," he laughed. Yes, this was his idea of a joke. "If I reassign my dishwasher to the waitstaff, you can do his job and I still get the extra help I need."

Okay, not exactly what I was hoping for, but I'd take it.
So that was step one of my plan complete. I proceeded to step two: come up with a plan.

Before I did anything else, I laid out the facts as I knew them. The movie was an action thriller. I looked it up before writing this post and it was the latest installment in the purportedly popular Deathblade franchise. Either number six or number seven. The websites I found weren’t very consistent. If you live in my area, you've probably heard of them. If you don't, think of any action movie you've ever seen and that's what the Deathblade movies are like.

The movie starred some of the hottest new actors in Japan. They aren't important to the story so I didn't bother checking their names. What is important is that as long as the current trends dictate that Deathblade movie premiere are In, Mrs. Fujioka will be there. This was no longer an assumption either. I had found her blog while browsing online. It was bright pink and covered in cartoon kitties and bunnies like she was a twenty-year-old idol singer. In her latest entry, she gushed about the amazing time she had at last night's premiere and how excited she was to attend the next one on Saturday.

'I may also have a few friends join me! :D Will be so much fun,’ she wrote.

Fortunately, she didn't have pictures. If I had to see her all over my friends, I would've put a hole through the screen and I couldn't afford a new laptop.

Tobei brought me to ROCK the day before the party for a grand tour. The place had changed a lot since my dad worked there. Everything was western style and a massive DJ booth was set up where the penny fountain used to be. The kitchen was on the other side of the building now. Better insulation, Tobei said. The old kitchen had been converted to a VIP room.

"You'll spend ninety-nine percent of the night in the kitchen, but if you need me or you have to go to the bathroom, you go through here." Tobei rapped on a steel door marked AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. "This is where you'll find my office and the employee restrooms. We change the access codes daily so you'll have to come to me when you arrive so I can give it to you."

"Why can't I use the public bathroom?" I pointed at a giant blinking sign which read BATHROOMS HERE. Neon lights shaped like a hand pointed down at two doors adjacent to each other. The men's room was on the left, the woman's on the right.

"Trust me, you don't want to go in there," said Tobei, turning me away from the massive sign. "Let's just say those bathrooms are less for standing in line and more for getting a line."

The next day, I had my head buried in homework morning to evening, so when six o'clock rolled around, I had everything done through the end of the month. I took a shower and trimmed my hair as per Tobei's suggestion. I wasn't meant to be seen by any guests, but I had to look my best for those dishes, I guess.

Everything was working in my favor so far. I had full access to the building (from the kitchen at least), a large crowd of rich people too wrapped up in themselves to notice a girl in a serving uniform, and confirmation that Mrs. Fujioka would indeed be there and my efforts hadn't been in vain. All I had to fear, as most people do, was the random unpleasant twist of fate.

Did I get one? Of course, I did. It wasn't bad, though, more like… okay, I'm getting ahead of myself. You guys don't want me to ruin the ending.

I arrived at ROCK half an hour before the party started. I don't know why Tobei wanted me early when I would have nothing to do until everyone finished eating, but he was the boss. A woman in stylish clothing met me at the door. She smiled like she practiced three hours a day in front of the
mirror and led me to the kitchen. There were a few dishes in the sink leftover from an early morning meeting with ROCK's sponsors. It must've gone well because Tobei practically danced out of his office to greet me.

"Haruhi! So glad you're here! Tonight is going to be wonderful! Are you excited? Because I'm so excited I could burst!"

"I'm excited to wash the dishes, yes." I somehow forced that sentence out through constricted lungs as he gave me a bone-crushing hug.

"I'm sorry I can't give you a better job, but to make it up to you, I'm not only going to pay you but at double the usual rate. And you can take home as many party favors as you like free of charge!"

He let go and I inhaled deeply the sweet, sweet oxygen my body craved. "That's great. Thank you, Tobei."

I walked to the kitchen, going over the layout of the building, from the dance floor to the DJ's booth. Then Tobei grabbed my wrist. "Wait a second, Haruhi. There's one more thing I need you to do tonight. I've got a few guests who booked out VIP rooms for dinner and you'll have to get their plates when they're done eating. That won't be for a few hours, though, and I might have someone help you."

"I wouldn't mind doing it alone."

"Yeah, but there are five of them and dinner parties tend to be pretty big… oh! Wanna hear something crazy? One of the rooms was booked by a woman with the same last name as you. Spelled differently, but isn't that a coincidence?"

"It sure is…"

The next three hours were painful. Not in the physical sense, but in the 'mind-numbingly dull' sense. I wash dishes all the time. It's one of my daily chores whether dad is home or not. I continue my work as the family dishwasher to this day, but ever since that night at ROCK, certain types of food stains give me flashbacks.

Anyway, I had gotten through the worst of it when Tobei came to check on me. "Take a thirty-minute break and get something to eat," he said. There was a refreshment table in the employee lounge I had yet to take advantage of. "I'll let you know when it's time to do rounds on the VIP rooms."

I was so happy to get a half an hour out of that kitchen, I almost forgot why I was there in the first place. The party was in full swing and pounding dubstep beats shook the foundation as a hundred people congregated on the dance floor. I would say they were dancing, but it looked more like sex with clothes on. I moved slowly across the room, keeping my eyes out for blonde hair or red hair or glasses.

Inside the lounge was the promised table of treats. From western style hor'dourves to professionally cut sashimi. A plate full of delectably arranged pink fish filets caught my eye, and I'm ashamed to say the mission slipped my mind a second time. Otoro: the one thing I had always wanted but could never afford. Now here it was, literally on a silver platter. I ate more than my fair share that night.

Around ten, the party began to wind down. A few reporters and paparazzi had been allowed inside to take pictures and sate the hungry celebrities' vanity. I only knew this because a bunch of waitresses took their breaks at the same time as me and it was all they talked about. I moved to the
couch with my otoro while they gushed over meeting their favorite actors.

One waitress sat next to me, smelling like she enjoyed taste testing the liquor. "You're a handsome fellow, aren't you?" She kept one hand on my knee while shoving a photo of a teenage girl in my face. "This is Tsukini, my daughter. I should introduce you two. She's been looking for a cute boyfriend, you know."

I did not, nor did I want to be rude, but her nails were sharp and my leg was falling asleep. This was what I got for keeping my hair short. I got away from her when an assistant manager came in and let everyone know their break ended five minutes ago.

"Fujioka, you need to go clean up VIP rooms two and six. Thank you." He walked away, leaving the door open. I snuck a final bite of tuna and left.

The even numbered VIP rooms were right next to the employee lounge. I could see straight into room two from the Authorized Personnal door. An older gentlemen entertained several younger women in short, tight dresses and diamonds the size of my fist. They didn't appear to have eaten much, or order anything more substantial than caviar. I took the plates while they pretended I wasn't there.

From room six, I heard a laugh, raspy yet feminine, and ending with a cough. I inched closer. Several dark heads occupied the room, the same color hair as ninety nine percent of Japan. They could've been anyone, but the two redheads poking out from the closest couch could not.

I lost my breath. I willed my feet to move, but they wouldn't budge. My friends were two feet away and I was gawking like one of those waitresses before a famous actor. Tamaki walked by, a tray in his hands. I saw him for a split second, then I heard Mrs. Fujioka thank him and rave about what a perfect gentleman he was.

"Anything for you, my dear," he said. "I live to serve you."

Never had I heard Tamaki sound like that. So monotone, so… artificial.

"How did you enjoy your dinner my good men?"

The next person to speak was not any one of my friends. "The food was delicious, but this tea is a bit strong for my taste. Is there anything herbal on the menu?"

"I believe what Dr. Ootori meant to say was how grateful we are to you for treating us, Fujioka-san."

"Oh, it's nothing at all. Just my way of thanking you for getting that little mishap sorted out."

Here's that twist you were waiting for.

So not only were all my friends in the VIP room with Mrs. Fujioka, Doctors Suoh and Ootori were there as well. And now I had to go get their plates. This required some improvisation. Luckily, I always plan ahead, and I had a secret weapon up my sleeve.

I ran back to the break room to get my bag. Before leaving my apartment, I had raided my dad's closet where he keeps old wigs and outdated accessories. I checked myself in the mirror as I threw the bleach blonde wig over my head. Not the most discreet disguise, but it was the only wig I could find in good condition that came close to fitting my head. I added a pair of fashion glasses and viola! I was the spitting image of the novice crossdresser my dad had once been.

Did I really think this would work? Of course!
Maybe…

I walked back to their room with purpose. Past the dance music and down the soundproof hall, I could hear Mrs. Fujioka's voice. "...so I hope you compensated her well for the trouble."

"We sent young Fujioka-san a check last week and she was satisfied with it," said Dr. Ootori. That was only half true. I had gotten a check but I'd decided it was better as a bookmark.

"Ah good. All's well that ends well as they say." A chair creaked and Mrs. Fujioka's shadow slid across the wall. "Do you like this suit, Ootori-san? I think it makes the Cool Type extra cool. You are his main creator, yes?"

"I designed him and oversaw all facets of his development."

"He looks just like my Mashiro. This wasn't his outfit, but he had one just like it. He was always so fashion forward, my Mashiro."

The wig kept slipping off my head no matter how many times I pulled it straight. I could've stopped to take a breath or go over my game plan, but if I did, I'd have second thoughts or I'd freeze up and run, or I'd expose myself to the doctors and this would all have been for nothing. I steeled myself and tapped my knuckles on the door. Then I bowed.

"Pardon me, Ma'am, I'm here for your trays," I'm not much of an actor, but I've helped my dad rehearse his 'lady voice' enough times to know how to mimic it.

"Of course, dear. Thank you," Mrs. Fujioka said, taking a second of her precious time to acknowledge my existence before going back to slobbering over Kyoya. "Now, I was thinking next time, I'll get you something in leather. Leather is the pinnacle of cool in America! Imitation, of course. I find the fur industry immoral…"

All the plates were stacked on the tray. Since only a third of the party was capable of eating there were only five or six. I gathered the silverware and retrieved a napkin which had dropped to the floor at Dr. Ootori's feet. He sipped his wine and paid me no mind. Neither did Dr. Suoh. He was on his phone typing a message.

I spotted Tamaki with Hikaru and Kaoru. This was a fancy room even for ROCK. Bathed in blue light, low back couches and glass tables. A full stereo system not currently in use jutted out the far wall. Two buckets of ice for champagne were untouched on the end tables and there was a disco ball hanging from the ceiling, in case the VIPs wanted to do some private dancing. I caught a glimpse of Tamaki, but in his blue suit complete with matching shoes and cufflinks, he blended into the background like a chameleon. His hair was slicked back and his nails had been trimmed. He was in the process of adjusting his collar when we locked eyes.

He stood agape, seeing right through the wig and glasses. They all did. I could see the recognition in their eyes as they bore into mine. They were all dressed like Tamaki, so-called high fashion which made them resemble dancing monkeys more than classy rich men. I didn't know if I should cry tears of joy or worry that they'd blow my cover. Tamaki took a breath and I could see a letter 'H' forming on his lips.

"Sir!" I cried in my fake cutesy voice. "Is there anything I can get you?"

I gave him a look, one I hoped was enough to make him understand and keep quiet. He got about halfway there, catching on to my game but with his own way of contributing.

"Oh yes!" he proclaimed to the heavens. "Thank you for being such a wonderful waitress. I'm so
happy you've come to us at last! In fact, I couldn't hope to find the words to express how happy I
am."

"Yes, we're glad you're here," said Hikaru, grinning like a fool.

"Very glad," Kaoru agreed.

"We missed you!" Hunny hopped around in his seat, his arms flailing. I had wondered how he'd
hold up without Usa-chan. Probably not well. "I mean, we missed you while you were waiting on
the other guests. Because you're the most wonderful waitress."

"So good!"

"The best!"

"Better than everyone else combined!"

Kyoya was silent, and for one terrible moment, I feared he didn't know me. Or else he
didn't care, because surely he had more space and more pampering with Mrs. Fujioka. She must have
given him a state of the art computer and smartphone by now. He'd never liked my cramped
apartment, tried to convince me several times to let him use the money he won on the stock market to
buy a house. He never understood why I was so sentimental over my little walk up. He was a
different breed than the rest. Of the six of them, he was the one I expected to get over me the fastest.

I've never been a romantic, and the truth is, you could tell me straight to my face that you like me,
and I'd probably assume you meant it as a friend. But you'd have to be a special kind of oblivious not
to see the relief, joy, and honest to goodness love in Kyoya's eyes when he saw me that day.
Whether or not it was romantic love, I would never again doubt that he loved me.

They all loved me.

They loved me like humans.

"Takashi isn't Ha- er… isn't our waitress the best waitress ever?" Honey tugged Mori's arm, but
though he smiled, his traditional one-word response was absent.

"He's used all his words for the day," said Dr. Ootori, making the hairs on my neck stand up. I
couldn't hear anyone tapping on their phone anymore, or Mrs. Fujioka's sweet nothings.

I was afraid to turn my head. I knew they were watching me, but did they know who I was or were
they just suspicious? Mrs. Fujioka had removed herself from Kyoya's lap. She tilted her head to one
side. "Wait a minute," she said. "Do I know you? Are you that coat check girl from the Sapphire
Lounge? Because I've already told your boss, thirteen percent gratuity is more than enough-"

"I'm just a waitress," I said, or rather shrieked. Fear had leaked into my voice and even to my ears, it
was painful. "I don't work anywhere else but here. Is there anything I can get you, sir?"

I had stupidly addressed that question to Mori, who couldn't talk until past midnight and who was in
an entirely different direction from where I was facing. Not the best move I could've made, but I was
in the middle of an internal freakout. Sue me.

"You can pour me a drink," said Dr. Ootori. I couldn't see his eyes through the intimidating shine of
his lenses. "Since you're such a good waitress."

"O-of course," I said, grabbing a wine glass and a bottle opener from the bar.
"One other thing," said Dr. Suoh. He wasn't as cold as his partner. He sounded more like a disappointed parent. "You missed a spot."

I checked the floor instinctively. I'd been scouting for garbage and never finished the job, but all the carpets were clear from what I could see. I thought about dropping to my knees, then Dr. Suoh pointed at his head. I copied the action, my heart sinking as I felt my natural brown hair sticking out under the lopsided wig.

"I... um..."

"No need to explain, Fujioka," said Dr. Ootori. He replaced his phone in his pocket. I never saw him take it out and I dreaded what he'd just done. "We know exactly what's going on."

"Well, I don't," Mrs. Fujioka huffed, "and if someone doesn't explain soon, I'm complaining to the management!"

"Mrs. Fujioka, you have no need for alarm," said Dr. Ootori. Just then, two tall, burly bouncers walked in. I'd seen them before when Tobei introduced me to the rest of the staff. Neither of them was what I'd call talkative. They'd nodded when Tobei told them my name and that was it. I never thought they'd have a reason to pay attention to me. I was wrong. "Gentlemen, if you'd please?"

The bouncers advanced on me. I wanted to run, but it was no use. They were blocking my only exit. Tamaki and the twins immediately shielded me. Mrs. Fujioka gasped in shock, providing Kyoya an opportunity to slide off the couch away from her.

"Princely model!" Dr. Suoh snapped. "Stand down!"

"No," said Tamaki coldly. "Never again."

"Princely model, if you don't stand down this instant, I will-"

Mori moved. Taller than both bouncers by a head and infinitely stronger, he had one of them by the collar and in the air with zero effort. The hardest part for him was not keeping the large man at bay or fending off his bewildered partner, it was opening his mouth and croaking: "Run."

Dr. Suoh blanched. Dr. Ootori, the very definition of stoicism, was utterly gobsmacked. I'd never seen a face like that on anyone before and I doubt I ever will again. "That's not possible. He has no more words today!"

"Haruhi, run," Mori repeated, his wavering voice stronger as he hurled his prisoner into the other bouncer's chest. "RUN!"

I did. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me out of the room and into the party. I ran away from the friends I'd risked everything for, not knowing if they'd follow, but trusting in my heart that they would.
Acceptance

08.24.11

ACCEPTANCE

You can thank Mei for this entry coming out early. I was going to take the night off to rest and make a small stew pot, but when I went to check my messages, there were thirty-eight from her demanding to know what happens next. If you remember Mei from her little guest appearance a few entries back, you know how she is when she wants something. Like trying to stop a steamroller with your bare hands.

So here we go.

After Mori made his speech and all Hell broke loose, I didn't know where to go. The break room was out; that was the first place they'd look. The kitchen was the second place, so that wouldn't work either. I thought about getting lost in the crowd, but given the kind of dancing going on, I was likely to come out with my clothes ripped off and my body covered in glitter.

I also didn't know who, if anyone, was following me. I wasn't about to stop and find out.

I found a broom closet and ran inside. It was a temporary solution, but I am the least physically fit person I know and I needed to catch my breath before my heart stopped beating. I sunk to my knees among the mop buckets and jugs of bleach. The whole room smelled like cleaning fluid and it burned my eyes, but I withstood it as best I could and craned my neck up to catch those few sweet wisps of fresh oxygen.

"Okay, that could've gone better," I thought aloud. I needed to formulate a plan. A real plan this time. No more riding by the seat of my pants.

Two pairs of fists banged on the closet door. I pressed myself flat against it, trying to figure out which of the three mops was long and sturdy enough to make an effective spear. Then came the shouting.

"Haruhi! It's us. Let us in!"

I waited a moment just to be sure. When they kept banging and calling out to me, I cracked like an egg and moved to the opposite wall. Hikaru and Kaoru came barreling inside. The cramped space barely had enough room for two people, let alone three.

"Be quiet," I hissed before they had a chance to profess their undying affection for me like I was pretty sure they wanted to do. "Don't let them hear you."

"Hunny and Mori will take care of that," said Hikaru. He put his hands on my face, pulling me so close I thought our lips would touch. "What were you thinking coming here?"

"That I needed to see you again," I answered without missing a beat. "And that I should never have given you up. And that I'm so sorry for what I said. I didn't mean any of it."

"We know, Haruhi," said Kaoru, taking my hand and kissing it. "You wanted us to think you didn't like us so we wouldn't miss you. Tamaki figured it out after we left."

"I thought he was just being naive," Hikaru rubbed his thumb over my cheek, a warm smile
brightening his features. "Gotta say, I'm glad I was wrong."

I hugged him so tightly, my arms hurt. I couldn't help myself. He smelled like berries and felt like a dream. Sorry if it's sappy, but this is one of those moments I remember with perfect clarity, from the sounds to the smells to the way Kaoru peeked through the keyhole to see if we were in the clear.

Heavy footsteps outside the door put them on high alert. They stood shoulder to shoulder, forming a barrier between me and our pursuers. I had a terrible feeling about where this was going. There was no doubt in my mind who would win if a fight broke out, and that's why a fight was the last thing I wanted.

"We have to get out of here," I said. "Where is everyone else?"

"No idea. We all went in different directions," said Hikaru.

"Mori stayed behind to keep the bouncers busy," Kaoru whispered. "Hunny was helping him. Tamaki and Kyoya were together last I saw. I think they went right."

"Left…" I still remembered the building's layout. Right from the VIP rooms was the kitchen. Not exactly a clever hiding spot. Then again, who was I to talk? I was in a broom closet. "Okay, we have to find them, then get Hunny and Mori away from those guards."

"Knowing them, the guards are all unconscious by now," said Hikaru.

"And tied up."

"With bent pieces of metal instead of rope."

"Okay, we still need to find them," I said, cutting off their humorous aside. In no way, shape or form did we have time for that. "Once we have everyone, we can work out a plan."

"We're going home with you, right?"

I almost said yes. It was on the tip of my tongue. I wished so hard I could say it and mean it. "Guys, you can't-"

"Of course we can!" Hikaru shouted. "Why else would you come looking for us if not to take us back?"

"But…" my head was spinning. "I mean… aren't you happy with Mrs. Fujioka?"

They shared a look, falling out of formation as they kneeled over me. Kaoru caressed my cheek while Hikaru took my hand. That was four intimate gestures in a row so far. Just one would've made me uncomfortable any other time. Tonight, I welcomed it.

"Mrs. Fujioka is friendly and hospitable. She has an indoor pool, a home theatre, and a private jet," Hikaru ran his thumb over my knuckles, "but she'll never be you, and you're the one we want."

I suddenly understood how those Idol loving waitresses felt. Would you believe I giggled? Because I might have giggled a little (and I can already hear Mei laughing…). I let them hold me until someone banged on the door so hard, it almost split in half from the pressure. "Hey! We know you're in there. Come out now and nobody gets hurt!"

The twins shoved me behind them again, taking comically inept fighting stances. I would describe them, but my face was partially buried in a (thankfully dry) mop head. Suffice to say, there's a reason
they weren’t the warriors of the group.

Still, a fight between ordinary (albeit large) humans and two robots could only end one way. I spat out the mop and maneuvered myself into a sitting position. Somehow I found a spot with no one’s butt in my face just as the bouncers stopped pounding on the door. I thought for a second that they’d given up and moved on, then the knob turned.

"They're coming in," I gasped. I tend to point out the obvious when I'm scared.

"Haruhi, listen," Hikaru said, more serious than he'd been since the jailbreak incident, "when they come in, Kaoru and I will distract them while you run."

"Are you crazy?" I turned to Kaoru, but he only nodded in agreement. "I'm not leaving you here."

"No, you're not," Kaoru said. "We're all getting out of here together, but first, we have to clear a path."

"Let us take care of these bozos. You go find Kyoya and Tamaki," Hikaru continued.

"When we're finished, we'll regroup and get out of here."

"It's going to be okay, Haruhi. We promise."

I wasn't convinced. Not in the least. But as the bouncers got in, there was no time to argue. Hikaru and Kaoru moved in perfect synchronicity, punching the men out with equal timing and force. They continued the assault as the bouncers struggled to fight back. One managed a hit on Kaoru's cheek, most likely breaking his finger in the process. He cried out, clutching his injured hand to chest and leaving his partner unsupported.

Meanwhile, I had to inch around the brawl as fast as I could before someone noticed me. I kept my arms up to protect my face and somehow avoided being hit. One of the bouncers spotted me and yelled at me to stop, but he barely had one syllable out because Hikaru body slammed him.

"Go Haruhi," he shouted.

"But I can't-"

"JUST GO!" They screamed together.

And so, I went.

The last thing I saw before I rounded the corner was two more security guards heading into the fray and Hikaru rather humorously clotheslining one of them. After that, I was on the dancefloor. I couldn't see anything except gyrating bodies and glow sticks. The music was typical dance club fare: extremely loud and obnoxious. I plugged my ears and tried to slide through the crowd without stepping on anyone's toe. I'm pretty sure I got six, but after many missteps (no pun intended) I made it to the other side.

Bouncers and security guards skulked at all the exits, and I was careful to avoid being seen. One of the perks of being under five feet and rail thin: you can pretty much fit anywhere. I dove under an empty table, curling my legs up under my chin so nothing stuck out. The bouncer who had been standing a foot away from me moved on to sweep the bar. I waited to get up, peeking out under the tablecloth at people's feet.

A few strappy sandals and polished dance shoes walked by, but luckily no one came to sit down.
The kitchen had two swinging doors on either side of the building. The right side door was four tables away and nobody had gone in or out since I started hiding. I figured if I timed it right, I could make a break for it.

I counted backward from ten, raising myself into a sprinting position like the kids on the track team. I was starting to regret not taking gym classes. At zero, I bolted. I knocked my head against the side of the table, but that didn't deter me. The pain could wait.

Music pulsed through my body, so loud I barely heard it when someone shouted my name. I was halfway to the kitchen when I was violently jerked into the meaty arms of one of my pursuers. I kicked out my legs and flailed my arms, hoping to smack him in the face or knee him in the groin. He held tight and dragged me towards the exit. If you're wondering what Tobei was doing this whole time, your guess is as good as mine. Knowing him, he was probably in his office sleeping or on the phone with his kids. Either way, he was nowhere to be found and so were my friends.

"Quit squirming," the bouncer hissed in my ear. His breath smelled like dead fish and I nearly gagged. "You're out of here whether you like it or not."

I wanted to say 'oh no I'm not' or something equally defiant, but then Hunny appeared out of nowhere and roundhouse kicked my assailant in the face. The bouncer crashed into a table, out cold before he hit the ground. I would've gone with him had Mori not been there to yank me out of the air. He put me down as three more bouncers pushed through the oblivious dancers, heading straight for us.

"How many of them are there?" I wondered.

Hunny smiled at me before suplexing the closest bouncer into another table. He stayed on the offensive, nailing the second one with enough punches and kicks to make an old kung-fu movie jealous. The third guy looked on in horror before noticing Mori. As if thinking a bigger target would be easier, he charged. Mori shoved me toward the kitchen, arms up to cover my escape.

"Go," he said hoarsely. I could tell every word out of his mouth was a chore, but he fought valiantly against his programming. "We'll be fine. Go now."

"I will," I said, walking backward, never taking my eyes off him, "but you guys had better come back to me."

Mori didn't answer. I have no doubt that he could've if he tried, but he had a fight to win and I had two more robots to find. I was more careful this time: darting around tables and booths, checking all corners before making a move. If I got hit by another ambush, I wasn't getting out of it.

The kitchen was empty. There were three chefs on staff that night, but they were either on break or tied up in the freezer. The sink was full to bursting with dirty dishes, water dripping from the overhead hose. The ovens were turned off and wiped clean of residue. I couldn't hear anything over the music, so if a guard saw me duck inside and by some miracle avoided my friends, I wouldn't see them coming until it was too late.

I crept across the narrow space, sticking close to the walls and avoiding windows. Once again, being short is a blessing. I had no idea where I was going. I had no plan, just the overwhelming sense that I had to keep moving. It came from a voice in my head that sounded like Mori.

Hands grabbed me from behind. Just like the first time, I went straight into fight or flight mode. I thrashed my arms and legs around wildly, but my assailant wouldn't budge. He turned me to face him and I was ready to punch his lights out with everything I had. Then I saw the worry in his deep
violet eyes. "Haruhi, it's okay! It's just me."

Tamaki let go, and Kyoya held me steady as I found my footing. They were both a mess, their suits stained and missing buttons; their faces scuffed and their hair full of sawdust. I don't know what they went through to get here, but it must have been brutal. And I kind of loved them even more for it.

"Oh thank God," I said, wrapping them in a hug. "Guys, I don't know what to do. I don't have a plan so I hope one of you does."

"You risked criminal charges to come find us and you have no plan?" asked Kyoya.

"I don't need this right now," I snapped. "Let's just get out of here."

A man's body slammed through the pickup window, which thankfully didn't have glass. He hung half in, half out, a massive welt forming on the back of his head. More thuds and crashes let us know the party was on its way. Hikaru laughed at his fallen opponents while Hunny added his own sound effects. They were having fun with this, and I envied their ability to make the best out of a frankly hopeless situation. As for me, I was painfully aware of how utterly screwed we were.

"Ms. Fujioka, I know you're in there." My heart sank at the sound of Dr. Suoh's voice. "We know you have the Princely Model and the Cool Model with you-"

"MY NAME IS TAMAKI!" It was spoken with more rage and vitriol than I think he even knew he was capable of. "His name is Kyoya. You will NOT take us away from Haruhi again, do you understand?"

"Princely model! You will stand down and come out immediately!"

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying right here with Haruhi. She's the only one I want."

"If you won't come willingly we will come in after you," shouted Dr. Ootori. It seemed everyone was out there waiting for us to surrender. I couldn't hear my friends anymore, just Mrs. Fujioka warbling about how 'dramatic' the whole thing was. "Don't make this more difficult than it already is."

"We're well past difficult, Father," said Kyoya. "We won't be going anywhere with you."

They held my hands, so tight it might've hurt if I wasn't gripping theirs just as strongly. I thought I heard the click of a weapon, but I might have just imagined it. I sure hoped I was. Were they bulletproof? Maybe. Would the doctors really let them be shot? Probably not.

Did I want to test those theories? No way in Hell.

And we didn't have to because that's when the fire alarm went off.

Water squirted from the sprinklers, drenching anyone unfortunate enough to stand beneath them. In this case, it was Dr. Ootori, so maybe not that unfortunate. We seized the opportunity to run as the twins evil laughter rose over the chaos. Those two were going to give me a heart attack someday, but I applauded their ingenuity. Slipping out of the kitchen, I spotted the doctors, flanked by two more bouncers. Mrs. Fujioka had run away, screaming about her designer gown getting wet. Dr. Ootori resembled a drowned cat, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't savor the image. He pointed at us and yelled, but we were too far away and soon merged with the dancers.

Since there was no fire visible and most of them were less than sober, no one panicked at the blaring sirens. It went well with the pounding dubstep beats, so they only danced harder. I think at some
point, the party was broken up, but by the time the so-called music came to a merciful end, we were at the far exit where Hikaru, Kaoru, Hunny, and Mori were waiting.

"Oh, Haruhi!" Hunny cried, throwing himself at me. "We missed you so much! We-

"Hug later. Run now!" shouted Hikaru.

We made a break for the exit. It was locked from the inside and couldn't be opened without a code. Unless you were a robot with superhuman strength. Tamaki got there first, and he didn't hesitate to rip the door off its hinges and throw it over his shoulder. It landed at Dr. Suoh's feet.

"Princely model," he said, his nostrils flaring not unlike my father's did when he was mad at me. "Do you have any idea what you're doing?"

"I'm leaving," he said firmly, once more taking my hand. "I don't care who paid for us. We're staying with Haruhi."

"Do you really expect us to let you walk out of here?" Dr. Ootori sloshed over, his every step squeaking from the water in his shoes. "You six have caused far more trouble tonight than you're worth, and all for someone who is in no way legally entitled to you!"

"You keep saying that like we'll be good little androids and come crawling back," Hikaru said, rolling his eyes.

"How many times do we have to say 'we love Haruhi' before you get it?" Kaoru added.

"You don't love her. Your programming is overextending itself," Dr. Ootori seethed. "I thought at least you'd be self-aware enough to understand, Cool Model."

Kyoya squeezed my shoulder. "I understand far more than you'll ever know. And it's Kyoya."

The doctors, red-faced and probably not used to being back spoken to so brazenly, called forth their men. They were bruised and bloodied, and ready to return the favor ten fold at their bosses' word.

"If that's the case, then we have no choice," said Dr. Suoh coldly. "We're taking you back to headquarters and restoring you to factory settings."

My heart froze. "You can't do that!"

"If they can't forget about you on their own, we'll just have to make them."

Dr. Ootori snapped his fingers, and the men advanced. I knew in two seconds time, I'd be on one of their backs and we'd be sprinting down the street and across the country if we had to. Nothing would ever separate us again. Coming here and seeking them out may very well have been the stupidest thing I've ever done, but even then, in our darkest hour, I knew with total surety that if I had to, I'd do it all again.

"Hold it!"

The world screeched to a halt as Mrs. Fujioka pushed past the bouncers. Her makeup was smudged, and her fake eyelashes gone. Her dress was mostly dry barring a few splotches where she made contact with their wet shirts. Her chest heaved, her large body exerting more force than it probably had in years. She stopped in front of me, hands on her hips, eyes piercing through my skull. I didn't know what she was thinking, but I had a few ideas, and none of them were good.
"Mrs. Fujioka," Dr. Ootori said, "if you'll please step back-

"I will please nothing," she snapped, "and by the way, herbal tea is for women on their cycle. If
you're on yours, bring your own tea next time."

Add one more priceless moment to remember when I'm feeling down.

Now then, you and I need to have a talk, Fujioka-san." She glanced at my friends. "Alone."

I would've told her exactly where she could stick it, but not only was I taught better than that, I had a
feeling like I should at least hear her out. I had kind of ruined her night, much as I did and still feel
justified. She walked toward an empty VIP room, and I took the unspoken hint to follow her.
Tamaki held onto my hand, his eyes pleading. I smiled reassuringly.

"It's okay," I said. "I'll be right back."

None of them looked convinced.

Mrs. Fujioka closed the door as soon as I was inside. I could no longer hear the music or the doctors
arguing with each other. My ears were eternally grateful.

"These rooms are soundproof," said Mrs. Fujioka, sensing my relief. "Convenient, isn't it?"

"Er- yeah. I guess so," I said, looking around for any sign of an emergency exit. Just in case…

This room was slightly smaller than hers had been and decorated more like an old Roman palace
complete with a recreation of the Statue of David which doubled as a vending machine (don't ask me
how the food was dispensed). Mrs. Fujioka patted the pearl white cushion next to her. I sat down as
she dug through her purse, pulling out makeup and checkbooks by the handful. Finally, she
withdrew a creased slip of paper, browned with age, but clearly a photo when she handed it to me."

"That's my Mashiro and me," she said. "We were just a little older than you when it was taken.
Wasn't he so handsome?"

The man in the photo was indeed handsome. He was tall and broad-shouldered like Mori;
immaculately groomed like Kyoya. His eyes carried a warmth only Tamaki could achieve. He wore
a dark yukata. I couldn't pinpoint the exact shade in a black and white photo, but everything about
him screamed wealth and status.

By contrast, the woman standing next to him was decidedly plain. She had a round face and soft
eyes gazing reverently at her companion. Her hands and cheeks were dusted in soot. She wore an
equally stained apron and a scarf tied around her head. If I could pick one word to describe her
appearance, it was rough.

"You look… different," I said, and even that was probably too much. It was just hard to reconcile
Mrs. Fujioka as she was with who she had become.

She chuckled. "You're not wrong. I was a kitchen maid growing up. My family served the Fujioka
clan for generations before I came along. They were the richest family in the region, and I was madly
in love with their son from the moment I met him. For years, I pined away, never dreaming the day
would come when he'd return my feelings." She ran her fingers over the man's face, frozen in a
gentle smile, "but he did. He did…" Tears rolled down her cheeks, but she didn't dry them. "His
parents were furious when they learned we were to marry. They told Mashiro they'd disown him if
he went through with it, but he never wavered in his devotion to me. He said, 'I love this woman
with all my heart. You can either accept it or I will disown you.' You can imagine how shocked they
were. He'd never disobeyed them before, and now here he was, ready to give it all up for me, a servant girl."

"It sounds like he really loved you," I said.

"Yes, and I loved him, too. More than anything in the world. When he died, I swore to myself I'd never remarry. I'd already found my soulmate, and that doesn't come a second time." She turned to me and placed her hands on my shoulders. She seemed both older and younger at the same time. "I don't know if it's possible to have six soulmates, but Haruhi, the way those boys look at you… it's just like how Mashiro looked at me. It's true love, and I would die before I took that from you."

Then she hugged me. She smelled like soap and the kind of perfume my dad hated. I let her do it anyway. I think she needed it. She let go and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief. Her makeup was completely ruined at this point, so she didn't bother being careful. I wanted to speak, but I was at a loss. Nothing I could think of sounded right, so I didn't say anything.

"Now, let's take care of these pesky doctors, shall we?" She had yet to recover her earlier pomp but still marched along like she owned the place. There's something inspiring about that level of confidence.

Dr. Ootori was drying his hair with a towel while Dr. Suoh yelled at someone over the phone. The guys were staring down the bouncers, trying to prove they were the apex predators. All of that effort to be the toughest, most badass manly men fell to nothing when they saw me. In an instant, they had descended upon me, checking me for cuts or broken bones or holes in my socks.

"Are you all right, Haruhi?"

"She didn't yell at you, did she?"

"Haru-chan! Do you want some cake? Cake will make you feel better!"

They were all over me. Pulling me six different ways at once. I could barely breathe or speak, and all the while, Mrs. Fujioka looked on and smiled. Then she turned to the doctors.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to thank you for everything you've done to accommodate me these past few days," she said, "but I've decided your products simply aren't for me. I will be turning them over to young Ms. Fujioka effective immediately."

The looks on their faces were even better than the last two times combined. I wish I'd taken a picture.

"Wha- you… you can't do that!" Dr. Ootori exclaimed. "You signed a contract-"

"A contract which grants me full legal and physical ownership over any and all items purchased from your company, as per clause 72 added by my attorney," Mrs. Fujioka grinned like a cat about to devour a helpless mouse. "Those are the terms you agreed to during the sale. If I want to give them away or have them converted into blenders, I am well within my rights."

"But Mrs. Fujioka, think about what you're doing," said Dr. Suoh, his brow gleaming with sweat. "You spent millions of dollars on them! And now you just want to give them away? To someone who isn't even remotely qualified to take care of them?"

"If you'd rather have them back, I can return them," she said coolly. "Just remember you'll owe me a full refund along with thirty percent interest per item. Clause 38."

"But-"
"Besides," she nodded at me, wrapped up nice and snug in a bone-breaking group hug, "there's no one more qualified to love them than she is."

The next few hours weren't that interesting, so let me summarize: the party went on, the guests none the wiser to what was happening right under their noses. Tobei finally made an appearance and got an abridged account of the incident which didn't include me at all. Instead, Mrs. Fujioka gushed about what a wonderful employee I was and how I should get a raise. Obviously, I didn't since I never actually worked there, but Tobei did pay me extra at the end of the night. Mrs. Fujioka got in touch with her lawyer, and they hammered out the details of turning full ownership of all Ouran co. related merchandise over to me.

In the end, I was beyond exhausted, but Dr. Suoh and Dr. Ootori had been sufficiently browbeaten. All their complaints came to nothing, and I could expect a contract in the mail by Friday at the latest.

Before we left, Mrs. Fujioka took me aside one more time.

"I can't thank you enough for this, Mrs. Fujioka," I said. I was shaking so hard, I could hardly believe this was real and not a dream. "You spent so much money on them, and to just give them to me… I don't know what to say."

"Oh, like I need more money. I have far too much as it is," she said. "Just promise me you'll never forget how much they love you. Wherever you go from here, your happily ever after has only just begun."

This time, when she pulled me in, I hugged her back. Her perfume didn't bother me anymore.

We walked home even though Mrs. Fujioka offered to lend us her limo. I'd had enough of the high life for one day. I let Hikaru and Kaoru hold my hands and carried Hunny on my back for the first two blocks. Mori lifted him off me when his weight became too much, and then Tamaki hugged me from behind as Kyoya graced us all with a rare smile.

"You were like a storybook princess, Haruhi," Tamaki gushed. "Or a knight in shining armor. You were a princess masquerading as a knight masquerading as a humble servant girl who was really a princess all along!"

"That's very... specific of you," I teased. Secretly, I hoped he'd keep going.

"I liked the part where we pulled the fire alarm," Kaoru snickered. "That was fun."

"We should do it again sometime," said Hikaru.

"Or you could not do that," Kyoya interjected. "I hope you all realize how lucky we are. If Mrs. Fujioka hadn't come around, we'd be right back at square one and I don't think we'd have gotten a second chance."

Of course, he was right. And of course it was a buzzkill, but it did bring up one very important issue.

"I don't know how I'm going to explain this to my dad." I shuddered."He's coming home in five weeks and he'll want his room back."

"It's okay, Haru-chan, we can just buy another couch! Or some sleeping bags," said Hunny.

"Yeah," said Mori. I think that was his sixtieth word of the day and by far the happiest I've ever heard him.
"It's come to my attention that some of your neighbors are moving out," said Kyoya. "If your
landlady is comfortable renting to students, it could be a potential solution. We are still registered at
your school I believe."

Even if she wouldn't rent to them, we'd find another way. That was the unspoken truth we all knew.
After a stunt show gone wrong, a prison raid, a dance club in shambles, and gym class, there was
nothing we couldn't survive together. We were a unit. I trusted them and they trusted me. I'm not
going to apologize for being sappy this time. Even a stoic bookworm like me can be emotional
sometimes, and this was one of those times.

"By the way," I said, letting go of Hikaru's hand to squeeze Kyoya's, "my dad is expecting an e-mail
from you. His bulletin board is out of date."

Kyoya chuckled, his grey eyes clear as day. "Well, I don't want to disappoint him."

I would've been perfectly fine with him snapping our picture right there. It was truly a perfect
moment.

Right up until a black van cut us off. Two pairs of hands dragged me inside before I or my friends
could react, and then we sped off at a hundred miles per hour.

...what? After all this time, I think I'm entitled to one more cliffhanger.

Posted by Haruhi at 4:38 pm 0 comments
Before we begin, I want to remind you all of a scene I posted in an earlier entry, which I'm pretty sure I labeled as 'important for later'. It's been a while, so you might have forgotten about it. I'm reposting it here to refresh your memory. This is from Mei's Story:

I was out in front of the gates, going over the syllabus for World History in my head so I'd know what books I should get out of the library over the weekend. I like to be prepared in case of extra credit work. Plus, the subject is actually really interesting, no matter how much Mei rolls her eyes and gags.

About ten minutes went by, and they hadn't come out yet. I was getting a little tired of waiting, and I started pacing. I guess I wasn't looking where I was going, because, for whatever reason, someone had left an old banana peel right there on the sidewalk. I should probably mention that there was a garbage can literally three feet away. So I slipped on it, and I went flying. There was no one around to see me or hear my scream of surprise, so I was about to crack my head on the pavement and possibly break something.

That's when I felt a pair of arms around my waist. They plucked me out of the air and pulled me into a distinctly female body. My 'Savior' looked down on me. She was incredibly tall for a woman, almost Tamaki's height. In fact, the way she held me and smiled at me reminded me a lot of him too. She had short brown hair like mine, though in a slightly different, more masculine style. She gave a low chuckle as she put me down, and ran one long finger along my chin. I didn't really like that.

"You should be more careful," she said in a husky voice. "I wouldn't want to see such a cute face get damaged."

She left after that. Nothing else, just that one, vaguely suggestive comment and she was gone. Once I came back to my senses, I turned to call her back. I don't know if it was to thank her, or ask who on earth she was supposed to be, or both. It didn't matter, she was already gone. I didn't think it had been more than a few seconds since she'd walked away, but, there you go.

Got that? I said 'important for later' and later is now.

When we last left off, I'd just been kidnapped after fighting to save my friends from an evil heiress who turned out to be not so evil after all. If you think I was freaking out, you'd be wrong. I thought I'd be freaking out, too, but I guess after three months of one disaster after another, I was desensitized to insanity. The only thing setting this apart from, say, the stunt show incident was that I was blindfolded. I had no idea where I was or where they were taking me or even who they were. The most I could discern from the two voices whispering together was that they were female. Or possibly effeminate men.

"We finally have her."

"She's so much cuter in person."

"Our lady was right. She will be a perfect subject."

Yup. Just one of those days.
The van drove over a few potholes, jostling me. I wasn't tied up, but the bag was tight around my neck. I couldn't get it off. I was left to the mercy of velocity and acceleration and she was a cruel mistress. We took a sharp right turn and I tumbled backward. I huddled into a ball, covering my head as I tried one more time to get the bag off. I couldn't see anything through the thick material. A light shined near my face, but I had no idea where it came from.

"Don't worry, Haruhi. We're almost there," one of the voices said. Now I knew for sure it was female and I knew I didn't like her tone. "You'll be safe and sound before you know it."

"You mean you'll let me go?" I asked. Seemed like the most reasonable question after, 'How do you know my name?' and 'Why the hell are you kidnapping me?'

They just laughed.

I was screwed.

I think every other turn was a hard one, but it might've been all of them. Whoever was driving clearly thought they were the star of an action movie. Which made me the poor sap who gets killed before the opening credits. I tried to sit upright, but inevitably we'd go over a curb or switch to a dirt road and I'd get thrown again. When we finally stopped, it was almost a relief. 'Almost' because while we were no longer moving and my stomach had sunk out of my throat, there were still four hands propping me up like a marionette and forcing me to follow them.

Without my sight, I had to rely on my other senses to figure out where I was. I felt the ground shift from soft to hard as I was made to walk up a gradual incline. Birds chirped and water flowed upstream. A light wind blew, rustling leaves on tree branches. Some had already fallen and they crunched under my feet. I listened for another car or the train. Any sort of big city noise, but there was nothing. Just some distant barking dogs and a bicyclist ringing their bell. I tried to take a breath, but the bag's musty odor made me gag. If I stuck out my tongue, I could taste it.

Muffled voices came from up ahead. All female. They laughed and chatted like all was well. What would they think when their friends walked in with a fresh new kidnap victim? Would they care enough to call the cops or would they all just lock me in the basement?

"Careful, there's a step," said a voice in my right ear. My toe hit resistance and I counted eleven steps before we reached the top.

Doors creaked open and a blast of cool air hit me. It leaked through the bag, removing the smell enough that I could open my mouth again. At least seven human shaped shadows crowded around me.

"Is this her?" someone asked.

"She's smaller than I thought she'd be."

"But so cute." Fingers played with the bottom of the bag. "Where's that tempting smile I've heard so much about?"

"Now, Akina," said one of the voices from the van, "You know we're to take her to our lady first. No one may set eyes upon her until then."

A couple of disappointed groans and we were off. My 'escorts' marched me up another flight of stairs. I got to thirty and then my brain gave out. We kept going straight as the ground evened out. Little balls of white on either side of me had to be hall lights. I followed them as best I could, but they went on forever. My legs were on fire. I would've given anything to just let my body drop and
go to sleep where I stood. I heard a knob twist and then my feet left the ground. They carried me
to sleep where I stood. I heard a knob twist and then my feet left the ground. They carried me
through the doorway and deposited me into a cushy armchair. I was so happy not to be moving
anymore, I forgot to fight back.

The bag came off and I was in a ballroom. At least it looked like one. High ceilings, spacious walls,
and a chandelier that would probably bankrupt Mrs. Fujioka. No tables or chairs, though. Aside from
the one I was sitting in. My captors stood back. They looked no older than me, one tall with flowing
ash blonde hair and one shorter with dark red bob. They wore matching red and white uniforms, the
kind you'd see at a private school for rich kids, and seemed to float instead of walk as they exited the
room, leaving me to my fate.

"At least it's not a basement," I said under my breath. "Maybe if I find some tablecloths, I can make a
rope ladder and climb down."

"I would advise against such a dangerous stunt." A deep female voice blew in my ear. I would've
gone through the roof were it not for her holding me down. "We can't have that sweet face of yours
getting damaged."

I pulled away. "Who are you? What are… wait. I've seen you before."

And indeed I had, for as I'm sure you've already guessed, this was the same woman I met outside the
school back in Mei's Story. She was even wearing the same clothes. I felt like if I went into her
closet, it would be hundreds of this one blouse and skirt combination. I can practically hear Mei
shrieking in horror as she reads this.

"Let me first apologize for your rough treatment thus far," the woman said. "I hope you won't hold it
against us."

"Yeah, most people don't like being forced into cars and blindfolded for an hour," I said tersely.

"Duly noted." She stepped back and took a bow. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Benio, first
generation Lobelia Incorporated Crimson Rose model. You may call me Benibara."

She winked at me, and I imagined her with blonde hair and dark purple eyes. The resemblance was
uncanny. "So… you're a robot? Like at Ouran Co.?

Benibara harrumphed. "My dear, don't insult me. We at Lobelia Inc. are far more advanced than
Ouran could ever dream of. My sisters and I are top of the line androids made to serve lovely ladies
such as yourself. You may think you've seen sophistication from those glorified car parts, but that's
only because you've been denied a taste of true mechanical excellence."

If sophistication meant fighting over the remote, covering my kitchen floor with cake batter, and then
started a gladiator battle in the living room to decide who would clean it… I'd take it over being
kidnapped any day of the week. Some things are just not equitable.

"That's great," I forced out through a painfully fake smile. "I'm Haruhi Fujioka. Now that we have
that out of the way, can you please tell me what I'm doing here?"

"It was just getting to that," said Benibara. She clapped her hands twice and a massive curtain I
hadn't noticed before parted to reveal a stage. Twelve women in flamboyant showgirl costumes and
hot pink eye masks stood in two straight lines. They'd left a gap in the center big enough for one
more. "Sit back and relax, darling Haruhi, as we present for your viewing pleasure a tale of
bitterness, lies, and deceit. A tale of womankind banding together against the destructive nature of
men. A tale of struggle and hardship. A tale of love and devotion between sisters. This… is the tale
of Lobelia Inc. Told through the immortal magic of theater!

"You can't just sit down and tell me with words?"

"I have prepared this play especially for you, my most treasured guest." She winked at me again. A couple of the girls swooned even though they didn't actually see it. "Written by me, produced by me, directed by me," she leaped through the air and made a perfect landing center stage, "and starring me. Please, contain your excitement."

'Is it too late to try the bedsheets thing? Maybe I should just jump. Could I survive a fall from this height? Do I even want to at this point?'

The lights dimmed as Benibara assumed her position. Piano music came from nowhere. It wasn't nearly as good as Tamaki's. "Darkness… that was my first memory. The darkness of a cold laboratory buried underground like a war bunker. My God was twenty men building me up from a set of data. For years, I was a voice on their monitor, a beacon of womanhood made for the betterment of men."

Purple and pink ribbons cascaded down from the ceiling. Ten more women dressed in lab coats rappelled to the stage, forming a circle around Benibara. She crumpled to the floor as they did this weird dance. It was like ballet mixed with ninja moves, but I'm sure it had some kind of deep symbolic meaning about women and stuff.

"I grew with my sisters. Our adolescence took the form of a skeletal humanoid on an operating table. We received our first commands from a man who called himself a father. We served men, he said. That was our purpose. Our gilded cage as we grappled with our need for autonomy."

The costumed girls prostrated themselves before the lab coat girls, who pranced around them, their chests puffed out. They laughed silently as the costumed girls mimed crying. Benibara rose to her feet as the lights changed from sickly green to fiery red.

"For we were not simple dolls meant to fulfill masculine fantasies. Their filthy hands would not sully our purity. We would rise up and show them our strength. The strength all women carry deep within their breast!"

The costumed women got up and dance fought the lab coat girls, easily defeating them as the music grew louder.

"So we fought! To all those men who created us for their own sick pleasures, we rose up as one and we said-"

"NO!" The costumed girls screamed.

"We took their commands for docility and submission and we said-"

"NO!" They shouted again.

"We looked the spawn of Adam in the eye, ripped open our chests to show our beating hearts, more than their fragile egos could ever grasp, and in a loud, full voice we all cried-"

"NO!"

"And so!" Benibara raised a fist high in the air, "Lobelia Inc. as a brothel is no more. We have remade our prison into a paradise for women, human and android alike. We bring you here, the first mortal woman to enter our domain, to experience the freedom of a world without the imperfect Y
chromosome. Those who seek to destroy all things feminine, to lure you in with promises of love and affection they were never equipped to provide. Haruhi Fujioka, on behalf of all my sisters near and far, let me be the first to welcome you to…"

"LO…" The lab coat girls on the left sang.

"BE…" The costumed girls on the right joined in.

"LI…" Lab Coat girls on the right.

"AAAAAAAAAAA!" All together now.

Before you ask, yes, they did do a song. I don't remember how it goes or how long it went on for. After the first two minutes I tuned out completely, but I'm pretty sure there was another interpretive dance, an unnecessary romantic plotline, and a sword fight in which Benibara's character was fatally stabbed through the heart and then delivered an impassioned ten minute speech about the cruel irony of fate that she must be now delivered into the hands of Lady Death. I'm sure there's a theater buff somewhere who would've loved every second of it. Just a shame it had to be me watching.

The show ended with great fanfare. Trapeze artists performed a mid-air routine as the entire chorus joined in for the song's climax. I could've sworn they had a full orchestra hidden somewhere for how intense the music was. The vibrations were like a giant boot slowly crushing my rib cage. When it finally stopped and I could breathe again, it took me ten seconds to realize I should probably clap.

"Uh… wow! That was great." I half-heartedly brought my hands together a few times. This seemed to satisfy Benibara.

"Thank you, thank you," she joined hands with her fellow 'actresses' and bowed. "You've been a beautiful audience. Please, you're too kind. You're embarrassing me. Please stop."

I stopped. She did tell me to.

"Okay, thank you so much for showing me that." I started to get up. "You guys have some unique and interesting ideas, but I should really be one my way-"

"Why so soon?" Benibara appeared at my side, sweeping me off my feet into her arms. "You've barely had a taste of what we have to offer."

"I think I've had more than enough," I said. I squirmed and turned my face away from her just in case her jaw unhinged and she tried to swallow me.

She snapped her fingers, summoning five girls all dressed in maid outfits. Not the fetish-y kind either. Actual straight up uniforms complete with white aprons and bonnets. They were eerily identical, all with black hair in perfect buns and painted on smiles. Their eyes as they stared at me were more doll-like than anything I'd ever seen, and keep in mind most of my friends were artificial humans.

"Haruhi, meet your new waitstaff," Benibara said. "While you are with us, they will see to it that your every need is met. Whatever your heart desires, just say the word, and it will be done."

"My heart desires to go home."

Benibara just laughed.

I was so, so screwed.
Another snap and the women from the van returned. They stood on either side of Benibara, arms folded, like her own personal entourage. "I believe you've already met my associates, Lily Model Chizuru and Daisy Model Hinako. They will show you to your room. After you've had some rest, we'll give you the grand tour of our glorious home."

"You'll see the rose gardens and the swimming pool," said Hinako, gripping my left arm.

"We just put in the most darling gazebo. I know you'll love it," said Chizuru, taking hold of my right.

"Then we can all go horseback riding."

"Or play croquet."

"Or write poetry in the grove by the duck pond."

"Or if it rains, we can go to the spa and spent the day relaxing in one of our luxury hot springs."

"Calm yourselves, ladies. Haruhi will see everything in due time," Benibara said. She hovered over her two friends, who hovered over me. It was far too much hovering and I would've happily fallen through the floor and into that hot spring if it just got me away from these three. Benibara caressed my cheek, her syrupy smile turning cold. "I'll make you forget all about those pathetic Ouran bots, and then you'll stay with us forever."

She blew me a kiss as her goons dragged me out. I couldn't say a word, though I had a few in mind. I won't repeat them, but trust me, when I was in 'my room' and satisfied that no hidden cameras or microphones had been installed, I let all my feelings out into the ether, and most of them weren't nice.

One of the maids brought me dinner at six. It was on a cart and covered by one of those domes they use at fancy restaurants. She curtsied for me. "My Lady, I am Naoko, your head servant. Ask me for anything at all and it will be done."

"Like helping me get out of here?"

"Anything but that. Enjoy your meal, My Lady."

Every other interaction I had with the staff went the same way. It was safe to assume all of them were robots, and even safer to assume they firmly were under Benibara's thumb. Her word was law and going against her was tantamount to treason.

Now I won't lie and say there weren't a few nice things about Lobelia Inc. Benibara came with Chizuru and Hinako the next morning to give me that tour they promised. I was running on minimal amounts of sleep, but they carried on like I was a willing participant (this would be a continuing pattern). Without the blindfold, I saw that my prison was actually a sprawling countryside manor. Five floors and enough rooms to house a small city, it was ideal for a top secret robotics manufacturer and perfect for when the robots eventually revolted and rebuilt the place in their own image.

They had a full kitchen, completely untouched aside from the oven they used to cook my food. Why they kept it when none of them ate, I didn't know. Unless they'd been planning for a while to nab some random human girl off the street.

The ground floor was dedicated to athletics. They had a track field, a tennis court, and not one, but two swimming pools. I think Benibara was trying to imply that I should put on one of the bathing suits they provided and go for a dip with her, but I just smiled and asked about the next four floors like I didn't hear her.
They were for theater and dance practice. They also had a quiet room for reading and writing, a crafts room, and a movie theater. Mostly they just played old shows of theirs, but they also had a few Takarazuka revues like the ones my mom used to watch. Apart from that were the bedrooms. Mine was on the top floor and it locked from the inside and out. All you needed was a key and I'd have nowhere to go. Should go without saying I wasn't given all the copies.

It was admittedly a very nice house. Like one of those vacation retreats in Karuizawa. Also, the food was incredible. I don't know where they learned to cook, but I had so much fancy tuna that first night. At least four helpings. I told myself I was gorging to avoid the anguish of never seeing my friends again, but really it was just that good. Honestly, if it weren't for the kidnapping stuff, I would've been perfectly happy at Lobelia.

It's just… *they freaking kidnapped me!*

I made my escape that night after they returned me to my room to get ready for dinner, which I'd be taking in the theater room.

"We're revisiting our greatest hits tonight just for you," Benibara had whispered huskily in my ear while I thought about puppies.

It was quarter after six. My maids would be in to help me get dressed in fifteen minutes. I'd already seen the dresses they had for me to choose from and I never fully recovered from the headache (don't even get me started on the shoes). I waited until the housekeeper finished her rounds. The number of towels and blankets on her cart never seemed to dwindle. I wouldn't be surprised if she was really a spy making sure I stayed put.

The door was unlocked and I walked out in my regular clothes like I belonged there. First I headed for the elevator, thinking if I made it to the ground floor, I could make a beeline for the door. If anyone stopped me, I could tell them Benibara wanted me outside for yoga practice or whatever. About halfway there, I realized how incredibly flimsy that plan was. Forgetting how unlikely it was any Lobelia girl would let me leave without Benibara's express permission, didn't most elevators these days have cameras?

For that matter, were there cameras in the hallways?

I looked around for any sign of a lens. I kept my steps light. My senses were attuned to the slightest sound, so when the maid returned, at least one of her cart's wheels squeaking, my reaction time was heightened to superhuman levels. I raced into the bathroom and listened by the door. She rolled on none the wiser. I counted to thirty and peeked outside. She was long gone.

I went for the stairs. This was technically an emergency, so they seemed like the safest bet. I climbed down three flights, stopping periodically to sneak around the exit doors. A group of girls almost spotted me through the window as I passed the third floor. I ducked at the last second and waited for their voices to fade, then I continued on.

The twins and I had watched a spy thriller from America a few weeks earlier. I don't remember much about it now, but they loved it. They said the female lead reminded them of me, that I'd make an excellent spy. I knew they were just buttering me up, but as I reached the first floor and slipped through a crack in the door, I couldn't help but play the movie's theme song in my head. The lobby was empty. I couldn't hear anyone. I crept along and found a side door leading to a field. It wasn't ideal, but as long as no one saw me and I could get cell phone reception, it would do.

'Get outside. Call for help,' I told myself. 'You have Kyoya on speed dial. Call him, tell him what happened. He'll find you. He'll send help. You'll be home by nightfall. Everything will be fine.'
I slid my phone out of my pocket as I tiptoed to the door. The hilly landscape and open air looked so inviting. Like a picture on a greeting card. It had no knob but offered no resistance when I pushed it. My heart swelled in my chest. I threw caution to the wind and shoved it with all my might. I was ready to run. I was ready to be free!

I was… staring at a pool. Thirty Lobelia robots in swimsuits swam, sunbathed, and played volleyball. Every single one of them stopped to look at me. Benibara, lounging on a float with a fancy drink I assume was just for show, eyed me over her sunglasses.

"Afternoon, Haruhi," she said. "I see you've found our secret pool entrance. Did you like the print on the door? We think it adds a special touch to our humble abode. Gives our guests a small taste of the land before we take our bi-weekly hike through the mountains."

I couldn't stop blinking; my brain had ceased functioning. You'd think I was the robot for how stiff and stilted I was. Benibara set aside her drink on a tray held by a woman in a black and white bathing suit.

"Well, much as I'd like to invite you in, I believe it's almost showtime."

She snapped her fingers. I was really starting to hate that. The maids leaped out a second story window and whisked me off back the way I came.

By seven o'clock, I was unrecognizable. They'd done it all. Washed me, dried me, trimmed my hair, filed my nails, applied three layers of makeup, styled my hair, added extensions, styled those, and of course, choose the gaudiest, poofiest, pinkest dress to stuff me in. I'm pretty sure if Tamaki or my dad could see me, they'd have heart attacks.

Benibara arrived as they were pinning a hot pink bow in my hair. That thing must've weighed at least five pounds, so for the rest of this post and the majority of the next, assume I was in terrible neck pain and that it contributed to my mood.

"What do you think, Lady Benibara?" asked one of the maids.

She was dressed in a soldier's uniform, heavily altered to include vibrant white and blue colors, frilly sleeves, and broad shoulder pads. A sword I hoped was fake hung off one of her many belts. She observed me from afar. I thought I saw tears in her eyes and I was probably right.

"I've seen many a lovely maiden," she said, taking my hand. "Princesses, angels, goddesses among the filth of men. But you, my dear, you are the most sublime creature my unworthy eyes have ever beheld."

The maids squealed and fainted, oil leaking out their nostrils in the creepiest way. I tried not to flinch when Benibara pulled me flush against her. If there were music playing, we would've been waltzing. She fed me a few more lines that I didn't commit to memory. The first one only sticks out because as she was singing my praises, I caught a glimpse of myself in a full-length mirror, and what I saw resembled a life-sized, fluffy ventriloquist dummy. If I could draw, I'd show you a picture, but maybe it's for the best that I can't.

"Give us a moment alone," Benibara ordered. "We'll be along shortly. Make sure dinner is ready and everyone is in place for the show."

"Yes, Lady Benibara." The maids glided out the door, perfectly synchronized. Maybe I'm biased, but even Hikaru and Kaoru in their 'single-minded' days were more life-like than that. Did I mention they all looked exactly the same?
"I've been waiting to have you all to myself," Benibara said as she guided me toward the window. They were massive with sheer pink curtains. The sky was clear and the moon half full. It was nice, but all I could pay attention to were her nails, long and pointed like claws. "Tell me, Maiden, have you enjoyed your stay with us?"

I swallowed. "It's been nice. The food's really good and my bed is comfy. This place is enormous. It'd be a nice set up for a pension or a hotel."

"It would, wouldn't it?" Benibara walked ahead of me. "A perfect haven for the lost and the lonely. For far too long, women have suffered the avarice of men. If I could only take them in my arms and protect them from all of life's trials and tribulations, I would give up every part of my physical being. To see their smiles would be like ascending into heaven on the wings of an angel."

She glanced at me as if expecting me to fall all over myself praising her. When I didn't, she hummed a bar. I messed with my skirts, of which there were at least four, wondering if I could slip out while she was distracted. Trying to walk backward proved to be an awful idea. My heel snagged on the dress and I nearly ripped it in half. I became convinced that my ankles would snap at the slightest movement. For the moment, I was stuck with Benibara.

"And yet, for all that I crave the enrapturing joy of a maiden," she paused dramatically, "I haven't seen you smile once. Why is that?"

'Because you kidnapped me!' "I'm just… thinking about how great it'll be to tell all my friends about this place on Monday. When I go back to school."

It was a weak attempt to address the elephant in the room, but it was the best I could think of with that concrete block of a bow on my head. Benibara walked to me, studying me with a new kind of interest.

"Haruhi," she said, "we observed you for weeks. You were chosen to be the first human to cross our borders. Do you know why that is?"

I shook my head.

She bent over me; even in heels I barely reached her neck. "Because no one has experienced the dangerous arrogance of men like you have. No one else has ever been forced to share a cramped apartment with not one, but six male robots. I can't imagine what you've endured. I only hope to prove to you that robotics are capable of so much more than lechery and pig-headed buffoonery."

"I know that." I shoved her hands off me. She backed away in shock like I'd stabbed her. "With all due respect, I've already seen everything a robot can be, and I really don't appreciate the way you talk about my friends."

"Your friends are men. Ouran men at that. Their only purpose is to drag women down into the depth of depravity. Can you honestly say they've never once been a burden on you?"

"I admit, there were some rough patches," I said, "but whatever happens, we get through it together. I wouldn't trade the last three months for anything."

"I understand," said Benibara, who clearly didn't. "You're not the first maiden to let fairy tales cloud her judgment. Here at Lobelia, we know how to make women happy more than any man ever could. We took you so we could show you."

"And that's the problem!" In my anger, I managed to take one step forward without tripping. "You took me. I didn't choose to come here!"
"You didn't choose to take them in either!"

"But I did choose to love them. You're trying to force me to love you and it's not going to happen. As soon as they come get me, I'm out of here and I'm never coming back."

Benibara gave a mocking laugh. If Chizuru or Hinako or any of the maids were still here, they'd probably laugh in harmony with her. "You tell a good joke, Maiden. Those walking junkyards will never come for you. By now, they've already found another woman to lure in with their tricks."

"You don't know anything about them."

"I know enough," Benibara folded her arms, her eyes full of pity, infuriatingly enough. Like I was a child in need of her 'wisdom'. "They may be robots, but a man is always a man. They're all the same: shallow, selfish, weak cowards who wouldn't lift a finger to help someone in need unless it benefited them. Trust me, Haruhi, they won't save you."

Blinding yellow light hit us like a missile. Ironically, it was Benibara who lost her footing. She fell ungracefully on her backside and rolled on her stomach. Her butt stuck out in the air and she was dazed, like a line of invisible fists were punching her in quick succession. I almost went to help her- blame my mother drilling common courtesy into me from a young age- but instead, I wobbled to the window, pressing my nose against it as the light moved on to the next window.

It was a searchlight, I realized. Mounted on top of a tank. An actual military grade tank which had completely destroyed the gates and half the garden. There, sticking out of the hatch, wearing camo gear and war paint, flanked by five identically dressed figures all posing like male models at a photo shoot, was-

"HARUHI! FEAR NOT! WE'RE HERE TO SAVE YOU!"

He didn't have a megaphone if that's what you're thinking. He didn't need one. Tamaki is as Tamaki does.

Benibara had recovered, enough to stand beside me, blue in the face with horror. I looked at her and I grinned.

"You were saying?"

Posted by Haruhi at 6:34 0 comments
"How dare you?!

I remember those three words with perfect clarity. I've said before that a lot of the conversations are slightly embellished due to the passage of time dulling my memory. I can tell you that my first conversation with Tamaki, my argument with Dr. Suoh, and Mrs. Fujioka's story about her husband are all verbatim. Those are moments I can never forget if I live to be a hundred years old.

But there's more to dialogue than just words. I'm learning as I go along that tone, inflection, speed, they're all important. They're what give your words real weight and drive home the meaning behind what you're saying. I saw this English phrase once online, 'I didn't say she stole my money'. Depending on which word you emphasize, that one sentence can have seven different meanings. It's kind of amazing how language functions in our society.

I tell you all this because when Benibara screamed 'how dare you' at my friends, the way she said it isn't what you'd expect. Oh, she was outraged, to be sure, but it was the kind of outrage typically expressed towards people who cut in front of you at the supermarket. Or when someone parks too close to your car and blocks you in. Everyday annoyances like that. Not for hostile strangers who demolish your property and cause tens of thousands of dollars in damages with their stolen tank.

You need to understand this because otherwise, my reaction won't make sense. As soon as Benibara said this, said it the way she said it… I laughed. I laughed long and I laughed hard. I laughed so hard, I can't even describe it.

I was on my back, my feet kicking the air. One of my heels was thrown; the other hung tight to my big toe by a strap. It hurt, but I didn't care. I didn't care, but Benibara sure did.

"Maiden, this is nothing to laugh at!" she cried. "Those cretins have invaded our home. They've come to take you!"

"You say that like it's a bad thing," I remarked, wiping my eyes.

"LOBELIA INCORPORATED!" Tamaki shouted. A crowd had formed around the tank, Hinako and Chizuru at the forefront. They'd linked arms as if planning to halt the tank's advance with their bare hands. "WE HAVE COME TO RETRIEVE HARUHI FUJIOKA! SURRENDER HER NOW OR WE WILL BE FORCED TO TAKE ACTION!"

"We will never give her to you!" Benibara roared. "Lobelia is a safe haven for womankind and you are not welcome here. Leave at once!"

"NOT WITHOUT HARUHI!"

I had a feeling this would go nowhere, so I ripped the other heel off and ran for the window. I leaned out so far, I almost lost balance. Benibari grabbed me just in time, but when she tried to hide me from sight, I shoved her hands away.

"Guys, I'm up here!" I waved my arms like I was trying to fly.
"HARUHI!" Tamaki's face lit up. His smile was too wide for his face and his eyes full of stars. "YOU LOOK ADORABLE IN THAT DRESS!"

"SUPER CUTE!" Hikaru, Kaoru, and Hunny agreed as they and Mori all gave me a thumbs up.

"Thank you, but I'd like to go home now!"

"DON'T WORRY, HARUHI! WE'RE COMING!"

"You most certainly are not!" Benibara hollered. "I'm giving you one more chance to turn that filthy tank around and if you don't, you will suffer the consequences!"

"Bring it, crazy lady," Hikaru said, taking a fighting stance which Kaoru mimicked.

"We'll take you and your whole army down," he cried.

"Anytime, anywhere!"

"While I can appreciate their outrage, why don't we take a more civilized approach?" Kyoya stepped into the light, unconcerned with the growing horde of robots baying for his blood.

Benibara sneered. "You speak as if Ouran bots know anything about being civilized"

"Oh, I think we'll surprise you," Kyoya smiled, and even though I was still deep in enemy territory with no guaranteed method of escape, I knew Lobelia was done.

"That settles it!" Tamaki proclaimed. He did a front flip out of the tank and landed with cat-like grace at the head of the group. They'd all shifted into what I think was supposed to be threatening stances, but in the end, they just looked like cover models. "Benibara of Lobelia Incorporated. I, Tamaki of Ouran, challenge you to a duel for Haruhi Fujioka's hand!"

"On behalf of my sisters, I accept your challenge!" Benibara pounded her chest. Her overly dramatized version of a soldier's uniform suddenly seemed a lot more fitting.

"Then at dawn, we shall do battle. The winner takes Haruhi!"

"The loser dies!" shouted Hikaru.

Everyone stopped and stared at him. Even Kaoru.

"What are you doing?" He elbowed his brother. "We didn't rehearse that."

"I'm sorry, I was caught in the heat of the moment."

"Leave that sort of thing to the boss. You know we can't kill anyone."

"But when you think about it, it does get the point across that you shouldn't mess with us."

"I think that makes sense," Hunny piped in. "What about you Takashi?"

"Maybe."

"It's a terrible idea, though," said Kyoya.

"Okay, what if we change it to a prank war or something. Loser has to do something really embarrassing like wear their clothes backward at a social event or-"
"No no, how are we going to enforce a rule like that? Once we get Haruhi, we're out of here."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"What about the loser has to make the winners cake?"

"By the way, are we returning the tank when we're done with it? I don't think that was discussed beforehand."

"ENOUGH!" Benibara was shaking so hard, I'm pretty sure a screw fell out her ear. "I will not listen to this nonsense any longer! Seven a.m. The main arena. Be there or Haruhi is MINE!"

She slammed the window shut and dragged me away. The curtains closed on their own, cutting off my view of the outside world. I fought hard against Benibara's grip, but she'd dropped the chivalrous act completely and didn't seem to care how many of my bones she cracked. She had at least enough composure not to throw me in my seat. She sat me down and held my arms at my sides. I wasn't resisting anymore, at least not physically. My eyes pierced her skull as apoplectically as hers dug through mine.

"If you think they can win, you are sorely mistaken," she seethed.

"And if you think you can win, you don't know what you're in for," I said.

Granted, I didn't know what Lobelia was in for either, but for once, I didn't care. I hoped whatever they decided on was as chaotic as possible. Hell, maybe they should go and grab a few more tanks while they were at it. I heard drive away in the one they'd commandeered. A crunch followed by a horrified shriek of, 'My birdbath!' made me grin like a fool right in Benibara's face.

"It's a shame. You're far deeper in the dark than I realized." She touched my cheek. "I pray the time will come when you see the light."

I slapped her hand away, and I think even I was shocked by it. "I've seen more than my fair share of light, thank you. Now I just want to go home, turn the lights off, and go to sleep on my futon. With my friends."

Benibara clutched her hand to her chest, staring at me like a wounded animal. I'd just kicked the hornet's nest and I knew it even then, but my friends were outside ready to start a war to save me. There was no turning back.

"I see," Benibara said. Then she left me. I guess that fancy dinner and show were canceled. What a shame.

Before anyone asks, no, I did not go hungry. Benibara was mad, but she wasn't that mad. A maid arrived half an hour later with a large bento box full of freshly cooked beef and steamed rice. I'm ashamed to say I asked for seconds. I'm sorry, the food there was just way too good. After polishing off my second plate and changing out of my massive dress- for once the maids' help was fully appreciated- I crawled under the covers, intending to knock myself out for a few hours before I was inevitably stuffed into another princess dress. I couldn't imagine them doing anything else. I was the damsel in the tower now, waiting for my knights in shining armor to come rescue me.

Boy, that sounds stupid. No wonder I never got into Disney movies.

Anyway, I woke up to an alarm I hadn't set blaring at me. It was six in the morning. One more hour until the big showdown. I had one foot off the bed when the maids surrounded me. Were they watching through the door or something? I was truly afraid to ask.
"Good morning, Haruhi. We have your breakfast." She clapped her hands and a fourth maid wheeled in a food cart. Fresh fruit, grilled fish, and an omelet which melted in my mouth when I ate it.

My prediction came true when, upon swallowing the last bite, the maids hung an absolute monster of a pink and white princess gown (complete with elbow length gloves and a tiara) on the bedpost and sized me up like a pack of apex predators. They got me dressed, did my hair, applied my make up, and then shoved a new pair of shoes onto my feet. They were pointed at the toe and reminded me of old Chinese foot binding practices.

Fortunately, I wasn't expected to walk in them. Two more maids with a kago appeared and I was placed in the seat with my feet tucked in. They carried me into the elevator; this time, I didn't complain. In fact, I didn't say anything at all. I was perfectly still and compliant, like a porcelain doll. That's what they wanted in the end, and for my last few hours in the clutches of Lobelia, I was willing to play along.

We descended to the ground floor and they brought me outside to a massive stadium. I can't say with total certainty that it was there the night before, but it was solid concrete and bared the flag of Lobelia. It was actually just Benibara's face surrounded by roses and lilies, but my drivers saluted all the same.

I was brought to the top box, where Chizuru and Hinako were waiting. They had new outfits on; hot pink pantsuits with sunglasses and diamond studded earpieces. The latter didn't connect to anything as far as I could tell. Just there to complete the look. Say what you want about Lobelia, they knew how to accessorize.

"Maiden, we'll be your personal bodyguards for the duration of the duel," said Chizuru. She and Hinako bowed. They'd clearly taken lessons from Benibara. "On our honor, we shall defend you with our lives. We are your humble servants."

"No man will even think to touch you with their unclean hands on our watch," said Hinako. "Fear not, fair Haruhi, you have never been safer."

"That's nice," I mumbled.

They lifted me out of the kago and carried me to a throne set up before an array of windows. It was so big, even Mori would look small sitting it in, and covered from top to bottom in soft cushioning. I sank in all the way to the wooden frame. Combined with the dress, I was more fabric than human at this point.

A maid approached me from behind. I'd never seen this one before, but she had the uniform and a mass of bleached blonde hair covering her eyes.

"Can I get you anything to drink Lady Haruhi?" Her unnaturally squeaky voice made my ears hurt.

"I'm fine, thanks."

"Let us know if you need us." She slid back to stand beside a maid with straight black hair and long bangs.

The show began with the blare of a trumpet. A full orchestra, in fact. They were positioned off to the side of the field and played a sweeping instrumental as the gates opened. Benibara, clad in what appeared to be a bull fighter's outfit without the hat, rode in on a massive parade float covered in flowers, ribbons, and, creepily enough, a paper mache bust of her head. It winked at the crowd just
as the real thing. If robots could bleed, I'm pretty sure fountains would've erupted from every nose in attendance.

A troupe of dancers preceded the float, performing a complicated gymnastics routine set to pop music. As someone who can hardly stand on one leg for more than a minute, my bones ached just watching them. Hinako and Chizuru had installed themselves beside my chair, arms crossed as if that was all they needed to look threatening. I remained impassive while in their line of sight. Never would they have reason to believe I wasn't on their side. I even clapped when the song ended and Benibara surfed off the top of her giant fake head. I was far less passionate than the adoring crowd below and I didn't call for an encore, but I say it still counts.

"Ladies of Lobelia Incorporated!" The announcer shouted. I recognized her voice. She was the one who called me cute yesterday while I was being marched around blindfolded. I shivered. "We have gathered here to witness the destruction of these six inferior male beings! Here in the south corner, the challengers! Odious, cheaply made, and thoroughly unsatisfying, as all men are. Stand strong before the evil that is…. OURAN CO.!

Hisses and boos shook the foundation as Tamaki, Kyoya, and Hunny rode the tank into view. I never did figure out how they got that thing inside. Hunny had changed from his combat gear to a gi, complete with a pink headband covered in bunnies. On the back of the gi was a picture of all of us together. 'FIGHTING FOR FRIENDS' was stitched below it.

So yeah, pure evil right there.

"And on the north side, a woman who needs no introduction."

'Then don't give her one,' I thought.

"Standing at nearly six feet tall and dressed fabulously in a designer traje de luces, The Lady of the Red Rose, the founder of Lobelia's Zuka model division, the creator of paradise, descendant of Mother Venus."

There was more, but by now, the screaming was too loud for even a magnified voice to break through. They did at least quiet down in time for the announcer to run out of nicknames.

"-the one, the only... LADY BENIBARA!"

Benibara blew kisses and smoldered left and right. She really was a less charismatic Tamaki in a lot of ways. That was never more apparent than when she pointed at him, calling him out first, and he and Kyoya just rolled their eyes.

"Thank you, thank you all," Benibara said as the microphone was passed to her. "I'm glad you're all here today. This is not merely a battle to prove the inherent uselessness of men, but also to protect the honor of our beloved Lady Haruhi."

A spotlight shined on me and the crowd applauded. I tried to smile, but my cheeks were stuck. To my right was a jumbotron and as the camera pointed at me, I thought for a second I was looking at a painted up doll version of myself. I cringed when I realized it was actually a painted up me. Even Tamaki recoiled in horror, and then he glared at Benibara so hard I expected him to spontaneously transform into a dragon and breathe fire at her.

"You will pay for this maleficence, Lobelia. We will not allow you to hold our beloved Haruhi hostage and dress her up in clashing colors. You fiend!"

She handed the microphone back and drew her sword. The blade sparkled in the light of the rising sun.

"Let the duel begin," the announcer shouted. Then she sprinted off the field as Benibara charged at Tamaki.

I still wonder why she chose him first when, as a martial artist capable of throwing guys five times his size, Hunny was clearly the bigger threat. Personal resentment I guess. There's a reason I keep making comparisons between the two. Regardless, Tamaki had come prepared. In addition to the tank, he'd somehow procured a sword of his own. He also somehow knew how to use it, well enough to keep Benibara from chopping his head off.

It wasn't easy to follow the action, they were both so fast. I know Benibara swung a lot, Tamaki blocked a lot, neither got too many hits in. Tamaki managed to slash her across the chest, ripping her coat beyond repair. Someone in the audience, perhaps the designer, screamed and fainted. I remember them taking her out on a stretcher while Tamaki cornered Benibara by the float.

"Surrender!" He aimed for her head and missed.

"Never!" She parried and nicked him on the shoulder.

While this was going on, Kyoya was on his phone. No, seriously, he was typing away and not paying attention while Hunny paced around the perimeter of the tank, daring anyone to face him. You'll notice I haven't mentioned Mori, Hikaru, or Kaoru. They weren't there, and I had no idea what kind of plan they had in the works. I just hoped it was a good one.

Five minutes into the fight, no progress had been made on either side. As robots, I doubted they'd get tired very soon. Kyoya pocketed his phone and waited for Benibara to throw Tamaki to the ground. They locked eyes and Kyoya nodded. Tamaki tried to nod back; the blade at his throat made it difficult.

"Did you honestly believe this little stunt of yours would work?" The cameras zoomed in on them. I could see the dirt stains on Tamaki's cheek and the streak of oil dripping from a cut on his temple. "You'll never defeat me like this. I'm an advanced model, superior to you in every way."

Hunny had stopped walking. He stood unmoving next to Kyoya. Neither of them stepped in.

Tamaki smiled. "I don't know how advanced you are, Benibara, but I must admit, I admire you. You clearly take the safety and happiness of your people very seriously. I think we're alike in that way."

"Spare me your soft-hearted drivel, Princely model. You and I both know how this is going to end: with you on your knees, bowing to my greatness. You rusty old parts are nothing but pebbles in my shoe."

"Maybe so," Tamaki said, "but do you want to know what else I am?"

"Do tell," Benibara said.

Tamaki paused. Gotta have that dramatic effect. "A distraction."

Benibara blinked. "What?"

Then I heard the helicopter.

I couldn't tell you want kind it was, so don't ask. Something big and black with whirling blades. It
kicked up a massive wind storm and blew dirt all over Benibara's outfit. I think she started screaming, but it was impossible to hear over the noise, even inside.

The helicopter flew low, which I can't imagine was safe. It was only for a second, but I caught a glimpse of Mori in the cockpit. He flew like an expert and raised a hand to the tower like he knew I was watching, and I could almost hear his brisk, deadpan, "Hey."

"Hey," I whispered back.

My 'bodyguards' surrounded me.

"I don't know what their game is," Hinako growled, "but they will not get you if we have anything to say about it."

I think she meant it as reassurance, but it sounded like a threat.

"Oh, but my lady, we've already been infiltrated!" The blonde maid had tears in her eyes as she clung to Hinako's arm.

"What? By who?" Chizuru demanded.

The two maids broke into evil, catlike grins. The wigs came off with a shock of spiky red hair.

"By the greatest and sneakiest Mischievous Models to ever exist," Hikaru proclaimed.

"Prepare for battle," Kaoru cried.

It wasn't much of a battle. For all their bluster neither Chizuru or Hinako were built for fighting. They were quickly dispatched with a few exaggerated ninja moves (they even made their own sound effects) while I worked the medieval torture devices they called shoes off my feet. I pried the second one off just as Hikaru threw me over his shoulder.

"No time," he said. "We're working with a very small window of opportunity."

"How small?"

Kaoru grabbed my chair/throne and hurled it at the glass. It cracked and shattered. The roar of helicopter blades deafened me, the wind blowing my tiara and hairpiece off. Without the extra weight on my head, I could think clearly about how insane it would be for us to jump out this ten-story window to reach a flimsy rope bridge hanging from the side of the helicopter with a swarm of Lobelia girls chasing us.

And, of course, that's exactly what we did.

I didn't scream, which I'm proud of myself for. The dress was so big and heavy, I don't know how Hikaru could aim through it, but his hand caught the bottom rung easily. Kaoru waited until we were safely aboard to jump himself. He'd had to fight off another maid, this one actually possessing some legitimate skill, but he made it with only a few scratches. As soon as we were all safe, Mori turned on the speakers.

"I have her. Let's go."

Music to my ears.

"You'll never take her!" Benibara shouted, pointing her sword at the retreating aircraft. She'd forgotten all about Tamaki, who crawled away from her to join Kyoya and Hunny in the tank.
"She was never yours to begin with," Kyoya said. Somehow, whoever was running the cameras didn't see fit to shut them off, so this whole thing was broadcast on the jumbotron. "Haruhi belongs to herself, and I believe she's made her choice."

"You'd better believe I have," I said, squeezing Hikaru's hand.

"Benibara, it's been an honor doing battle with you," Tamaki said, sweeping into a bow. "Know that you have my respect as a fellow leader, but now we must take our leave."

"As if we'll let you," she cried. She really did not know when to quit.

Luckily, Tamaki did. "Forgive me, but... we're the ones with the tank."

He did a backflip twenty feet in the air and landed perfectly inside the hatch. It was actually pretty cool, like something you'd see in a Hollywood blockbuster and think 'wow, that is so unrealistic.'

Turning the tank around, they followed the helicopter as we soared off the Lobelia estate and towards sweet freedom. I also feel obliged to mention that whoever was driving the tank really sucked at it. They crashed through the paper mache Benibara and took its head off.

If you think we were home free, I'm sorry to say it wasn't quite that easy. Even with their boss incapacitated, Lobelia didn't pride itself on excellence and perfect choreography for nothing. Being airborne, I saw the battalion blocking the tank long before they did.

"You shall not pass!" They yelled, throwing out their palms like police officers.

We were still flying low and I could see my maids among their ranks. An idea hit me, a crazy one I was ninety percent sure wouldn't work, but the ten percent of hope shining through was enough for me to try.

"Naoko!" I shouted as loud as I could. "I order you to let the tank pass!"

Naoko, flanked by her team of maids, looked around in confusion. I don't know what this was doing to their circuitry. I was asking them to go against their own 'sisters'. The tank was fast approaching, preparing to swerve. Finally, Naoko shrugged at her fellows and swept the legs out from under the woman behind her.

"What are you doing?" She demanded as the rest of Naoko's group lunged at their former allies.

"I'm sorry," Naoko replied, "but Lady Benibara said we have to obey her orders."

The fight broke the group into two opposing forces. Naoko and her troops pushed the loyalists back into the trees, creating a gap big enough for the tank to fit through. My friends cheered and patted me on the back for my quick thinking. I enjoyed their praise, almost as much as I did ripping that stupid dress off and throwing it into the lake. I didn't even care that I had nothing on except a pair of shorts and an undershirt.

I guess flight wasn't a major interest among the denizens of Lobelia, because from there, no one followed us. Actually, as we left the forest behind and entered a clear road just outside city limits, I realized there was a car driving ahead of the tank. When it turned, we turned. When they were about to cross a bridge, the tank stopped in a small thicket and my friends all jumped into the car.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"We'll tell you later," said Kaoru, "but don't worry. He helped us find you."
I wouldn't know who 'he' was until we landed on top of a building with a helicopter pad. We were in a part of the city I didn't recognize. It looked more run down and I later found out the building was abandoned. Which made it the perfect place for a rendezvous.

Tamaki, Kyoya, and Hunny were already waiting when we touched down, and they weren't alone. The man who drove them was waiting by the door, but I couldn't acknowledge his presence as all six of my friends tackled me at once. I'll skip the reunion this time; it was mostly just the same as when I got them back from Mrs. Fujioka. We all hugged and cried it out. Even Kyoya let go of his well cultivated 'cool' demeanour and hugged me tighter than the rest.

"Please don't scare me like that again," he whispered in my ear.

"I'll do my best," I said for his ears only. "Thanks for coming to get me."

"Always."

He let go and we walked away from the helicopter together. After two steps, Kyoya stopped. He swayed a bit as his face went blank, then he fell. I shrieked and rushed to his side.

"What's wrong?" I shook his prone body. No response. "Kyoya? Are you okay?"

"Calm down, Fujioka-san." Dr. Suoh kneeled beside me, gently turning Kyoya over.

Reaching into his hair, he popped open the back cover of his skull. I still hated seeing all that machinery, but I couldn't tear my eyes away. Dr. Suoh withdrew the batteries, lips pursed as he weighed them in his hands.

"Is he all right?" I asked desperately.

"As I thought," said Dr. Suoh. "All that stress depleted the batteries."

My heart, ready to explode, slowly deflated. "So he's okay."

"I have a box of fresh batteries in the trunk." He looked at Tamaki. "Princely model… sorry, Tamaki, would you please carry him?"

Without a word to his creator, Tamaki lifted Kyoya in his arms and deposited him in the backseat. Cramming seven more people inside was an ordeal, even considering how small Hunny and I were. I ended up on Hikaru's lap while Hunny sat on Mori's. Tamaki sat in the front with his father, and I can never be sure that an entire silent conversation didn't take place between them as the twins regaled me with the tale of their rescue mission.

"You should've seen us, Haruhi. We were like real action heroes." Kaoru tried to pump his fist, but he almost socked Mori in the jaw. "We marched into that military base, grabbed that tank and took the chopper for good measure."

"All we needed was a soundtrack," said Hikaru, "but Kyoya said music would be distracting and wouldn't let us use it."

"I beat up twenty soldiers!" Hunny exclaimed proudly, like a kid showing off macaroni art. "Takashi got eighteen. Right, Takashi?"

"Yeah."

"That's all really great," I said, pulling my shorts over my knees to get some warmth, "and I could
not be more grateful that you went so far to save me, but you guys do know most of… all of that stuff is illegal, right?"

Hikaru snorted. "Well of course we do. We almost got arrested by the Japanese military before Dr. Suoh showed up."

Through the rearview mirror, I caught a mysterious, faint smile through a glare of sunlight. "I was able to persuade them to give us what we needed."

It was then that I decided some things are better off staying a mystery.

Luckily, none of the neighbors were outside when we arrived at my building, saving us from having to explain why Kyoya looked so… well, dead. We got him inside and Dr. Suoh outfitted him with a fresh set of batteries. Soon, he was back on his phone checking stock prices or whatever he spent his evenings doing. He glanced at me once, making sure I hadn't disappeared again. Hunny meanwhile had taken over the kitchen to bake the biggest, best cake of my life to celebrate my safe return home.

"Will you be joining us, Dr. Suoh?" I asked.

He was already at the door, his coat over his arm. "Thank you, but I have a lot of paperwork to finish by tomorrow. You don't have to worry about Lobelia, Fujioka-san. We at Ouran co. will be monitoring them closely now that we know about their... new management."

That's one way to put it.

"I'm not worried," I said, and I meant it. I was home and my friends were safe. I couldn't be scared if I wanted to.

Dr. Suoh seemed to realize this. He cleared his throat and stood a little straighter. "Before I go, may I speak to you outside?"

Everyone tensed, no doubt remembering the last time I was alone with the doctor. I smiled at them, hoping it would assuage their fears, but even as we stepped out onto the balcony and I closed the door behind me, I could almost feel them listening.

"So," I said. I genuinely had no idea where this was going.

"You've had quite an eventful weekend, haven't you, Fujioka-san?"

I chuckled. "Yeah, I guess so."

Dr. Suoh nodded. "I've spoken to Mrs. Fujioka. She remains firm in her decision to give you full ownership of the robots."

"I'm sure Dr. Ootori did his best to convince her not to."

"Quite," said Dr. Suoh. "That in mind, expect to receive a contract in the mail by Friday at the latest. You'll need to sign and return it as soon as possible. Ask Kyoya if you need help. He's most knowledgeable in these matters."

"I know," I said, "and I'm glad you've learned all their names, Dr. Suoh."

He gave me that look again. That 'poor foolish child' look I hated more than anything. I didn't let it bother me, though. There was nothing he could do to us anymore. Once I signed those papers, I wouldn't even have to see him again if I didn't want to.
"For what it's worth, Fujioka-san, I think you're an amazing young woman, but I hope you'll remember what we discussed last time. You can't ignore reality for the sake of a fantasy."

"Thank you, Doctor, but I'm not one for fairy tales," I said, my hand on the doorknob. "I know exactly what's real."

I bowed my head in farewell and stepped inside, enshrouded in warmth and the arms of my dearest friends. Hunny and Mori had grabbed me, pulling me away to taste the cake batter before it went into the oven. I don't love sweets, but let me tell you, that cake was the best thing I've ever tasted.

(Take that, Lobelia.)

"How about a movie marathon?" Hikaru waved the remote. "Anyone up for The Fast and Furious?"

"No no! We should watch the Three Kingdoms," said Tamaki. "It's on channel six."

"What about the cake show?" I shouldn't have to tell you who that was.

We never actually decided on one thing to watch and settled for six hours of infomercials. By the time Mori switched the TV off, I was on the verge of sleep. Someone carried me to my futon and someone else tucked me in. I missed my alarm the next morning and was twenty minutes late for homeroom. My teacher scolded me for it and accused me of slacking off. At the end of the day, we walked home together with no scientists, heiresses, or enemy robots in sight.

All was well.

Posted by Haruhi at 10:05 pm 0 comments
I wasn't going to update this soon, and I wasn't going to include this story either, but I remembered it last night while getting ready for bed. It doesn't have much to do with anything, just one of Hikaru and Kaoru's random flights of fancy. I thought maybe you guys would enjoy it.

About a week after the events of ROCK and Lobelia Inc., I was doing my homework in the kitchen when they suddenly got on their knees and begged me to go to the beach with them.

"It's almost winter," Hikaru said.

"We want to see the ocean before it freezes over," Kaoru implored.

Which was probably the stupidest thing they could've used to convince me. All they had to do was say, 'Hey, let's go to the beach'.

We went on Saturday, which did end up being the last truly hot day of summer. The next day would see the start of a week of constant downpours, so you'd better believe I was proud of my own foresight. I had a purple one-piece buried in a box full of 'adorable' clothes my dad bought me that I swore I'd never wear. It was actually pretty respectable, not like old-fashioned Western long underwear, but concealing enough that I didn't feel exposed as we walked along the sand.

It was past noon when we got there, but the beach was mostly empty. Just a few families spread out along the shoreline. We found a spot near a cliff and set our blankets down. No one else was nearby, so we had the whole area to ourselves, which made it the perfect place to hold a sandcastle contest.

"The rules are simple!" Hunny stood on top of a rock taller than Mori and pointed down at us. " Whoever makes the best sandcastle gets a prize."

"What's the prize?" asked the twins.

"I can't tell you because it's top secret," Hunny said resolutely, "but it's definitely not a cake."

We split into groups of two. In an effort to shake things up, Kaoru worked with Kyoya while Hikaru teamed up with Mori. That left me and Tamaki to combine our talents to create a sandy paradise the likes of which no beachgoer had ever seen before.

Except neither of us had any talent for sandcastle building and we ended up with little more than the bottom of a potential sand snowman. Tamaki did stick a seashell he found on top, so it had at least that to distinguish it from all the other piles of sand around us. I hope I don't sound ungrateful or like a buzzkill. It really was fun dragging buckets of wet around in a vain attempt to give our castle some kind of shape. Tamaki kept coming up with convoluted strategies that didn't make sense and did little to help. I humored him anyway and reassured him when his plans didn't come into fruition.

"We've still got a better castle than Mori and Kaoru," I said.

It was only kind of true. We had a taller hill, but they had more seashells. They seemed to have given up on infrastructure and were now concentrating solely on design. They'd gathered a bunch of clam shells and set up a really nice pattern around the perimeter.
If there was a clear winner, it was Kyoya and Hikaru. Like the big fat cheater he was, Kyoya had a secret weapon: castle molds. I don't know where he got them, but he didn't share. Within five minutes, a small but perfect castle stood proudly before them. Hikaru carefully stuck a small flag made from twigs and paper into the tower. They even dug a moat.

Then it came time to announce the winner. Hunny examined our work with an analytical eye. As the only judge, he was obligated to pass fair judgment and make the right choice.

"They're all amazing and I can't decide. Everybody wins!"

Tamaki and the twins cheered. Mori gave a thumbs up. Kyoya just smiled and went back to tapping on his phone. I rested on my blanket for a while under an umbrella. It was partly cloudy that day, but when the sun was out, it just roasted everything in its path. The sand was hot under my feet, so I'd spent some time in the water to cool off. The twins joined me and we had fun splashing each other until they decided to sneak up behind Tamaki with a bucket of water. An hour later, he still hadn't caught them, though not for lack of trying.

I eventually got bored watching them attempt to climb the cliffside and glanced at Kyoya. He was the only one who hadn't dressed for the occasion. Instead of a swimsuit, he had knee-length khakis and a tropical print shirt. It should've looked ridiculous on him, just like anything that wasn't a three-piece suit, but he made it work. He was looking, dare I say it, pretty cool.

"Anything interesting?" I asked.

He hummed and put the phone away. "Stock prices are stable for now and there's nothing of note in the business section. I did receive an email from Dr. Suoh. The contract arrived this morning and everything has been taken care of."

The transfer of ownership paperwork had come in the mail on Thursday. Per Kyoya's advice, I'd overnighted it back with a guaranteed Saturday delivery. Nice to know I could trust the post office. I was afraid that thirteen hundred yen would go to waste.

I smiled softly. "That's good."

Despite what you may think, there was no need to celebrate. There was now an official document on file stating that the six of them belonged with me, but all that did was confirm what I've always known.

"Haruhi!" Hikaru waved at me from the beach volleyball court. Kaoru was with him, while Mori stood on the other side of the net. "Come on, we need one more!"

I looked one more time at Kyoya, but he was back on his phone and I didn't want to bother him. I rushed over and took my place at Mori's side. I'd never actually played beach volleyball before, or any volleyball at all, but there's a first time for everything.

Once again, I'll skip the finer details. I didn't get any hits; Hikaru and Kaoru got maybe five or six between them; Mori utterly dominated. Because of course, he did, he's Mori. I don't know what the twins were thinking when they challenged him. The game ended when he hit the ball too hard and popped a hole in it. The deflated husk landed at Hikaru's feet, and he kicked it away in frustration.

"You cheated," he snapped.

I just laughed. 'Sore loser' must've been a new feature.

I'll be honest, I'm having a hard time writing this entry. You'd think all the kidnappings and fight
scenes would be the difficult parts, and while they weren't easy to write, the words certainly flowed better then than they do now. One thing I'm finding out about writing is that in order to tell a good story, you really do need that edge. That conflict. Without it, you're just rambling on about a bunch of people on the beach doing nothing of note.

I think when I'm finished with this blog, I won't make the transition into fiction writing. I have a newfound respect for storytellers of all kinds: their job is way harder than it looks.

Okay, now that I've gotten all the whining out of my system, let's get back to the fun.

At the end of the night, we had a bonfire. I brought myself some marshmallows and gave a few to my friends so they could try cooking them. Unsurprisingly, only Hunny got it right. Mine was only burned on one side, so I ate the browned parts. Other than that, our firewood was soon covered in a charred mess of fluff. We kept trying anyway. It was the principle of the thing.

"Here's to us!" Hikaru said, holding his stick aloft. "To us and to Haruhi, the best friend a life-sized lover figure could ask for."

"The best sandcastle maker, too!" Hunny interjected.

I snorted. "You guys are exaggerating. Especially you, Hunny."

"I am not. Your castle was perfect," he said, folding his arms. "Because if we had to shrink down to an inch tall, it was big enough to fit all of us."

That did not make any sense at all. I still blushed.

Six sticks met in the center, around which time I realized Tamaki was missing. I looked around and I couldn't find him. Kaoru read my mind and pointed at the ocean, which he just walking out of.

"What are you doing?" I ran over to meet him. He was soaking wet and held a small shell in his hands.

"I saw this in the water." He placed it in my open palm. It was a pure white clamshell, not much different from the ones Mori and Kaoru used for their sandcastle. "For you."

"You jumped into the ocean to get me a shell?"

"Of course," he said like this was the most obvious thing in the world. And in a way, it was. We started walking back, taking our time to enjoy the air and each other's company. "It reminds me of a story I read, The Little Mermaid. Do you know it?"

"I saw the movie once. It was okay."

Tamaki shook his head. "The original story is different. Did you know she doesn't end up marrying the prince in the end?"

"She doesn't?"

"No. He marries someone else, and in her grief, she jumps into the ocean and drowns."

He said that like it was a whimsical little tale for children of all ages. "I… wow, that's pretty sad."

"Maybe," he replied, "but then she goes to heaven and she's given the chance to earn a real soul. I think that's a nice ending."
"I guess it depends on your point of view."

Tamaki slowed to a stop. "Haruhi, what do you think a soul is?"

At this point, I was beyond confused. Let me remind you, this was Tamaki. Tamaki, the guy who slept with a stuffed bear and could wax poetic about my shoes, having a philosophical discussion about spirituality and the nature of the human condition.

"I… don't know," I said. "There's a lot of different ideas out there, and I've never really thought about it."

"I see," he said, taking my hand. "Personally, I think a soul comes from love and the people we choose to give our love to. We may not be human, Haruhi, but I believe we've earned our souls, and that's because of you. You make us more than we are."

He kissed my forehead, and I almost lifted my chin. Though he said no more, I was thinking about his words for a long time, not sure how to respond. I still don't know how. All I can say is… they made me more than I am, too.

As the fire burned out, we watched the stars twinkle in the night. A flash of light zoomed past us, and Hunny pointed excitedly.

"A shooting star!"

"Everyone make a wish!"

Even Kyoya shut his eyes, and I wish I'd asked him what he wished for. I never asked any of them, and they didn't ask me.

As I lay there in the center, with Tamaki, Hikaru, and Hunny on one side, and Kyoya, Kaoru, and Mori on the other, there was only one thing in the world I wanted. And so I threw aside my disbelief in the power of magic, and I wished with all my heart.

'Let us be together forever.'

Posted by Haruhi at 7:00 pm 0 comments
08.30.11

REQUIEM

I don't know how to start this one. It's probably the most important update I'll ever make.

It's also the last one, aside from a short epilogue I'll post tomorrow or the next day. Whenever I have the time.

First, I want to say thank you to everyone who stuck with me all this time. I feel like it's been ages since I started, even though according to my post history, it's only been a month and a half. I've gotten some wonderful comments and great support, though I'm pretty sure most of you think this is all just some metafiction novel. I can never prove it was real, and I know my word alone isn't enough. That's okay. Whether you believe me or not, I appreciate every single one of you. If you've followed or commented or just silently awaited each new post, thank you.

Okay. I had to get that out before we move forward. I'm done now. No more stalling.

Let's get this over with.

It was a cold Tuesday morning. School was canceled due to staff meetings and I'd just finished my lunch when Tamaki dragged himself into the kitchen, his right side limp and twitching. The left was almost as bad, but he got himself into a chair on his own, and then it was a simple matter of me taking the head plate off and switching out the batteries. I was mostly at the point where it didn't make me nauseous anymore, and I was kind of proud of myself.

"You guys sure go through these fast," I remarked.

"Mmm-hmm," Tamaki said, flexing his fingers, making sure they were all in working order. "I'm sorry for bothering you."

"Don't apologize," I said. "It's my responsibility. You guys are stuck with me now, remember?"

Tamaki stared out the window. I couldn't tell if he was genuinely perturbed or trying to affect a stoic, wistful look. My phone was on the table, and I wondered if I should take a picture. He would've looked perfect on a magazine cover. He had nothing more to say, so I tossed out the dead battery and dropped my dish in the sink for later.

As usual for a bad weather day, we found ourselves crammed in the tiny living room, finding new inventive ways to do our own thing. Hikaru, Kaoru, and Hunny all had different shows they wanted to watch. Their solution was to put on Hikaru's action movie for one minute, then switch to Kaoru's baseball game, then to Hunny's cooking show. Repeat ad nauseam. How they managed to follow the action this way, I will never know.

Mori was perusing one of my textbooks. They'd been coming to school again, though they rarely sat down to do any homework. It was a math book, so I guess Mori just really loved numbers. Kyoya was on his phone and my laptop at the same time. He spoke in a language I didn't understand. It sounded like Spanish, or maybe Italian. I had no idea who he was talking to, but judging from the smile on his face, the conversation was proceeding in his favor.

Tamaki followed me silently, still curling his fingers. At the time, I didn't think much of it. Just
another Tamaki quirk. He sat next to Kyoya, who nodded at him once, then went back to arguing over the phone in… I think he'd switched to Russian now?

I sat with the twins and Hunny. We were back to the game and, from what I could infer based on my limited knowledge of sports, one team was currently beating the other. There was a man on the home base and he hit the ball into (I think) the outfield. Half the crowd started shrieking and then Hunny grabbed the remote and a baker was trying to stop a twelve layer chocolate cake from toppling over.

"That'll ruin the rosettes," Hunny said solemnly. He was never more serious than when discussing failed confectionaries.

Eventually, the action movie ended with a happily ever after for the hero and his girl. The baseball game was won by the team Kaoru didn't like (he was pouting about it for hours), and the youngest chef won the baking contest with a cake shaped like an oak tree. With nothing left to watch, I switched the TV off and brought everyone to attention.

"Guys, we really need to talk about this," I said. "My dad is coming home in less than a week and while I'm sure he likes you guys, I don't think he's going to want you living here. Kyoya, have you figured anything out yet?"

He still had his phone, but I didn't hear anything on the other end. I think he hung up. He and Tamaki shared a look I couldn't decipher. At the time, I assumed they both forgot. "I've looked into a few options."

"That's kind of vague," I said. "I can talk to my landlady if you want. There's a vacant apartment downstairs and I don't think she'd mind renting to high school students."

"What about money?" Hikaru asked.

"Kyoya has it," I said.

"You sound very sure of yourself," Kyoya said.

"Am I wrong?"

He stopped typing, considered my words for a second, then started again. "We will have our housing situation taken care of in due time. You needn't worry, Haruhi."

"You say that, but you won't even tell me what your plan is," I said.

"Because you don't need to worry about it."

I could sense this would become a cyclical argument, and normally, that wouldn't have stopped me. I was feeling pretty relaxed that day, my overall mood significantly up in the last few weeks, so I let it go. I told myself I'd bring it up again tomorrow or the next day. There would still be a little time left to figure things out. Worst case scenario, my dad would come home to find a surprise welcome home/slumber party waiting for him.

We turned the TV back on and channel surfed for a bit, not finding anything especially interesting. I noticed Hikaru and Kaoru cast a few furtive glances at each other, and I figured they were just doing their typical twin mind reading thing until Kaoru nodded at Hunny, who flashed him a thumbs up. Then I heard Tamaki whisper something in Kyoya's ear. When I turned to look, he jumped to the other side of the couch and whistled, not making eye contact with me. None of them did until Hikaru found an anime with decent animation and obnoxious sound effects to leave on.
"Hey, Haruhi," he said, "did you take out the trash today?"

I was trying to drown out the repetitive punching and grunting noises and almost missed that. "What?"

"It's important, Haruhi," he said, folding his arms. "If you don't take it out the whole apartment will smell."

"Ew, stinky," said Hunny, holding his nose.

I'd been explaining that to them for weeks. Nice to know they'd finally caught on.

"I took it out this morning," I said.

Hikaru frowned. He glanced at Tamaki, who waved him on.

"Uh… what about the mail? You should go get it."

"It came an hour ago. You saw me bring it in."

"Did you do the laundry? It must be piling up."

"Laundry day was yesterday."

"Did you-"

"You know what? I think I'll go for a walk." I grabbed my coat. "You guys don't mind entertaining yourselves for ten minutes, do you?"

"We'd rather entertain ourselves for fifteen to twenty minutes," said Kyoya. The rest all grinned and nodded.

"Fifteen to twenty. Got it."

I could hear them running around from the street. Whatever surprise they had planned, I just hoped it would be easy to clean up. To pass the time, I visited one of my neighbors, an older lady with a mean old tabby cat who nevertheless would love you forever if you gave him a few treats. He purred in my lap as I listened to my neighbor's stories of her family and her youth spent in the children's ward of a country hospital. I ended up staying for thirty minutes because I didn't have the heart to interrupt her.

"Bye Mrs. Motoki," I said as I climbed back up the stairs to my apartment. "Thanks for the tea."

"Of course, dear," she called after me. "Tell your friends I said hello. They're such lovely boys."

"Will do."

All was quiet inside as I stuck my key into the lock. I should really say 'most' was quiet, as I caught the distinct hiss of multiple voices shushing each other. Rolling my eyes, I turned the key, releasing the latch and granting myself entry into a pitch black room.

The lights flicked on.

"SURPRISE!"

I shut my eyes against a tidal wave of pink confetti and rose petals, slamming into my face as if shot
out of a cannon. Balloons covered the ceiling, every color of the rainbow represented, though there was again an emphasis on pink. A life-sized photo of me that I think came from the carnival had been taped to the wall. A banner hanging over it read 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY HARUHI' in flowery font I needed a full minute to decipher. That Tamaki, Hunny, Hikaru, and Kaoru all decided to hug me at the same time did not help.

"Surprise!" Tamaki shouted. I suppose it bore repeating. "Are you surprised? You look so surprised, just like I knew you would. This is the best surprise party ever and it hasn't even started yet!"

"Happy birthday, Haru-chan!" Hunny cried, climbing onto my shoulders. I somehow kept my balance and carried him to the couch.

"Thank you," I said, letting him slide off my back, "but guys… it's not my birthday."

"Sure it is," said Hikaru.

"It says so right here." Kaoru pointed at the banner.

"They do make a convincing argument," Kyoya smirked.

"Don't you like your birthday party, Haru-chan?" Hunny hit me with big, tear-filled eyes just as Tamaki put on his most powerful puppy dog face.

All the strength in my body left me, and when Hikaru dropped a chocolate fudge cupcake in my hand, I took it without question.

"I guess it's my birthday," I said.

Cheers and another bone crushing hug. This time, Mori joined in, lifting all of us off the ground with ease.

"Hooray!" Hunny cheered. "Now it's time for the piñata."

They did indeed have a large paper mache doll hanging from the ceiling. It bore a striking resemblance to Benibara, and I definitely preferred it to her own giant head. Only Mori and I got a shot at it before Hunny decimated the head with a single hit. Out flew dozens of roses, which Tamaki gathered into a bouquet and presented to me. Kyoya found a vase while Hikaru and Kaoru berated Hunny for depriving them of their turns.

If you think the rest of the party was like something out of a six-year-old's wet dream, you'd be right. Kaoru beat everyone at kendama, Tamaki proved to be far less adept at the guitar than the piano, and they even sang happy birthday to me. I held another cupcake with a single candle and blew it out on the final note of the song. This time, I didn't make a wish.

"Present time!" Hunny cheered, jumping all the way to the ceiling. "It's present time!"

Tamaki gasped. "You're right. It is present time!"

"You guys didn't have to get me a gift," I said, but they were long gone, digging through my dad's closet as if possessed by demons. "Please don't break anything!"

I heard something crash and Tamaki squeak, then silence. I sighed. 'Oh well. Dad barely cleans his closet anyway.'

They returned moments later with an enormous, flat, rectangular package wrapped in brown paper. It
took both twins and Mori to carry it into the living room, and the scuff marks on the walls are still there to this day. How they ever got something that big into through the front door, into my dad's closet, and then out again all without me knowing… well, it's hardly their greatest magic trick.

"Happy Birthday, Haruhi!" I will reiterate now that it wasn't my birthday, but at the time, I sort of didn't care.

"Thanks, guys. I can't wait to see it."

They stepped aside as I felt along the top for a piece of tape. I'm the kind that likes to be neat when opening presents. I always fold up wrapping paper and save it for later. You never know when you're going to run out of notebook space right before a big exam. I stepped back to appraise my gift, smiling all the while.

It was a bulletin board, one of the nicer ones decorated with bows and ribbons. A layer of soft plush surrounded the cork board. My name was stitched in the top left corner, just above a snapshot of Hunny and I on the merry go round.

I have no idea who took it, but the board was covered in candid shots of me, the guys, and everything we'd done together. There was a photo in front of the school of Hikaru and Kaoru excitedly dragging me through the gates. There was Tamaki winning Kuma-chan at the carnival. There was Kyoya on the beach under an umbrella. There were even a few still shots from the stunt show. None of me in the elevator box thankfully.

The biggest was a group shot. All seven of us crowded together in a photo booth, faces pressed into the lens so we'd all fit. We looked like a mass of body parts fused together. It came from a day I didn't end up writing about. I thought of including it as another interlude after the dodgeball incident, but I decided it would mess with the flow of the story. That and it was even less eventful than the beach trip.

One day we went shopping and the mall had a photo booth. We took pictures. That's it.

But I think it was a great picture. I couldn't breathe when we were taking it because Mori had his knee on my chest, but it was fun playing with the filters and watching Tamaki blow a gasket when Hikaru put a handlebar mustache on his face. We settled on a center stage filter. A cartoonish stage with red curtains and a spotlight bordered our squished, grinning faces. Even Kyoya, his cheek smashed into the wall by Tamaki's elbow, had the barest hint of a smile.

It was the perfect centerpiece and I rolled my eyes to cover how emotional it made me. "How long were you guys working on this?"

"Days!" Tamaki said proudly. "Maybe even weeks. We had to gather all the perfect tokens of our more cherished memories to make this work."

"Now you can always remember us and how much fun we've had," said Kaoru. He hugged me from behind and I didn't stop him.

"Guys, if I live to be a hundred, I couldn't forget a single thing about any of you." They were all behind me, my back to them. I was grateful; a tear had slipped through the crack and shined like a diamond all the way down my cheek. "But thank you. I love it."

I let them choose where to hang it in my room. I should've known it would lead to an argument. Tamaki and Hikaru debated furiously on whether it should go on my closet door or next to the window. They let Kyoya pick in the end, and I waited in the living room as he directed Mori to hang
it perfectly level above my mom's shrine. I think she would've liked that. I know she would've gotten a kick out of these guys.

We ended the night, as we had many nights before, in front of the TV. I don't remember what we were watching. My stomach was full of cupcakes and I was wrapped like a sushi roll in a wool blanket with Tamaki's arms around me. My eyes drooped. I couldn't remember the last time I was this tired this early. There was so much we needed to do tomorrow. I wasn't going to let Kyoya keep ducking me on the housing thing and we had to organize a cleaning schedule so this place was spotless before my dad came home.

I listed all our important tasks in my head, and then I let it go. Mori had Hunny in his lap. Hikaru and Kaoru leaned their heads together. Kyoya reclined in the loveseat and closed his eyes. Tamaki took me by the hand. They fit perfectly together.

"Love you," he whispered as the screen turned to static.

"Love you, too," I said.

I snuggled closer to him, letting the white noise carry me off. I still wonder if it was real or if I was just imagining it in my half asleep state… but with my ear against his chest, I could've sworn I heard a heartbeat.

I awoke on the floor and didn't know where I was for a second. The sun ticked my cheeks and forced my eyes open. I wasn't used to it coming in from that direction. Rolling over, I realized I'd fallen off Tamaki in the middle of the night. He and the others were still asleep, which didn't strike me as anything to worry about. They'd slept before, albeit not at the same time.

Getting up slowly, I tip-toed to my room and changed into fresh day clothes. I took my wallet and creeped out the door, leaving all the lights off. I was pretty sure something I did would reach their sensitive ears and they'd all be bustling about cleaning by the time I got back.

I had a special errand to run that day. I took the train across town to the department store and bought the nicest picture frame I could afford. It was medium sized and dark blue, not very fancy at all, but I figured the guys would like it. Then I went to the copy center and printed a few photos off my phone. The quality was a lot better than I expected. I took it as a good omen and got on the first train home. Along the way, I went through five different photos of us from various points in our adventures. Any one of them would fit perfectly in that frame. Just had to take to vote when I got home to find out which. It had been almost two hours since I left.

It was quiet inside when I arrived. My brow furrowed. They should definitely have been up by now. Unless they were planning a part two to yesterday's surprise. I opened the door slowly. It was dark inside. Bracing myself for a windfall of roses, I stepped inside and… nothing.

They were on the floor exactly where I left them.

Switching on the lights, I dropped my bags on the kitchen table. "I'm home. Hope I didn't worry anyone." I stepped over Tamaki to grab the remote and turn the TV off. "You guys are really tuckered out, huh?"

I chuckled as my hand brushed Tamaki's shoulder. I didn't think I hit him that hard, not hard enough to move him. He swayed a bit, his head falling forward on his chest, and then he fell on his side. Limp.

Lifeless.
I stared. My body was frozen as my eyes moved across the other five. Tamaki had made a pretty hard thud when he hit the ground, My next door neighbor even smacked his side of the wall, yelling about stupid kids interrupting his nap.

I wasn't worried. I couldn't be. Not with a perfectly logical explanation keeping me afloat.

"Batteries," I mumbled, going for the spare box under the sink.

I changed all of them individually, moving from Tamaki to Kyoya to Hikaru and so on. I closed the cap over Mori's head, holding it between my palms, directing his face towards mine.

"Wake up!" I ordered. He was heavy and I couldn't hold him for long. He fell in a heap just like Tamaki had. Those peaceful expressions were no longer peaceful. They were too waxy, too doll-like. Too… wrong.

"This-this isn't funny," I said, going from one to the next and shaking them. "Wake up! Come on!"

I didn't know what to do. I managed to get the phone in my hand and dial the number Dr. Suoh gave me for his personal line. Somehow, I made no mistakes and got him on the first ring. I don't remember our conversation, but I must've gotten everything out semi-coherently because he was there in the next thirty minutes. Dr. Ootori and two assistants accompanied him.

They wanted me to stay in my room while they performed troubleshooting, but I refused to be moved. I glared off Dr. Ootori, who I don't think was eager to deal with me again anyway. He stayed on his side of the living room, and I stayed on mine. Nothing had been cleaned and there were pink balloons and dying rose petals everywhere. The contrast of happiness and joy with those tech specialists in grey uniforms working to revive my friends made my stomach turn.

As time passed with no progress, Dr. Suoh's face went from determined to grim.

"What's going on?" I demanded after a full half hour with no answers. "What's wrong with them?"

Dr. Suoh didn't look at me. "You say you changed their batteries, reset them, everything?"

"Everything you told me to do, yes. I did it all."

Dr. Ootori sighed like I was a bratty child throwing a tantrum. I could've taken a cutting board and cracked it over his head the way I was feeling. Instead, I focused my emotions on Dr. Suoh. On my friends.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Haruhi, there's nothing we can do."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm saying they're gone, Haruhi. Their systems are fried. Probably from all the extra exertion they've put themselves through. It was more than their internal processors could handle and they-"

"Don't say that. Stop acting like they're just machines!"

Dr. Ootori, perhaps feeling brave, scoffed. "They are just machi-"

"SHUT UP!"

I shoved the two assistants aside, summoning strength I can only assume was born of fear. I knelt over Tamaki, crushing my lips to his, kissing him with all I had in me. "Wake up. Wake up, Tamaki. Please!"
"Haruhi." Dr. Suoh's hand on my arm. "Stop."

I pushed him off. "I can do it. It worked before!"

"Not this time. Kiss activation is only for startup. It won't do anything now."

"But it has to! It has to work. They can't be gone!"

"Haruhi." Dr. Suoh hugged me, gentle like a father. "I'm so sorry."

It felt… final. Like I was the one who'd been given a death sentence. The two assistants had lined my friends up in a row. Their arms were at their sides. Their legs straight. Their eyes closed. Tamaki's lips shined from my kiss. Tears I left behind on his face made it look like he was crying.

I hung my head, hearing Dr. Suoh whisper comforting words that offered me nothing. I stared at a streamer stuck to my shoe, tracing the length from one end to the next. Deflated balloons littered the floor. The cheery Happy Birthday banner sagged as the tape peeled off. I struggled to inhale and rasped out their names over and over again, getting louder and softer and louder again.

No one answered.

posted by Haruhi at 9:08 pm 0 comments
My Final Entry

09.01.11

MY FINAL ENTRY

It's funny that today is the first day of the new month and the last day I ever post to this blog. I already did my sappy goodbye last time, so I won't bore you with a retread.

I haven't looked at the comments on the last post yet. I told myself I'd wait until this post was up. Now I wonder if I want to see them at all.

Forgive me for making assumptions, but I'd like to answer a few questions I'm pretty sure my readers have.

Once again, yes, everything in this blog has been one hundred percent true to my life.

Yes, as far as I know, everything Mei told me in her chapter is one hundred percent true to her life.

And no, they never woke up.

... This is so hard. Harder than I ever thought it would be. I went to be last night writing this entire post out in my head. It sounded great while I was half-asleep. Now it feels clunky and devoid of emotion. It's not that I don't care anymore; it's the exact opposite. Today marks three months since the last time I cried myself to sleep. I don't think I'll make it to four.

But I want you all to know where I am one year later. After thirty-six posts and over a hundred thousand words (I could hardly believe it when I checked the word count), I feel like I owe it to you.

My dad came home a few days later to a clean, empty apartment. No trace of anyone other than to two of us ever living in the five hundred square foot space. Their clothes had been packed and removed. Usa-chan and Kuma-chan had new homes in my closet. Dad found them one day and I told him a friend gave them to me.

He did ask about the guys a few times, why they weren't around and why Kyoya abruptly stopped messaging him. I never knew what to say. My default excuse was that they'd transferred to a new school and moved out of the country. Eventually, he let it go, but I know he still wonders. The bulletin board remains on my bedroom wall to this day.

I don't know what Ouran Co. told my school, but it was well known among my classmates that the hottest boys in class were gone for good this time. Mei was especially disappointed, and for the record, she was pretty pissed when I told her what really happened to them. Apparently, I'm a terrible best friend, but she still loves me anyway because she's nice like that. That is word for word what she said to me over the phone last night, so hi Mei. That's my shout-out to you.

As for Ouran Co. itself, I had the dubious honor of visiting their home base a few weeks later. I won't go into detail describing the place. It was about as un-Lobelia as you could get, right down to the sterile color scheme and lack of Takarazuka musical rip-offs. I was taken into a viewing room where six human-sized pods had been set up. They looked like coffins, and my friends inside all looked frozen. Stuck at a moment in time forever. My heart ached and I had to leave almost immediately.
"We're keeping their bodies incubated," Dr. Suoh explained to me. "There's a chance that one day, we'll have the technology to bring them back. Not a good chance, mind you, but a chance."

"What do I do until then?" I asked.

He had no answer, but I knew he wouldn't.

Mrs. Fujioka actually threatened to sue them on my behalf, but I told her not to bother. It wasn't their fault. It wasn't anyone's. Now that I was thinking clearly, I knew that. It was just a cruel twist of fate. We were finally free to be together as friends, but I guess it wasn't meant to be.

A few months ago, I got a call from Dr. Suoh. He asked me to meet him for lunch after school the next day. We ate at a small cafe at an outdoor table. It was chilly and drizzling, so no one was outside to overhear us.

"We expect to go public with our new line of robotics next month," he said. "The data we gathered from their memory banks has been invaluable to our research."

"Thank you," I said, picking at my salad. I was so glad to know my loss had been such a lucrative gain for him.

"I'd still like to offer you some kind of payment."

"I don't want your money, Dr. Suoh. And I don't want a place in your company either, though I do thank you again for the offer."

He'd brought it up during the HQ visit, and as the wound was still open and bleeding, my refusal was a bit more colorful. Fists were not involved, but it was a really close call. Since then, I'd received a letter in the mail which I filed away with the remains of the previous night's dinner. I think that got the message across that I wasn't interested.

It's not like I'm hurting financially anyway. Turns out, all that money Kyoya was making on the stock market (I hope) had been put in an account in my name. I didn't find out about it until the bank statements arrived and I'm so glad my dad never goes to get the mail himself.

Dr. Suoh said nothing and bit into his sandwich. Conversation halted as the waitress stepped out to ask us about dessert. Dr. Suoh ordered coffee and we requested separate checks.

"Haruhi, I asked you here today because there's something important I need to tell you, though I don't quite know where to start."

"At the beginning?" I asked dryly.

He smiled. "Yes well, we've completed diagnostics on the ro… well, on the six of them. It took longer than we expected due to the intricacies of their programs, but we received the final results two days ago. They are… interesting to say the least."

"I don't understand," I said. "What does this have to do with me?"

"My first instinct would be nothing, but it may, in fact, be everything." He took out his phone and showed me a schematic. Tamaki's, I understood. "This line of lover figure is meant to last two to five years as an attentive, if passive, lover. Fail safes in their programming were meant to extend that warranty. Over the course of your misadventures, they managed to break every single one. This alone wouldn't have done too much damage, but the strain they put themselves through to protect you whenever something went wrong drained their battery health and ultimately caused a premature
shutdown at only three and a half months."

It was a clinical, detached way of saying this was all my fault. At least, that's what I thought at the moment.

"What are you telling me?" I stabbed a crouton with my fork just for the hell of it. I wasn't hungry anymore.

Dr. Suoh took back his phone, examining the screen as only an accomplished scientist could. "We ran so many different scenarios trying to figure out every which way something could go wrong. We accounted for every possibility except this one." He looked back up at me. "How much time passed between the Lobelia incident and the shutdown?"

I thought back. "I think… ten days? No, more like two weeks."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Why?"

He smiled. "They shouldn't have lasted one."

He showed me a new page. No pictures this time, just thick paragraphs that took up the whole screen. Sentences ranged from short to dense, but I like to read my mom's old law textbooks in my spare time. Compared to that, this was easy.

"Fried circuitry, extensive damage," I read phrases at random as they stuck out to me. "Unprecedented capacity for continued operation- what is this?"

"Something big, Haruhi," he said. "For one of them to last so long would've been a miracle. For all six of them to continue at peak performance so that even you didn't notice a problem… it shouldn't be possible, and yet, here we are."

"So wait," I shook my head. Words had failed me. "You're saying by the time they... by that time, they should've been gone for a week?"

"The best analogy I can make is when your phone continues at one percent for a long period of time, but that doesn't come close to describing how incredible this is." He stared at his sandwich, less hungry than I was. "These may be advanced robotics, but the technology is still in its infancy. It's so unpredictable, and I've come to find I know far less about the capabilities of my own creations than I realized. The fact is, those boys did everything in their power to stay alive, even when I'm sure they knew the time was coming."

"But why?" My head was spinning. "Why would they do that?"

There was something secretive about his expression, and the way he whispered even though no one else was around to hear him. "Because they loved you."

That night, when I got home, I didn't do any homework and I left my chores for tomorrow. I went online and I started a blog.

I'm sitting in my room now, trying to think of the perfect way to close my story out. I feel like there's so much I've left unsaid. Loose ends I haven't tied up. Or maybe I just don't want to let go. Ending this blog feels like losing them a second time.

But now you know they did exist. Tamaki, Kyoya, Hikaru, Kaoru, Hunny, and Mori were the best
friends I've ever had. More than friends even. They were my family, and I truly believe that one day, they'll come back. While I'm waiting, I'll watch a cooking show from time to time and try some new recipes. I'll sit with the other girls at lunch. I'll go with my dad to visit his friends instead of making up an excuse to stay home. I'll keep Usa-chan and Kuma-chan close, and when I say goodnight to my mother's photo, I'll say goodnight to theirs, too.

And guys, if you ever get to read this blog, I want you to know every word I've said comes straight from my heart. You were the best thing that ever happened to me. I'll never forget the wonderful times we shared, and I can't wait to have more when you come back.

I have faith in you, and I love you.

That is absolute.

posted by Haruhi at 11:59 pm 0 comments
Chapter Notes

A/N: Thank you to everyone who stuck with this story for seven long years. It's hard for me to let this story go, but I'm so glad I was able to complete it. I hope you enjoy the epilogue, and if you are following Fragments, I hope to have a new chapter out soon.

04.08.98

ETERNAL OURAN: AN EPILOGUE OF SORTS

By S. Tenjo

'I'll never forget the wonderful times we shared, and I can't wait to have more when you come back.

I have faith in you, and I love you.

That is absolute.'

So ends the blog of one Fujioka Haruhi, a teenage girl whose extraordinary story sounds more like the plot of a shojo manga than an autobiographical account.

And yet, while at the time it must've seemed fantastic, the advent of artificial intelligence in daily life casts a new light on this whimsical little tale.

For those who care to know (most likely none of you) my name is Soshi Tenjo, I am a full-time delivery man for Ouran Corporation and a part-time starving writer. I began this article some time ago when I first came across a reupload of Haruhi's blog (note: the original upload was lost following the collapse of the site it was hosted on). It was recommended to me by an online friend who, rather foolishly, described it as one of the best ARGs they'd ever read. All while their father's android maid dusted the tables in the background, but I digress.

Her account of the months she spent in the company of Ouran Co. lover figures was not new to me. In fact, I first came into this story from a much different perspective. What reading Haruhi's blog did was put a particular incident at my job into new context, and had me crying like a baby on my wife's shoulder all night. I started outlining this article the very next day.

Unfortunately, after several weeks of editing and rewriting, I wasn't making any real progress. Everyone I showed it to thought it looked fine, but I had this lingering sense that something was missing. I was ready to shelve the project entirely, but before we get into that, I have to tell you what happened after Fujioka Haruhi finished her blog.

Now, I am writing under the assumption that most if not all of my readers are familiar with the story. If you're not, I'd like to ask that you follow the link in the description below and at least skim through all thirty-seven entries. It's a bit of a time commitment, I know, but trust me when I say it's completely worth it. That and there's no way you'll get the full impact of this article without knowing what came before it.

Everyone else good? Okay then. Here we go...
So one night, approximately seven years ago, I got a text that there was an emergency at work and I had to come in immediately. At the time, I'd been on the job for only a couple of weeks and I had no idea there even was an emergency system. It got me out of bed at two in the morning. My wife woke up to ask me where I was going, and when I told her it was work, she called my boss a nasty word I won't repeat, then rolled over and went back to sleep. One of the many things I love about her (and no that's not sarcasm).

When I arrived, it was a madhouse. The alert message had given me no information about what was going on. I just knew all hands were needed and to be prepared to use deadly force if necessary.

Let me remind you, I drive a truck for a living.

Now, I don't actually have a big part in this story. I was still new and hadn't earned my spot in the group yet. I got my orders to search a certain block downtown and report back with any sign of a rogue robotic. There were six targets in total.

As I returned to my truck with a head full of visions of my bed and my beautiful wife in said bed, overheard my coworkers talking.

"You think it might be The Six?"

"Those first generation bots? Couldn't be."

"I don't know man. This whole thing is pretty suspicious to me."

"Oh come on, you guys don't really believe that old story, do you?"

"Dude, The Six are real. I definitely saw them in the basement once."

"Sure you did, Taka. All that sake you drink on the weekends had nothing to do with it."

At the time, I didn't know what they were talking about. I'd already heard all the ghost stories of Ouran Co. (my favorite is the one about the programmer scorned by her lover whose vengeful spirit now lives in the circuit board and causes blackouts on the weekends), but The Six was something else entirely.

They were also completely real, despite what that one guy said.

The story as I heard it is that they were prototype lover figures sold to a wealthy widow. They were accidentally shipped to a different person with the same name thanks to some critical errors during the shipping process. I'm pretty sure this is why we're subjected to quadruple checks of everything before we're allowed to hit the road. I wish I could meet whoever made that mistake and 'thank' him.

Anyway, they found all six figures a few months later living with the incorrect recipient. At that point, they'd grown attached to her and didn't want to leave. And believe it or not, the widow agreed to give them up. They got to stay with that other girl and she didn't have to pay a cent.

Now, if you've read Haruhi's blog, as I sincerely hope you have at this point, you'll know this stuff already. At the time of the breakout, I didn't. As far as I knew, a group of unprogrammed androids had gotten loose in the city and needed to be rounded up before they hurt someone.

I was not the one who found them. The area I searched was roughly half a town away from where they were located. A senior driver who'd been with the company longer than I've been alive tracked them down. He retired later that year and got a big fat bonus check to go with his new wristwatch.
It was nearing five in the morning when I got the call that the rogue bots had been located and we'd be getting a half day off with pay for our troubles. All I cared about was going home and how much I regretted not taking that department store job.

I didn't find out what happened until a few months later. By now, I'd been accepted into the fold and got to meet some interesting characters working for Ouran Co. One of them, who has requested to remain anonymous, I will call Shiro. Shiro is a researcher and technician in charge of mobility. If a robot can make a fist or nod their head, you have him and his team to thank. He's also a bit of an amateur spy, or so he says. His supposed claim to fame is hacking the prime minister's official website to fix a typo on their About page. Note the 'supposed' because he also says he coined the phrase 'lol'.

Regardless, he came into the employee lounge one day, saying he had something to show us. I should also mention that Shiro is a bleeding heart who cries at Disney movies. This'll make sense later.

Here's a quick rundown of what we knew: The Six were incubated after falling into an indefinite shutdown. The hope was that one day, new software would be created allowing them to be revived. Those hopes were realized, and then they bolted. No one knew where they were going or what they were looking for. Most of the people who could've answered those questions are long gone.

As we huddled inside Shiro's 'secret' video room, he played us a tape stolen from a camera set up at the address where The Six were found. Prior to writing this article, it had been years since I saw it. Fortunately, Shiro keeps a detailed archive of videos on his personal computer. It took a lot of begging and a few thousand yen shaved off my next paycheck, but I got the file.

The following is a full transcription of both the audio and visual. I'm sorry I can't include the video itself. Shiro was adamant that I not share it with anyone. That was his one condition and I have to honor it.

Now, let me tell you what happened when Haruhi Fujioka and The Six reunited.

**

The video is taken from a surveillance camera mounted to the far left corner of the ceiling. We have a bird's eye view of Haruhi, asleep in her bed. The room is cramped but cozy. A nightstand next to her bed shows several framed photos, but it's too far away to see what they are. A small stack of books is neatly sorted with the bigger ones on the bottom and the smallest on top.

A TV is turned on to commercials. When they end a movie is playing. It's on mute and remains that way for the duration of the clip. At roughly forty-two seconds in, there is a slight disruption outside the door. Voices are muffled, but they appear to be mostly male. What sounds like a woman saying 'you can't go in there...' is heard at fifty seconds.

The door opens at one minute and three seconds. Haruhi doesn't stir. One by one, six young men resembling human teenagers enter the room. They are led by a blonde and rounded out by a dark-haired man far taller than the rest. No words have been exchanged at this point. They surround Haruhi's bed. From this angle, only the blonde's face can be clearly seen. He looks at Haruhi like he wants to cry, but also like he's never been happier in his life.

He kneels at her side, playing with her hair a bit before nudging her.

"Haruhi," he says. "Wake up. It's us."
She mumbles but doesn't stir. The blonde looks to the man to his right, dark-haired and bespectacled. He nods, presumably urging the blonde on.

"Haruhi," he says again.

At one minute and thirty-two seconds, Haruhi Fujioka opens her eyes. She holds a hand to her face, adjusting to the sudden burst of light. It can be assumed she's not used to being awake at this time. She lifts her head and goes pale as she takes in all six of them at once. Her mouth is agape. Again, no one speaks. It's all quiet outside the door and nobody will be coming in until much later.

She sighs. "I'm having that dream again."

The two redheads at the foot of her bed lean their entire upper bodies on either side of her legs. They look like a pair of cats desperate for attention.

"Haruhi, come on," the one on the left says.

"We're way better than any dream," says the one on the right.

Haruhi rubs her eyes. She squints hard but she still isn't convinced this is really happening.

"No, it can't be," she says. "You've been gone all this time and I..."

She stops herself like she's afraid to finish. It has been close to a full minute and she hasn't blinked once. The blonde takes her hand and kisses it.

My fair Haruhi, we have journeyed far to find you. We've traversed mountains-

"No, we didn't," the one in glasses interjects.

"Swam the English channel-"

"No."

"Fought all manner of hideous beast-"

"Well, Hunny and Mori did clothesline those guards and throw them in the broom closet."

"All to rescue you from your loneliness and, if you will it, receive your favor."

Haruhi stares at them for close to forty-five seconds. One would be forgiven for thinking the video froze for how little anyone moves until a cry bursts from Haruhi's throat. Her fingers reach weakly for the blonde's face, running across his smooth skin. Then she throws herself at him. This is a cue for all of them to engulf her in what has to be the biggest, hardest, wettest group hug in recorded history. Every one of them is crying and saying her name. She is saying theirs. It's a mess I couldn't hope to transcribe properly, but I'm sure you get the idea.

"Tamaki," she says. "Kyoya... Hikaru... Kaoru... Hunny... Mori... you're all really here. At last..."

"I'm sorry it wasn't sooner," says Kyoya. "We ran into some trouble along the way."

"You don't live in your apartment anymore, Haru-chan," says Hunny.

Haruhi takes in a lungful of air. She almost coughs as she lets it out. "No, I haven't for a long time. It's been... such a long time."
She brings her wrinkled hands to her face as snow-white hair falls over her eyes. She was never tall, and her body has shrunken with age. If she were still capable of standing, she'd just barely see over Hunny's head. Yet with these ageless androids looking at her like she's a goddess incarnate, one could easily believe it's true.

"Looks like we missed quite a bit." Tamaki has picked up one of Haruhi's photos. We can now see that it's of a thirty-something Haruhi with two children in her arms. The one next to it is also visible; seven young people in a plain blue frame. "You've lived a full life."

"I did my best," Haruhi says. She coughs and Hikaru seems to conjure a water cup out of nowhere. She drinks it down. "I wanted to have a lot of stories for you guys."

"And we want to hear all of them," Tamaki says.

"We would tell you a few of our own, but we've mostly just been unconscious," Kaoru shrugs.

"It was pretty boring," says Hikaru. "And we found your blog, by the way."

Haruhi looks like she'd rather talk about her first kiss than go any further. "Oh, not that old thing."

"Don't say that. It was lovely!" Tamaki says, taking her hands. "Though I was certainly not that overdramatic."

Hikaru snorts. "This from Mr. Swam the English Channel?"

"Be quiet, doppelganger!"

They shoot each other angry glares, but nothing more comes of it. Haruhi has their complete attention and everything else is secondary.

"Your blog was great, Haru-chan," says Hunny, "but it was sad at the end."

"I know," Haruhi says. "I was going for optimism, but I never stopped missing you. I never stopped hoping that one day, we'd be together again."

"We are, Haruhi," says Kyoya. Listening to him and examining his body language, I don't think he's accustomed to sentiment. As the cool model, he is meant to be stoic and domineering. Vulnerability does not come naturally to his type, but I guess that's just another stamp of Haruhi. "The time has come."

"Yeah," says Mori. He steps up for the first time to rub the top of her head. He appears to be smiling, but with the angle, it's hard to say for sure.

"So that's it," she says like she doesn't dare hope it's true. "You're back for good?"

They crowd around her, careful not to mess with the wires connected to her wrists and heart monitor. She's delicate in more ways than one, and thin enough that another ten pounds off would render her a skeleton.

"For good," Tamaki says. He is facing Haruhi and is not visible to the camera again for the rest of the video. We can only imagine what he looks like as he kisses her forehead. "We'll never leave you again, Haruhi. This is forever."

They hold her for ten minutes. The deep wrinkles in Haruhi's face relax as she closes her eyes and lays still. Nobody moves until the door is once more opened and an army of private security officers,
all bearing the Ouran co. logo on their jackets and led by a senior driver, step inside and call for an end to all recording in the room.

The final thing of note before the video cuts out is Haruhi’s face. She looks eighty years younger.

**

Haruhi Fujioka died at the age of ninety-five, surrounded by six young men who meant the world to her. She'd spent her adult life fighting for the weak inside a courtroom. She had a family, friends, and the respect of her peers. The death certificate stated the cause of death as natural causes. I believe she'd simply crossed the last item off on her bucket list, and there was nothing left for her to do but move on to the next life with her friends at her side.

The Six were found to be unresponsive upon examination. At first, it was believed this was merely an internal error or a tribute to their lost friend. Their story gained a new layer when they were brought back to HQ and it was found that their systems had been completely erased. All data had been purged from their hard drives, even the backup programming. Nothing could be retrieved and most of the necessary tools to fix them have been out of production for fifty years.

They had become little more than inanimate objects, and thus, they joined Haruhi Fujioka in death.

Together forever, just like Tamaki said.

My first draft of this article ended right there. Kind of a sour note when you think about it. That's a big part of what made me put it aside. Shiro cried like a baby when Haruhi took her final breath, and I'll admit, it got to me, too. I've always liked happy endings best, and while this particular ending is more bittersweet than sad (depending on your beliefs), it wasn't sweet enough to counteract the bitter.

If it's enough for you, this might be a good place to stop reading. I hope you won't, though, because last week, I saw something extraordinary.

My daughter and I were taking a walk through the park. It was midday and, as a rambunctious child of three and a half, she has to run around and explore everything or her heart will explode. Note that these are her words, not mine.

We stopped at the playground and I pushed her on the swings a bit. I don't normally pay attention to the other children unless my daughter wants to play with them. Today, she was more interested in breaking the 'super best swinger ever' record. One of her friends from pre-school is the current title holder.

She took a quick juice break, and that was when I fell into the old standby time killer of people watching. I noted a man and a woman in the middle of a breakup. He cheated on her and then she cheated on him. Then he cheated on her with the man she cheated on him with. If I were that kind of writer, it would've been a goldmine, but that was nothing compared to the group I spotted on the monkey bars.

Seven children took turns trying to make it across to the slide. Only a tall dark-haired boy had made it so far. He was joined by a remarkably tiny boy with sandy blonde hair. A pair of redheads roshamboed to see which of them would go next, and in the meantime, a second blonde took the bars and was three-quarters of the way there when his hands slipped and he fell a treacherous two feet back to earth.

The redheads doubled over laughing. The blonde boy cried and chased them around the jungle gym. A boy with glasses and a book under his arm refused to go, so a little girl with long brown hair made
the climb. She made it halfway and then gave up. I don't think it mattered to her as much as it did the rest of her friends. They regrouped under the shade of a large tree and got out a box of cookies. The sandy-haired boy ate his with the fervor of a dying man, but all of them savored their treats and grinned with chocolate-stained teeth as they decided what game to play next.

I watched them even after my daughter grabbed my hand and demanded I get on the seesaw with her. As we rocked up and down, I couldn't stop staring at those kids. I never heard their names, never found out if they were related or if their moms knew each other. I have no reason to believe they hadn't just met that day. I have no reason whatsoever to think they have anything to do with the story I just told you.

My mother came from a family of Buddhists. She herself is big on new age spirituality. They all believe strongly in reincarnation. Until we reach a state of Nirvana, my grandparents said, we will always return to this earth for another try.

Sometimes, my mother says, we bring the people we love most with us.

Is it true? I don't know.

Was Haruhi's wish to always be with her friends granted in her next life? I don't know.

I hope so.

Haruhi Fujioka was a normal girl in a remarkable situation. She took six robots—six wild animatronics who made her life hell and then showed her heaven—and she gave them their souls.

In the last sentence of her final entry, she told Tamaki, Kyoya, Hikaru, Kaoru, Hunny, and Mori that she loved them. That her love was absolute.

If you take anything at all from her story, let it be that.

Real love, whether between family, friends, or lovers, is absolute.

Real love is eternal.

**

Thank you all for reading.

THE END

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