

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic Series: "Ranma Gets A Clue"
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Chapter 2, "Confusion sets in."

He was doing a fair job of keeping his eyes off his fiancée, the last thing either of them needed right now was to have their parents notice them showing even a trace of affection towards each other. They would be in the chapel before they knew what had hit them, if they did.

With everyone finally seated Kasumi started dishing out breakfast. Bowl's of rice and miso soup, pickled vegetables and of course, tea. Digging in hungrily the family ate as usual, with Ranma and Genma eating the most, fighting each other for the food. Akane for her part had no appetite. She couldn't show any outward sign of divergence from her normal actions. For if she did, Kasumi would pick up on it immediately and would want to know what was wrong. To tell the truth Akane herself didn't know what was wrong, she just felt, well . . . weird, and very lightheaded.

Ranma on the other hand, seemed to have almost entirely forgotten about what had happened this morning. He was too busy locked in battle with his father over breakfast. Each of them stealing food from the main serving dishes and each others plates with lightning quick chop stick strikes. Both of them eating what was on their plates with equal abandon. Genma was rapidly devouring his bowl of rice and miso soup, and Ranma was starting to worry about his own. With the speed of his chestnut fist Ranma quickly set about devouring his own food. Genma finished his and immediately went for that of his son's. His chopsticks only struck bare dish as Ranma had just finished. Pouting, Genma glared at his son. Ranma grinned coyly and said,

"It's okay pop you're on a diet remember?" Genma started to agree. "Why yes I . . . HEY! Waitaminute! . . ." then he snapped out of it, "Are you saying I'm fat?"

"Not at all old man ::grinning:: for a panda." That did it. Genma was mad now. He leapt up from his seat, lunging at his only son, intending to strangle some manners into him. Only his hands grasped only empty air. Tapping his father on the back of the head Ranma grinned.

"Getting slow old man." Genma in a state of shock was thinking to himself, "How in the world did Ranma get behind me so fast? Is he getting faster, or am I really getting slow?" Ranma took advantage of Genma's pause and subsequent absence of movement to grab Akane's hand and haul her away from the table.

"Come on Akane we're gonna be late!" He shouted almost gleefully, as he practically dragged her behind him. The rest of the family just watched in shock as Ranma dragged Akane out the front door. With the notable exception of Genma whom at the moment was still standing where he had lunged for Ranma, his hands grasping an imaginary throat and his

mind replaying the aborted battle over and over, trying to figure out when Ranma had managed to get behind him. Ranma grabbed both their box bento lunches and school bags as he went out the front door, Akane's hand still tightly in his.

Akane for her part was just basically letting herself get dragged. She trusted Ranma. About 2 minutes later though Ranma was still going full speed, running along their daily route which took them by the aqueduct, when the fence had come into view he had tensed as if to jump up on it, then looked back at his fiancée and smiling continued to run beside and in front of her on the ground. Akane however was getting tired, jogging for long distances she could do, but not sprinting. Gasping she managed to get out,

"R-Ranma -S-Slow down please . . . "

"HmMMMM?" Ranma looked back to see Akane stumbling after him. He slowed immediately to a walk and then stopped altogether to let her catch her breath. After a short while she stood up tall again and just looked at him. Ranma hardly seemed to notice that she was blushing at their close contact and that he was still holding onto her hand. He was obviously excited about something, and looked anxious to get somewhere.

He was waiting for her though, even though it was obviously slowing him down. She also noticed during her precursory glance, that he had all her stuff shouldered alongside his. "How sweet!" he thought.

"Ranma . . . " She started to say.

"Yeah?" Glancing down to her eye level, he trained his eyes on her and she could almost feel herself slipping away and losing herself in those 'Oh too intense' blue gray eyes of his. "W-Why are you in such a rush today? We're like a half an hour early for school ya know . . . and you haven't even sparred with your father today yet . . . " She trailed off feeling stupid just talking to Ranma and having him just listen.

Ranma just grinned and poked her in the nose as he said, "Ah but I have sparred with you today Akane." He said while grinning True he had sparred with her she reasoned. But she knew and he knew that she was nowhere near the level of perfection that Genma had achieved. So Ranma couldn't have gotten a very good workout. Instead of arguing the matter though, she just dropped it. The morning was too beautiful, the wind too crisp and fresh and the sun too bright and cheerful, and Ranma was being far too nice to let some stupid argument kill the mood.

Ranma was just standing there still. Watching Akane out of the corner of his eye, the rest of his mind was still going on over drive. He was very confused and needed to talk to a sympathetic ear or he was gonna lose it. But who?! None of the Tendou sister's obviously, nor his pop or Mr. Tendou. None of his other fiancée's he dared tell, nor would they want to hear it. They would most likely slap him and then go off to kill Akane.

To be honest Ranma didn't really have a lot of friends. At least none that he would trust not to blab to the entire school this sort of thing.

Sure there were Hiroshi and Daisuki and a few select others. But they were mere followers really, not equals, nor friends. Running over his ever dwindling list of people he knew, Ranma was trying to find one he trusted, at least a little. The old freak was out, DEFINITELY OUT! The old ghoul was wise, but he really didn't trust her, and couldn't dare let her know about this. She was a possibility, but only if he could figure out a way not to let her know who the girl was he was talking about.

There was Dr. Tofu, and while Ranma trusted him explicitly with regard to all matters of the mind and body and anything concerning honor, he was afraid that either Kasumi might walk in, or that he might spill the beans later when she did make an appearance. There was Ryouga . . . he trusted him, sorta but not if it concerned Akane and besides it was rather difficult to locate Ryouga unless one had a few weeks to kill wandering around Japan looking for an oddball martial artist carrying a steel lined bamboo umbrella.

"Ranma!" Akane Shouted. Ranma snapped out of it and focused on Akane.

"I have been trying to get your attention for the last couple of minutes . . . what are you thinking about?" She fairly yelled. Ranma could see she was starting to get mad. And lord knew that could mean trouble.

"Uh nuthin Akane. I was just, um nuthin." He stammered.

"Well then," she softened her voice now seeing as he wasn't just ignoring her. "Let's get going then shall we, it will be weird to actually get to school EARLY." She grinned at this comment.

It was at this point that they both heard it, and both of them froze in their tracks. A distant ringing approaching at what sounded like incredible speed. Which could only be one person this early in the morning. Shampoo.

Ranma paled and braced himself, Akane just glowered. "Great!" She thought, 'just great we were actually getting along fairly well, and now that Chinese Bimbo! Has to show up and wreck everything!' Out loud she said, "Ranma, lets get out of here . . ." Her eyes pleaded with him. But Ranma had suddenly had a realization. MOUSSE! He could talk to Mousse. Since wherever Shampoo was, Mousse was sure to follow. Akane started off towards school, when she noticed that Ranma was not following her, he was just standing there with a stupid grin on his face. Akane's heart broke a little bit then, and her face fell. Angrily she stomped back over to him.

"Ranma!" She yelled, he looked down surprised.

"Yeah? What is it Akane?" Softening her voice into the tone that she reserved for when she was really furious.

"If you want to get hung on by Shampoo and every other girl that happens to cross your path . . ." She paused a minute and fought back the urge to cry. "Then I guess it is none of my business. Just gimme my stuff and I'll . . . I'll leave you two alone." She sniffled just faintly.

"N-No no Akane it's not like that at all. I hate being hung on, by ANYONE. I'm not waiting for Shampoo, I'm waiting for Mousse." She just rolled her eyes and snorted.

"Yeah whatever Ranma." With that said she snatched her satchel and bento box lunch out of his grasp, intending to storm out of there, but only succeeding in sort of stumbling-walking. Curious though she stopped about a block away and turned back. She wanted to see what Ranma did around his other fiancée's when he thought he was alone. What she saw next amazed her. Shampoo displaying skills almost superhuman, was riding her bicycle on the top of the railing that bordered the aqua duct. A cloud of dust trailing in her wake. She was wearing her usual outfit, a pink silk blouse and pink silk pants, imprinted with a flower design that was very feminine very close cut and looking almost like pajama's. Her hair was pulled back out of her face with a simple ribbon, and as usual she wore no makeup. Waving to Ranma she cried out.

"Airen Airen, Nihaio! Husband no go to school today, take shampoo to date!" She grinned happily seeing as Akane was nowhere to be seen, and Ranma was just standing there waiting for her, oh happy day! Launching herself and the bike off the railing and straight at Ranma. Since Akane was not there though to distract him, nor hit or yell at him, he had plenty of time to gauge her trajectory and rate of fall, speed and angle.

He neatly side stepped the falling bike and caught her around the waist in a move that could almost be compared to a clothesline attack. Slowing her down just enough he then let her go to stumble behind him while he spun the opposite way he had let her go. It was over in under a second. Dazed Shampoo came to a halt and looked at Ranma.

"Husband . . ." She began, obviously struggling with the foreign language. "You I mean," straightening up Shampoo spoke a sentence that could almost pass for descent Japanese.

"Would you care to take me on date?"

'She must have been studying' Ranma thought. Akane watching from the distance noticed that while Ranma was being polite, and Shampoo was obviously unaware of it, he was constantly circling around her and staying out of her range. He had one leg back and both hands above waist level, a loose guarding stance but still a stance that would allow him to fight or flee on a moments notice. Effectively keeping the Amazon girl at arms length while not making her aware of it. Akane started to grin openly. Shampoo was getting frustrated. Here she had spent all that time learning that phrase, thinking that the only reason that Ranma hadn't accepted her invitations in the past was because he hadn't understood her.

Thinking he might not have heard her the first time, she tried again. "Would Husb . . . I

mean , would you care to take me on date?" She looked up at him hopefully.

"Hey Shampoo that's great! Your Japanese is improving every day . . . who has been helping you?" Ranma asked. In the shadows Akane frowned. "What's he being so nice to her for?!" She muttered under her breath.

Shampoo answered Ranma, uttering a single one word answer. Ranma leaned forward and said, "who? I didn't hear you." A little louder the very proud Amazon girl mumbled the word again. Seeing that Ranma was still waiting for an answer , she blurted out, "MOUSSE! Stupid duck boy help me!" Shampoo pouted, and to alleviate the uncomfortable tension she felt she took the time to run through the familiar motion of flipping her hair over her shoulder.

Ranma just grinned and looked up. Scanning the rooftops, then back down at Shampoo. Then Ranma got an evil impulse. "Was it hard Shampoo?" he asked her. Looking up proudly Shampoo declared,

"Nothing too hard for Amazon warrior!"

"Well did you work real hard on it?" Ranma grinned. Shampoo not getting where Ranma was heading with this simply nodded. Almost laughing now Ranma managed to get out, "did you work yourself into a lather?!" Grinning he snorted and tried not to laugh out loud. Shampoo just stood there a minute then suddenly getting it she stood up tall and with her hands on her hips she defiantly shot back, "that not funny Ranma! Village family names of Amazon tribe no is for laughing! Husband's need be polite!" She made a great pouting face and then grinning evilly she said, "maybe wild stallion boy need to be broken in more, yes?"

Ranma shut up still grinning and just accepted the play on words regarding his name sake. Looking at Shampoo again he imagined her working herself into a lather again and broke out laughing harder. Falling over and clutching his sides Ranma giggled uncontrollably.

It was contagious and soon Akane was chuckling quietly to herself in the shadows and Shampoo was smiling though not laughing . . . Warrior women did not laugh, she told herself. Ranma while rolling on the ground in mock hysterics was still watching the rooftops for telltale signs of the person he was watching for. The master of "hammerspace" was sometimes hard to spot, so Ranma was teasing Shampoo in the hopes of goading him to reveal himself. Knowing how protective Mousse was about Shampoo . . . there! About a block away by that chimney, a flash of light off of metal. That could only be one person. Hopping to his feet Ranma muttered his goodbye to Shampoo and hopped up to the nearest rooftop then to the one after that.

'And that was that,' Akane thought. 'He never touched her, he was polite but kept his distance and now he is off to god knows where I am going to be late for class.' Quietly Akane slipped around the corner very proud of her fiancée heading off to school. Shampoo just stood there for a minute, then out loud she said to herself, "that one is crazy horse boy." Shrugging her shoulders she straightened her outfit and adjusted her hair, then turned and

picked up her bike, hopped on and sped off.

Ranma was busily hopping from rooftop to rooftop looking for Mousse. Spotting the glimmer he had seen earlier Ranma stopped a rooftop away and called out, "Mousse come out man, it's me I need to talk to you." Casually stepping out from behind a chimney mousse leapt across the chasm that separated the two rooftops,

"Shampoo my love you have come for me at last!!" Ranma expecting this neatly sidestepped the crazed duck man and yelled after him, "put your glasses on man, it's me Ranma!"

"Ranma Saotome?!" My most hated adversary?" Mousse then slumped his shoulders a little and muttered, "what do you! want?" He then sat down straddling the bridge of the rooftop. A knife appeared in his hands seemingly out of nowhere, a wet stone in the other, he began to sharpen the blade while glaring at Ranma, not exactly friendly body language. Ranma mirroring his opponent had his arms crossed, like a barrier in front of him. Ranma decided to keep his distance for now and simply leaned up against the chimney. Speaking first Ranma tried to break the ice.

"Mousse just hear me out okay man? You can argue with me after I am done." Nodding mousse continued to sharpen. "Okay mousse here goes, I really don't have a lot of guy friends that I can trust with this sort of thing. However you are a man of honor are you not?" Mousse looked up startled and replied, "Of course I am Saotome. I was raised with the finest sense of honor a man can have." He confirmed indignantly. Mousse was now paying rapt attention. Ranma continued on.

"Very well as a martial artist I ask you to swear to me that what I am about to tell you will go no farther, not even to Shampoo, and especially not the old ghoul. Do you swear?" Mousse paused for a second then said as he nodded, "I swear continue." With a sigh Ranma plopped down next to Mousse, he spoke in low halting tones. "Mousse, I am confused . . ." Seeing as it looked as if Mousse was about to make a smart ass remark Ranma quickly cut him off. "You have known me since you followed Shampoo here right? How many fiancée's do I have now Mousse?"

"I believe the official total is 3 now right?" Ticking off his fingers as he listed them, "There is Akane, Ukyou and, gritting his teeth, Shampoo."

"Right, not to mention: Kodachi, ling ling, lung lung, most of the girls at school, that ramen noodle fiancée I had, anyone who happens to swallow a love potion pill, female monkeys, Venus, basically anything female in general seems to be drawn to me." He trailed off as Mousse was starting to get "that look" on his face.

"What is your point?" Mousse growled.

"Well you see you and I are very similar yet also very different. We both have many of the same qualities but there is a striking difference between us two, you openly love Shampoo and chase her. What is it like to be that way? To know you love someone?"

Mousse sitting as Ranma was now facing the still early morning sun. His back was arched forward and his shoulders slumped as he hung his head in thought. His unrestrained black hair cascading down around his head, hiding his face from view. Suddenly sitting up and assuming a haughty tone of voice Mousse sneered, "am I to believe that the great self proclaimed god of love and he whom has total power over women, with legions of them falling at his feet, begging to be wed to him, is asking ME! What love is? Tell me Saotome what game is this? Do you mock me now?"

Ranma simply sighed and seemed to look even more depressed. Then he spoke. "You obviously don't know me as well as you think you do. I know that the old man isn't the cause of ALL my problems, but he sure is for a great deal of them. I was taken from my mother when I was six years old. The words "training journey," didn't really register then, as part of a ten year trek all over Japan and parts of China."

"I miss my mother Mousse, and because of Jusenkyo and this stupid curse of mine. In addition to the idiotic promise my pop made, I am honor bound to not see my mother until I can find a cure. Do you know what that feels like?" Mousse didn't, his mother was safe in China and he could go and see her whenever he felt like it. Paying closer attention now, he tried to listen carefully as Ranma, his supposed enemy, poured his heart out to him. He was beyond confused.

"Casual admirer's aside, I have four girls chasing me around right now in their own ways. There is Akane, my first fiancée I was aware of. Thanks again to the old man. Then there is Ukyou, my oldest and best friend to this day, she is also after me thanks to pop. Then there is my self titled fiancée, thank god, Kodachi the black rose of annoyance, Kunou. Crazy as she is and acts, she is only after me because I was the first male not related to her to show her an ounce of kindness."

Ranma paused and then looked sadly at Mousse, his eyes showing sympathy. "Then there is Shampoo . . . a girl so obviously in love with either myself or her traditions, that she will sit for hours on end perfecting her Japanese just so she can ask me on a date . . . how long did you help her with that phrase man? Knowing whom she was planning on saying it to?"

He looked at Ranma differently now, he could see a teenager sixteen almost seventeen, almost a full grown man, a person very strong and confident but in the eyes of this person he could see a lot of confusion and a little weariness. Haltingly he answered.

"I-err well I, yes you are right I did help her. I did it out of love. I don't think I could deny her anything if she asked it of me. I knew she would say it to you, but I just chose to ignore that part. Instead I just focused on her beautiful voice and imagined those words were being spoken to me." Mousse smiled a resigned grin.

"Yet you never give up do you? She spits in your face and you get up the next day and ask for more, completely forgiving her, full of love . . . why?"

"I-I love her Sao . . . err I mean Ranma. Until I am dead I will never deny that, nor will I give up hope."

"You know something Mousse I think that secretly Shampoo cares for you as well." His eye's lit up at this.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, I have watched her mousse, you ever just watch her? When she is around other men, she refuses to even speak or glance at them, completely ignoring their presence. Let alone flirting with them, she NEVER does that. Then there is you, she trusts you enough to let you live in the same house as her. She talks to you, and YOU are the one she goes to when she needs help man.

You are constantly breaking down the barriers that she lays down between you two. She even took you home tenderly after that match we had that I was supposed to throw . . . sorry bout that by the way, but you were kinda freakin me out with those blades of yours." Mousse was in shock. What Ranma had said was all true. Shampoo really did care for him! It was only the stupid laws and the old ghouls keeping them apart then.

"So what is your point Ranma? Why do you wish for me to tell you what it feels like to be in love?"

"I have four people in my life right now all acting on what they believe to be the influence of love. Some of them are very aggressive and open about it. Others are very shy or cautious about it. I have feelings too ya know, I'm human too . . . I just don't know what they mean."

"Very well I shall play your game Ranma and tell you what it is like for me to love Shampoo." Taking a deep breath and looking off into the distance he began. "When she walks into the same room as myself, my heart starts to beat faster and my knees feel weak. If she speaks to me I will gladly listen, for no sound is more beautiful than her voice to me. Many people either love or lust after Shampoo for her body. For me that is not the case. I am effectively blind without my glasses on. Even with them on the vision is not that clear. I never get to even hug her, which you do on an almost daily basis."

Ranma started to protest. Mousse holding his hand up continued, "let me finish, which you get to do whether you want to or not. I enjoy the scent of her whether it is the flowery "just showered" fragrance she has or her musky after exercising scent. I love everything about her and I would gladly almost gleefully die for her if she asked me to, and I would do so anyway if her life was in danger . . ." He paused to look up at Ranma. "Much the same as you have done for Akane on many occasions." Ranma blushed at this. "In short I enjoy being around her, revel in her affections and am not in love with only a part of her but with the person that Shampoo is." Stopping Mousse looked up and met Ranma's eyes unashamedly. "For me to deny my love would be silly." He said that while looking pointedly at Ranma.

"So tell me Ranma why the sudden interest in what it feels like to be in love?"

"I, um, I, well ya see . . . " Looking up and seeing Mousse looking rather un-amused and rather impatient . . . he began again.

"Something happened to me this morning."

"Yeah and?"

"Me and Akane . . . we well, sorta . . . " Mousse face faulted and he tipped over. Sitting back up quickly he prodded Ranma.

"Go on, go on."

"She well I, well we both sort of ki . . . " He trailed off on the last word.

"What did you say? You two what?!" Mousse was losing control here he was so excited.

"We kissed." Said so quietly that Mousse almost missed it, but also said with such sincerity and that blush on his face could not be faked that Mousse knew that he was telling the truth. Understanding lit up his features now.

"So you think you may love the Tendou girl huh?" That explains a lot. This could also cause you a world of problems if you let word of this get out, I can see why you swore me to secrecy. If you openly pursue Akane, all hell is gonna break loose."

"I know, I know, Mousse, I need help . . . I need a plan."