

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic Series: "Ranma Gets A Clue"  
Written by Robert "Asayogure" McAdams  
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#### Chapter 4, "The fury of the fiancées."

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Akane sat at the breakfast table eating her breakfast and sneaking furtive glances at Ranma. He was also playing a sneaky game of "peek-a-boo" and was stealing glances at her as well. Reaching for food became a whole new kind of game, to see if they could touch hands without arousing any suspicion. Ranma was having the damnedest time keeping a straight face today. He was in a good mood, and Kasumi, deciding to go Western style today, had served eggs and *bacon*. If Ryouga walked into the room, he would have a heart attack. Ranma was practically crying from the effort to hold in his laughter, just thinking about it.

All too soon it seemed, breakfast was cleared and the two of them set out for school as was their daily habit. They paused at the doorway to grab their lunches and satchels and slip on their outdoor shoes. Ranma froze in the entryway and pivoting at the waist with hands on hips, swung his gaze wildly around the area. "Where in the hell ... " he muttered to himself.

"Looking for something?" Akane said, looking curiously over her shoulder at him, while getting her shoes on. "Hey, where's your bag anyway Ranma?" She asked casually, noticing what he was looking for. "I uh, I um ... I dunno." He said while continuing to gaze around the room with his mouth open in confusion.

"I musta left it at school somewhere, or something." Shrugging his shoulders, he grabbed his lunch and snuck it in Akane's bag when she wasn't looking. Then he slipped his shoes on and hopped out the door. Whipping her head around, Akane saw Ranma already almost half a street away.

"Damn it, wait for me!" She yelled after him, as she accelerated out the door in a run. When she caught up to him, they ran for a while in silence, with Ranma on the fence-top, and her running alongside him on the ground. Ranma didn't follow his set pattern today though. The closer they got to the school, the weirder he became. He kept rotating between running atop the fence and hopping down to run beside Akane. His eyes were all over the place, and he kept clenching and unclenching his hands into white knuckled fists. Akane was pretty sure Ranma was losing it. Ranma, however, just **KNEW** that something bad was going to happen.

That was how his life worked, he would have fun, and a bomb would level his house. He would smile, and be taken away from his mother for a decade. He would say he liked a flower, and it would turn out the flower was possessed by some demon Happosai had pissed off in the name of Anything Goes Martial Arts. He would eat some bacon, and weeeeeee// ...

At the moment Ranma would admit that he liked Akane. That was all, he just liked her ... right? But even so, things that Ranma liked or cared about had a habit of being destroyed or taken from him. And Ranma wasn't really in the mood for that kind of crap today. So he was being extra paranoid.

Running absentmindedly alongside her, Akane felt Ranma's hips accidentally bump into hers, and she skittered off the sidewalk, a few steps to the left.

'So that's the way he wants to play it huh?' Akane thought to herself, and grinned evil-like. Girding herself mentally for battle, Akane brought **HER** hips firmly into play and Ranma bounced into the fence with the twanging spring of stretching chain linked fencing. Snapping out of his thoughts as the fence snapped him back, he looked at her with a stricken expression painted on his face.

Then he playfully returned fire. Unfortunately, while they were busy playing and running, they failed to take notice of an ominous bicycle bell sounding in the distance.

Shampoo was so shocked at the sight running towards her, that she didn't leap onto Ranma, or even try to destroy Akane. She just sat upon her bicycle balancing atop the fence railing, looking down at the two of them, and feeling rather confused. Ranma and Akane, noticing her, stopped so quickly they had to dig their heels in to avoid falling over. Ranma swore a rather descriptive oath under his breath, causing Akane to raise an eyebrow in surprise at him.

"What you doing to husband, Akane Tendou?!" Shampoo demanded, her arms folded under her breasts in a no-nonsense kind of pose. The wind picked up for a second, and tossed her purple hair into waves flowing behind her, the wind carried with it the smell of the canal water, a musky wet smell. 'This could be a good or a bad sign,' Ranma thought, and waited to find out.

"*Your* husband!?" Akane shot back dryly. "I'm sorry I missed the ceremony. When did he marry you?" Shampoo shot Akane a glare that would freeze boiling water. Ranma now understood the phrase, "if looks could kill." Shampoo was making a move to advance on Akane, when out of the clear blue morning sky, a single sparkling stream of water arched towards her. Instant cat. Akane still hopped up on, "**MY**-almost-boyfriend" protection adrenaline searched crossly for the source of the water. Choking back a laugh, and settling for a snicker and a very satisfied grin, her eyes found the old lady watering the dust down outside her home as she did every day, following the ancient traditions.

'I swear, if I didn't know better I'd think she waits out here to get people wet on purpose.' Akane mused to herself. Her thoughts were quickly interrupted by the introduction of a heavy

weight onto her right arm, causing her to lurch off balance. Looking down, she found Ranma. Curled up into as small a ball as he could make himself, he still felt like he weighed a ton to her, though. Shaking and with a wild look in his eyes, he whispered, "C-C-Caaat!" Re-directing her gaze to the fence, Akane found Shampoo glaring at them, kitty cat like, of course.

Shampoo jumped off the top of the bike she was still balanced upon, and, as it sailed off into the canal, she sailed straight towards Ranma.

Ranma clenched his eyes shut and whimpered. Akane thinking quickly, spun with all her might, pivoting on her toes like a ballerina. This caused the heavy pack on her back, to swing with quite a lot of force. The pack caught the mid-air cat, and caused Shampoo to go sailing off after her bike, making very indignant cat sounds. Smoothing Ranma's hair with her left hand, Akane kneeled down on the rough, sun warmed pavement, on her skirt-bared knees.

She cradled Ranma in her lap and cooed to him for a few seconds until he snapped out of it. Looking up with his normal eyes again, their gazes locked, and Ranma did something he had never done before after being pulled out of his Cat Terror. Arching his neck, he brushed his lips up the base of her neck, tickling the little hairs there, and whispered in her ear, "thank you ... my fiancée." It was as near to kissing her, consciously, that he would dare to do in public.

Embarrassed and confused, Akane blushed and quickly pushed him off her lap, causing him to land in a rather undignified pose on the pavement. Standing awkwardly after having his body weight crushing her knees into the pavement, she wiped some loose gravel off her knees, straightened and smoothed her skirt, and adjusted her hair and pack. By now Ranma had regained his dignity, and was sitting cross-legged on the ground, staring at her rather crossly.

"I don't think that was necessary." He said dryly.

"Do you have any idea how much you weigh, you hippo." Akane shot back playfully as she finished making herself presentable.

"Yeah, well ... you still didn't hafta push me, ya coulda asked me to get off, ya know."

"Well I ... oh shoot! We're late again! Come on!" She dashed off in the direction of the school, leaving Ranma to stare after her dust trail and sigh. Rolling his eyes to the heavens, he muttered, "women!" and loped off in pursuit of her. After all, he needed to keep her in sight if he was to keep her safe. Not to mention the fact that she was carrying around **HIS** lunch -- that was important stuff.

They arrived at the grounds of Furinkan High School, and stopped. A small group of students were baring their way. Idly, Ranma noted that Kunou wasn't there, which surprised

him. He also noticed that unlike the aggressors he had encountered in the past, this group of students looked, well normal. The assembled students carried no battle gear, no sports equipment, and their eyes lacked that obsessed mad gleam. This was gonna be trouble.

Ranma swore another oath under his breath, this one a little bit louder and definitely not something he had heard in the Tendou household. Akane raised both eyebrows at him. A single student stepped forward with his head bowed. Walking towards Akane, and ignoring Ranma, he stopped about two feet in front of her. Raising his head, you could see tears streaming from his eyes. His hands clenched into fists. At his approach the wind picked up, but the noise died down.

"Akane, I have loved you for as many years as you care to recall. I poured my heart out to you on many occasions. I asked you out repeatedly, and never sullied your honor by participating in the idiotic actions of some of my fellow classmates in the morning, by trying to win your affections through force. Yet time and again you rebuked my advances and dragged my honor through the mud! I came here today to tell you that you are an evil bitch and I hope you are happy with ... "

**\*CRACK!\*** That was as far as the guy got. Ranma stood in front of his fiancée; he was breathing heavily, the sky grew darker behind him. Thunder sounded in the distance. The wind picked up behind him and tossed his hair and clothing around, as he fought to contain the rage that sprang up within him. Akane could feel his anger, and it wasn't even directed at her. The young men in the courtyard must have had bladders of steel to remain rooted in place as they were, and not wet themselves. The wind was bringing with it the smell of the sky right before it rained. Ranma's clothing started to whip and snap about as the wind built in tempo. The weather mirroring his darkening mood. His hands were clenched into fists and his knuckles were white as he squared off against the threats against his fiancée.

"Ut-oh." Akane said quietly. Still standing in the same place she had been when this had started, while wearing a surprised and unhappy look on her face. She was still clutching her satchel in front of herself like a shield, from when the boy had approached her. Then, Ranma spoke.

**"LISSEN UP!!!** Akane is **MY** fiancée! Only I have the right to call her names. I am warning you now I am **NOT** in a good mood. If you have any brains you will leave **RIGHT NOW!!**" At that, about two thirds of those assembled did leave, quickly. The scrambled and knocked each other over in their haste to get away. One student Akane could just barely hear, berated another as they ran, "Idiot! How could I let you talk me into taking on Ranma! *Come back here!*" The student then slapped the back of the other student's head as they ran. That left five total, discounting the now unconscious young man at Ranma's feet. The remaining ones were about to regret their decision.

Akane just stood there in shock over how furious Ranma was. He was protecting her!

Violently! 'Good lord,' she realized, 'this could get out of hand quickly!' Akane walked up behind Ranma, intent on soothing him; but as she approached, she suddenly felt the strong need to back away. The sky grew even darker as black clouds rolled into the previously clear sky. Ranma seemed to be radiating heat. She heard a low growl escape his throat and she watched as he started to glow very faintly around his body outline with a dull and almost dirty crimson aura!

The last time she had seen this battle aura had been on the island of Togenkyo as they were falling toward what she had thought at the time was her certain doom. He had cast a red aura then, right before he had released the energy of his Ki into an attack she had never seen him use, using it to protect her, the blast had been strong enough to drill through an island! 'Dear god, he's ready to kill for me!' Akane realized in a panic. Frantically, she looked around for a way to cool Ranma down, or for some help in that area. *Where was Dr. Tofu when you needed him?*

Ranma's incredible display of power managed to scare away two more of the students. Now only three were left. They were unarmed, but Akane also knew they were Martial Artists, and they were fantastic ones. They were in her P.E. class and she spoke with them on many occasions. Before today, she had considered them friends, even though each one of them had been persistently asking her out since she had been like, twelve. They held their ground and met Ranma's cold furious gaze with gazes of frustrated vengeance. Akane was terrified. Not for Ranma but for these brain dead people! Dear lord, didn't they see how angry he was? He was ready to kill! She had to stop this.

Stepping in front of Ranma, Akane tried to get his attention. Looking into his eyes froze her as an icy blast of dread knifed through her. Her heart clenched in her chest. In those beautiful blue eyes of his, she saw a life time of pain and loss. She saw anguish and personal suffering. She knew that Ranma was protecting her, but she had no idea what the depths of his feelings were, or all of his reasons for doing so. But looking into those eyes, she knew Ranma was not entirely in control of himself. Now she was **REALLY** afraid for those guys, they had no idea of the potential danger of the powder keg they were holding a match to.

Ranma glared at the young men assembled before him. All of them unarmed, just the way he liked it. But that didn't matter because he knew them all to be masters of their individual arts. As a matter of fact, these were some of the guys Ranma trained with when Ryouga wasn't around. One was a master of Judo. A deadly art if used properly, and an effective counter to the Kenpo style. One was a master of Akido. Not necessarily a deadly art, but also quite capable of it, Akido was also an effective counter to his style. The last was a master of Tae Kwondo. That was too similar to Kenpo to be of any threat to Ranma on a half-way good day.

But this was not a good day, and he had two other serious threats to deal with. Despite what people thought about Ranma, he was no god, and he was not invincible. A good shot to the right place on his head would render him unconscious as well as anyone else -- Cologne

& Happosai proved that often enough. Ranma was afraid, not for himself but for Akane. Coldly, he considered his chances of beating three masters simultaneously, using conventional methods.

Weighing his options, he also started to unconsciously tap into a power within himself that he knew nothing about. Something he had only used a few times in his life and had always used in the defense of others. Most recently that meant Akane. This primal power came alive within Ranma's mind and tore through his body in the shape of his life's failures and fears, his suffering and sweat and tears, filling him with it's strength. He subconsciously felt the most incredible need to protect, violently. The power grew as his mind flashed back to his training, and everything that he had gone through because of it.

He had lost too much, had suffered too much at the hands of men and women, doing what was "right," or was "for his own good." He had been separated from his mother, he had missed a large chunk of his education traipsing around Japan and China training with his father, he had been forced to leave friend after friend behind on that trip. Bitterly, he thought of Ukyou, and what he had been unwittingly forced to do to her.

She had been the first person that Ranma could recall as having said they loved him. His father rarely did, and he barely remembered his mother. True at the time he had thought Ukyou a boy and thought the talk of love as sort of weird, but it had still made him feel good. It had made him feel accepted and safe. Like he was home.

Over the years of his training, he might have forgotten a lot about his brief stay with Ukyou, but he had never forgotten that feeling. When they camped out under the stars, in the dark, in some strange mountain pass, Ranma would be afraid. He had cried himself to sleep searching within himself, alone and afraid, looking for that feeling many times. While his father would snore blissfully unaware of his child's fears just a few feet away.

He had never forgotten the feeling, but he *had* lost it. Several years later, as his self confidence and deadly skill in the arts had grown, he had slowly begun to realize that he could no longer dig within himself and find that feeling, it was gone. Which is why it had shocked him so, when he had felt it again, from a different source. He had felt it again when he had met Akane that fateful day, and she had asked if he would like to be friends. He could never thank her enough for restoring a part of his childhood, and with it a piece of his humanity.

Ranma felt a sick burning sensation in his chest. Then his anger turned into an icy resolve. Over and over again he kept muttering, "never again, never again ... you'll have to go through me ... I wont let you take her from me." He wasn't even really aware he was muttering it. Suddenly, Akane stepped into his field of vision. Waving her hands in his face and calling his name repeatedly, with a look of terror in her eyes. In the split second that he took to look at her, all hell broke loose.

The men attacking him were lashing out with years of pent-up frustration, years of rejection and loving from afar. True they had only come here today to vent a little, but since they now had a convenient target for their anger and bruised egos, they lashed out at Ranma with all they had. Ranma was defending one of the most precious things in his life at the moment, and had no intention of letting her get hurt, or losing her. While his focus was diverted elsewhere, they rushed him.

Ranma's only concern at the moment was Akane, he couldn't use any attack with her in the way. Quickly reaching out and picking Akane up, he cradled her in his arms and leapt. Kicking one of the students in the face, hard, to boost his jump to a nearby roof top.

Dimly his mind registered the sound of breaking bone, as his foot snapped the young man's jaw, or at least cracked a tooth or two. He landed and set her down gingerly. Then Ranma turned to settle this matter, for good. Before he could do anything however, he saw dual blurs of motion streak towards the students on the ground.

The motion turned out to be chains, chains trying to wrap themselves around the students. One student was now out of commission, lying on the ground writhing in agony. The other two managed to dodge the chains. Beside himself with astonishment; Ranma watched Mousse leaping to his aide Ranma decided to accept the impossible, and sat down beside himself to watch what most assuredly must be the end of the world, if Mousse was helping him.

As Mousse leapt into battle, weapons flying everywhere and battle cries shouted in Chinese ringing off anything that gave off an echo, Ranma could see a wet fur-ball sticking out of the neck of his robes, that could only be Shampoo. In a daze, he watched Mousse land perfectly balanced and square off against the two still standing. Mousse rocked side to side in a ready stance, coiled like a steel spring atop the balls of his feet.

Before anything else could happen, a stream of tiny cutting spatulas impacting sharply into the concrete, cut their way to him in a deadly row. Back flipping out of the way, Mousse never saw the ribbon that shot by to wrap him up. Shampoo the cat hopped out of his robe and went scurrying away as they landed again.

Ranma watched as Ukyou leapt down out of a nearby tree, and Kodachi stepped out from behind the shrub she had been hiding behind, Mousse held firmly in her ribbon. "You're ruining my plan sugar." Ukyou growled as she walked towards Mousse, unlimbering more throwing spatulas from her bandoleer as she walked.

"Ho ho ho. That's right darling, you'll spoil all the fun if we let you run amuck." Kodachi intoned as she jerked her ribbon tighter.

"These guys were about to help rid us of a pest problem, and they need to finish their jobs, sugar," Ukyou said grimly. Ranma couldn't believe it. He would expect this sort of thing from Shampoo or Kodachi, but, Ukyou?

"Why, those ... those evil bitches!" Akane growled from behind Ranma; he turned to see her make a move to jump to the attack. As she passed Ranma on the roof, his hand shot out. She suddenly shuddered and fell back into Ranma's arms. He released the shiatsu point from her neck and cradled her now limp body. There was no way he was going to let her take on Kodachi **and** Ukyou. He laid her limp body on the rooftop, snug in a crevice.

Ranma then hopped off the roof to confront his tormentors. He was still burning with the need to protect, and now a little bit of anger as well. Ranma angled his jump to kick through the ribbon holding Mousse as he landed. Without pausing, he then started towards the two girls.

"Ukyou! Have you gone insane!? What on earth would cause you to do something like this?" Ranma challenged as he slowly and painfully walked toward she to whom he owed so much. Quickly he searched his mind for a way to neutralize her without actually attacking a girl. The power still raging in his body screamed for vengeance, begging him to ignore her sex, and instead focus on the threat she represented.

Before he had a chance to do anything though, his momentum was halted as both of his arms were caught from behind and lifted into a position that was **VERY** painful. Turning to kill whoever had the audacity to impede his vengeance, Ranma caught a stiff fingered jab to the throat. Falling to his knees choking, Ranma saw through the tears in his eyes two satisfied looking martial artists. Seizing his anger and it's cries for blood, Ranma turned the core of his being into ice.

There was too much at risk. He had left Akane unconscious on a rooftop, Ukyou and Kodachi were confronting him, Shampoo might be back any minute, and then he had these two goons to worry about. It was more than his already fragile mind and inhibitions could tolerate. Stuffing his anger and emotions into a deep, dark corner of his mind Ranma staggered to his feet.

The two young men, who had been celebrating and congratulating themselves on their victory, halted in mid-back slap. Visibly resolving themselves to finish their jobs, they squared their shoulders and advanced upon Ranma with the gait of those who had already won. Ranma started to back away from them. He could sense their battle auras, their self-confidence, and their emotion-driven mind sets. Slowly they approached him, and Ranma, faking a look of uncertain fear, backed away from them as he drew them into a tighter and tighter spiral.



Ukyou realized what Ranma was doing, too late, but shouted anyway, "Look out you idiots, he's drawing you into a trap!" But it was too late. The young men rushed Ranma, screaming battle cries of righteous victory. Closing his eyes for a second, Ranma focused his entire life energy into sensing the heat of their anger and emotions. Fixing it within his mind, he had power over it. Just before the dual attacks reached him, he released the cold of his totally calm mind and body.

Catching his opponents in the physical as well as the mental sense, he channeled heart, mind, body and soul into an attack learned gratefully from an old Amazon. The attack of the rising dragon. Releasing the dragon, it took on a being of it's own and caught the two young men unaware, seized their anger and emotion driven attacks, bound them with it's own energies, and drove them heavenward, with a force to bring down mountain tops. It lifted them bodily off their feet into the air, slamming the force of their attack back upon them doubled in power and icy cold, over and over again. The dragon knocked them instantly unconscious, slammed them up and around the tightening spiral and carried them off out of the school grounds.

Standing in the middle of the blast crater, smoke and debris and fine dust swirling around him, and the icy blue aura of the dragon pounding out of him, Ranma turned to face his attackers. Settling his gaze on the one he felt had most betrayed him today, Ranma stepped out of the crater and started to walk towards her. The incinerated ground crunched under his footsteps as he took each betrayed step.

Letting his control go, his anger and feelings of betrayal surged to the front of his mind again. The anger was like an independent being, clawing and screaming around his mind begging to be let out. Blinking back the tears forming in his eyes that the feeling of betrayal brought, Ranma stopped about 10 feet in front of Ukyou. Calmly he noticed Kodachi trying to make herself invisible as she inched for the protection of the nearby shrubs and garden areas. Snaking the length of ribbon he had salvaged from around Mousse out of his sleeve, he caught her ankles with it, lashed it tight by jerking violently with his left hand, and tripped her off her feet.

His anger howled and wailed to be let free. But first he had to know why. Why would his oldest friend betray him? "Why, Ukyou, why?" He asked as he pinned her against the tree trunk she was trying to melt into with the force of his stare. Visually squaring herself up, she glared defiantly at him as she shot back.

"Why? Why do you think, you mule brained jackass?! You're mine. I *own* you. You have a debt to me and my family honor. You *promised* me damn it! Said we would always be together back then. You told me you loved me too all those years ago. You called me your cute fiancée! What was I supposed to do, roll over and die because Akane has a crush, and your fathers are idiots? You owe me Saotome, because of you, I never knew the life of a normal girl. That's why."

Stunned and shamed, Ranma's anger withered and died. Standing there amidst the chaos of battle, of love won and lost and pinned between forces he had no control over, Ranma broke a little, then he broke a lot. His heart catching in his throat, he fell to his knees at her feet. Dazed and confused. He still loved her, damn it, he had loved her *first!* But he loved Akane too, at least he thought he did.

But he had loved Ukyou first, and she had returned his love openly without asking for anything in return as only a child can. He **HAD** promised her, damn his father to hell for making him break that promise. What was he supposed to do? He knelt there in front of her, and blinked back the tears of anguish that threatened to consume him.

He suddenly felt a fierce constricting around his ribs, and looked up into the eyes of the first girl he had ever loved, as she hugged him desperately. Clinging to something she was either unable or unwilling to let go. Kneeling beside him, she held him and looked into his eyes. Searching for something Ranma could not fathom.

"I'm sorry Ukyou ... so sorry ... I ... I ... " he trailed off as she lay a single finger against his lips to shush him.

"It's okay sugar. All's fair in love and war right? I've waited for you for this long I can wait a little longer. Just ditch all those other chicks and we can head for the hills. Just you and me what do you say?" She bit her lip as she looked into his soul through his eyes, waiting for an answer.

Akane. Could he just leave her? What right did he have to her? The promises of two idiotic old men, made without his or her consent, before they were born? He had never made those promises, and denied them every chance he got. But he had made promises, out of his own mouth, to *this* girl. But ... he still liked Akane. He cared about her. Sure she couldn't cook, and was as violent as a gorilla, but she was *his* gorilla. Besides, if he just up and left her, it would ruin her, the same as it had ruined Ukyou. All of this must have been flashing across his eyes, for it seemed Ukyou got her answer. Shoving him aside, she stood. She glanced back over her shoulder as he lay stunned on the ground.

"You idiot. Can't you see that I know you can't seem to make a decision? If you had just stayed out of the way today ... , we managed to make those guys angry enough that Akane would be in the hospital for sure right now. Then you would be free. All you had to do was step aside and let it happen." Letting out a defeated sigh she continued. "But then you wouldn't be Ranma would you?" Ranma was starting to get angry again. Akane in the hospital?!

"So that's it. Take Akane out of the picture and then my choice is easy right? Ukyou. How could you? I know this wasn't your idea, this could only have come from her demented mind."

He said while jerking his thumb in Kodachi's hog-tied direction. "Were you were testing me? You had to have known this scatter-brained plan would never work. You know I would die for her. You know I would die for you. Heck I would even die for nut-ball over there if the circumstances warranted it. I know you want me to make a choice, heck half the girls at this school would like for me to make a choice. I also know I owe you. But not like this, U-chan not like this. I will decide, but it will have to be on my terms, when I'm ready. Can you ever forgive me?"

The usage of her old nickname had knocked Ukyou into a trance of past remembrance. Snapping back into the here and now she nodded. "Know this Saotome. I'll never give up. I would cross the gates of heaven or hell for you. Until you make your choice, I will not give up." Giving him a bitter-sweet smile. She jumped onto a nearby roof, and was gone.

Sitting up and hugging his knees to his chest Ranma's guilt and sorrow and indecision wailed in his mind. And he punished himself with it. He punished himself for the pain he caused Akane, and Ukyou, and the young men he had had to hurt today as a direct result of his indecision. He lashed himself for the pain he caused because every time he should make a decision, he froze like a deer in the headlights. He even sort of felt sorry for Kodachi and his old man.

Sitting there silently berating himself, he never heard the foot steps approaching him, but he did feel it when a most definite feminine weight glomped onto his torso from the rear. Pressing herself firmly against the object of her desire, Kodachi cooed in his ear,

"Raaaanma, darling. My love, why fight it? You know you love me, just say it and you have my heart and my estates. Myself and everything I own, would be yours forever."

'Oh great I forgot about screw-ball,' Ranma thought. Kodachi Clung to him from behind. How she had gotten free, only Houdini could answer. Ranma felt a flash of anger at her blatant attempt to buy his love. Ranma straightened to his full height, which was much taller than her, causing her to dangle from his back.

Landing with a plop, she grabbed his shoulder and spun him around. Anger in her voice, she also demanded a decision, in her favor of course. Ranma didn't owe her anything though. Before he could formulate a proper retort, a bonbori struck the side of Kodachi's head, carrying her out of the courtyard.

"Hey, watch it with those things! You could hurt someone!" Ranma shouted indignantly as he spun on his heel to face the Amazon warrior girl, who jumped off the roof towards him, yelling,

"Airen, when you stop stupid fighting and choose Shampoo? Is Amazon law!" She finished as she landed. Taking a step towards him, she waved her remaining weapon erratically. Ranma made the "evil be gone" signs with his hands crossed in front of himself, waiting for whatever punishment she was ready to dish out. He did owe her something, albeit indirectly. She crumpled after her second step. Mousse caught her from behind before she could hit the ground though. Grimly, he laid her on the ground as her weapon slid from her grasp. Wiping his forehead with a cloth materializing presumably from his cavernous robes, he sat beside the fallen object of his desire. Cradling her head in his lap. Ranma was beyond perplexed.

"Mousse, you did that?" Ranma asked.

"Of course I did, Saotome. She would have killed the Tendou girl and most likely yourself way before this if I did not render her unconscious occasionally." Ranma was dumbfounded.

"If you can beat her in secret, why don't you do it in public?! All you would have to do is beat her with witnesses around and then she would have to marry you!" Ranma elated, seeing one of his problems flying over the horizon.

"Just as Akane did not want to be won by violence when she had to fight her way to school, I do not wish to have Shampoo for my bride because I am stronger than her. Not even the old ghouls know I have a mastery of the truly ancient arts. If she did, she would make us duel and marry, in order to preserve the blood-line, and strengthen the tribe. I could not bear forcing Shampoo to do anything she did not wish to do. No Saotome, I will win her heart fairly." Ranma's problem came back over the horizon and dive bombed him.

"Then why did you help me today? If you hadn't bought me a little time, most likely those guys might have actually touched Akane. If she had been harmed, I would never have forgiven anyone involved here today. Including Shampoo. She had a part in this didn't she?" Ranma asked already knowing the answer. Mousse just nodded.

"I did not do it to help you Saotome. I did it to help an innocent, caught in between forces she has no defense against. Akane Tendou is a noble spirit, she does not deserve the fate that was planned for her today ... tell me Saotome, have you given a thought to the plan we decided on?" Ranma had, and it terrified him.

"I dunno Mousse, what will people think, you see what happened here today, simply because they must have noticed me paying slightly more attention to her than usual. If I commit to the plan, there would be no turning back, no second thoughts." Sighing Ranma looked off into the clouds that were hiding the morning sun. The birds had hushed and the school yard was as quiet as a graveyard at midnight.

"But I guess I have no choice now huh? You're right Mousse ... things are getting out of control, it's now or never." Looking back to Mousse for the confirmation he so desperately needed. He saw him gathering Shampoo into his arms tenderly. Looking into Ranma's eyes,

Mousse nodded and whispered, "Do not fail Saotome."

With that he leapt as easily as if he was not carrying a 130 pound girl, and was gone. Leaving Ranma standing alone in the ruined courtyard. The wind picked up for a second and pulled on him, seemingly as if destiny was tugging him in the direction it wanted. Sighing, Ranma leapt back up to the roof top and crouched over Akane. Brushing hair from her eyes, he gazed at the sleeping features of the primary cause of his trouble today. But he could not fault her for it.

Smiling tenderly, Ranma picked her up in his arms and squatted on the roof top, letting her sit on his lap as her head and torso rested against his chest, supporting her shoulder to balance her with his left hand. He reached his right hand to the two spots on her neck, and under her jaw line, and pressed gently. Her eyes snapped open. And she slapped him, hard. Falling backwards he hit the roof, as she leapt out of his arms shouting, "Pervert!" The anger fled her features when she saw who it was. Sitting down in a heap she looked up at Ranma, and muttered a quiet, "sorry."

Grinning, Ranma sat next to her. He silently celebrated when she leaned into his side and cuddled against him for warmth, shivering in the still chilly morning air.

"What happened?" She asked him in a sleepy tone of voice, while laying her head on his chest. "You fainted Akane." Ranma lied through his teeth. He seldom struck her unconscious, and she usually never bought his explanations when he did. The now obvious parallels between himself and Mousse were just sickening he thought glibly. But his explanation seemed to satisfy her today.

"How long?" She asked. Glancing at the huge school tower clock, Ranma noted that only about five minutes had passed since they had entered the gates together. Had it really only been five minutes?

"Just a couple of minutes. We should probably get to class. Maybe we'll luck out and Ms. Hinako fell off a cliff or something." He quipped. Akane giggled into his chest, with her eyes closed, and her breathing shallow. She felt so safe here. Her mind and emotions were in turmoil. She had gone from being terrified to elated in the course of five minutes and for some reason she felt very sleepy.

Dimly, she was aware of the fact that she was sitting on a roof-top in a skirt, which was probably why her legs felt numb, laying half-way on Ranma, in full public view. The common sense part of her mind screamed at her to get off of him, and down from the roof, and into class. But for today, she kicked that part of her mind sharply down into a silent corner, and let herself drift off into sleep. 'Great, just great.' Ranma thought. 'I must have hit that sleeping nerve too hard. She'll probably be out for an hour or so.'

Grinning silently to himself, he cradled Akane's shivering body to his. Scooting into the lee of protection the angles of the roof offered. Trying to keep most of her body off the clammy cold roof-tiles, he held her while she slept. Dimly his mind was aware of how dangerous this was. All it would take would be one person to spot them, and his old man and Mr. Tendou would eventually find out, and Ranma would be wearing a tuxedo so fast he probably would have to throw it over the clothes he was wearing.

But he ignored the danger, for today. Slowly her shivering stopped as the sun peaked through the clouds, then lanced across the courtyard, striking the two roof-bound figures with it's heavenly warmth.

Akane awoke in his arms forty-five minutes later, and this time she didn't slap him. Smiling shyly, she inched off of him, and smoothed her skirt. Without saying a word, they jumped off the roof. Ranma handed Akane her satchel at the door to the school, just as the tone ending first period sounded. Mouthing 'see you tonight', Akane turned and headed for second period. In a daze, Ranma headed down the hall.

Peeking around the corner, the girl who had retrieved Ranma's satchel for him quickly pulled her head back around and clutched his satchel to her chest. She had been so worried he wasn't going to show up today, and she would have to carry it around *again* all day.

That dang thing was **heavy**! Leaning against the wall right by the corner she demanded her mind come up with something clever to say to him when she returned his satchel. Her breath was coming in short gasps as the moment drew nearer and the realization of what she was about to do sunk in.

Trying desperately to gather the courage she needed, she closed her eyes and took deep breathes. Ranma turned the corner and promptly slammed into something short and softer than him. Looking down he saw the sort-of familiar face of a girl he was pretty sure sat behind him in first period. Looking astonished, she stared back up at him. Quickly, Ranma bent down and picked her up off the floor and set her gently on her feet. 'Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god ... he's touching me, what do I do, what do I do?!' She thought frantically. Her mind stared to shut down with panic.

Stammering, the girl held an object out to him. Shoving it into his arms, she said something about finding something of his, and ran off, her face a peculiar shade of crimson. Looking down confusedly, Ranma found himself holding his missing satchel, complete with the prize bokken. Smiling absently at the good omen, his mind still doing jumping jacks, he headed to class.

The girl, who's name was Midori, careened around the next corner and slammed her back into it. Pressing her forehead back into the wall with both palms she wailed silently. 'Damn it! I blew it, I blew it, I blew it!' Furious with herself she made dual fists with her hands and slammed them into the wall behind her.

The shock of the pain brought her back to reality. 'Gee I wonder if I broke something?' She thought as her hands started to throb. 'I guess I better go get a note and see Dr. Tofu.' She thought resignedly to herself. He would know what to do about this. He always knew what to do. Idly as she walked off to the nurse's office to get a note, she wondered if the doctor had ever met Ranma. Now there was a guy! She hoped the Doctor was in a mood to talk today, because she certainly felt like talking.