

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic Series: "Ranma Gets A Clue"

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## Chapter 6, "Archaic Awakenings"

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Sitting atop his pillar, Ryouga had a prime view of the surrounding area. Therefore he could see the approaching dust cloud careening towards him. Debating with himself for a little while, Ryouga decided now would not be the best time to see Akane. As she was likely dead set on seeing Nabiki as soon as possible. Ryouga hopped off the pillar, landing lightly on the balls of his feet with his hands in his pockets, and went inside to tell Dr. Tofu of the imminent arrival.

Akane ran driven by a fear that had her breath catching in her throat. Nabiki was hurt, hurt because she had been attacked by someone. Akane **had** to see she was all right for herself. Biting down on her lower lip, she willed herself not to cry. Akane was completely unaware of the slight copper taste in her mouth that her biting was causing. She was far too busy to acknowledge pain.

Glancing back, she saw that even Ranma was struggling to keep up with her, as he was staying about a pace behind her, and wasn't goofing off like he usually did when he ran; he was seriously running to keep up with her. Ranma charged behind her with his elbows swinging back and forth like the guide rods of a train's wheels.

Ranma thought as he ran that he could not bring himself to admit that Nabiki being out of commission would not be nice. She was an active participant in making his life difficult. But if she was really injured... and if it was because someone had assaulted her... then the perpetrators would have to answer to the fiancée of their victim's sister, after all she was family, right?

Shaking off that useless train of thought, Ranma forced his mind to take notice of his surroundings. A comfortable drill for someone to do who really doesn't want to think about anything. His mental exercises were a development of the consequences of a lifetime of having deranged martial artists and numerous monsters and demons trying to kill you from all directions, at any time.

After awhile you tend to develop the habit of constantly scanning your environment for threats. It is amazing what your mind will focus on in times of crisis, for instance, as he ran Ranma thought about the stupid little flower basins the government placed alongside the fence of the water canal. The flowers were a vain effort to beautify something that just couldn't be covered up. The effort was there but the results were the same. The flowers were

set there to cover up an eye sore and became one themselves. That was pure poetry.

At least the flowers gave off a pleasant scent in the late afternoon air. The sky was starting to clear, and was now only partly cloudy. A small breeze coming from the east picked up the delicate essence from the flowers and wafted it into the air. That mixed with the smell of the dust and the musk of the canal water made a refreshing combination that Ranma remembered from his travels in the outdoors.

Akane was frantic. She knew Dr. Tofu had a different way about him. He usually tried to make something seem better than it was by putting on a cheerful show. But he had sounded pretty serious on the phone. That was not a good sign. Akane ran faster.

Reaching the doctors building, Akane hardly paused as she grabbed the door and flung it open. The hinges creaked audibly as they strained against the tremendous, sudden force being applied to them and the door chime rang crazily.

"Nabiki! Where are you?!" Akane wailed. Running up the steps in the entryway, Akane forgot to take the time to don inside footwear. "Where is she?!" She murmured a lot softer this time. Akane started to race for the examination room door, when she slammed into something, hard. Bouncing off of Dr. Tofu, she stumbled and would have fallen backwards if her arms were not encased in a gentle but vise like grip. Struggling to stand up, Akane lowered her voice a little.

Looking up into the calm, smiling face of Dr. Tofu, Akane was reassured a little. "Help me up Dr. Tofu, please... I have to see her, make sure everything's all right...I promised..." Akane whispered the last part as her struggles slowed then stopped. Her legs giving out from under her even more she started to slump to the floor, as an icy fist of helplessness seized her heart and squeezed. Her breath coming in short gasps she started to cry. Crumpling to the floor the doctor cradled her, then picked her up and started to carry her over to the couch.

Ranma entered the door just then, assessed the situation with the expert eye of a trained observer, made eye contact with the good doctor, and nodded. He quickly went over to where Tofu was standing and picked up Akane's now weeping body, holding her as easily as he would an infant. He calmly stood there and spoke with the doctor.

"So how is she, Dr. Tofu? Is she gonna be all right?" He whispered as he started to rock Akane gently back and forth. Her hysterics slowed with the intimate contact and loving care she was receiving.

Tofu grinned as replied, "well if you mean Akane, she'll be fine. If you mean Nabiki, she has a slight concussion and a few abrasions on her head. She should be well enough to go home tomorrow. Akane on the other hand, seems to be having an awfully tough time with this for some hidden reason. I would like to have a chat with her before she goes home."

Nodding his assent, Ranma sat down on the couch with Akane still held gently in his arms and sank into the corner as she cuddled into him. She was making slight sniffing and whimpering noises every now and then. The fact that she was doing this was normal. 'Lots of people lose control of their emotions when a loved one is hurt.' Ranma thought. But doing it to him, in public... 'She must be losing it.' He decided. As he held her he endured something few others could survive; she was hugging his neck with a death grip. At the moment the brute strength that she was so famous for had somewhat left her, so Ranma could thankfully breath.

Akane's world was falling apart. Someone had hurt one of her sisters! The sea of her life was approaching hurricane capabilities and Akane was heading for the edge and desperately needed an anchor right now. Ranma was that anchor right now. The warmth of supporting human contact and the fact that it was Ranma slowly brought Akane back from the edge. Time marched onward heedless of her problems. Finally the room seemed to stop spinning and her heart was returning to a normal beat. Her tears slowing, she shyly raised her eyes to his, her long eyelashes clumped together with her recent tears.

"Well, hello there, feeling better?" Ranma asked. Shock painting her face Akane leapt out of Ranma's arms and tumbled onto the couch next to him. Breathing heavily Akane froze and just looked at Ranma.

"If you breath one word of this to anyone..." Akane growled.

"I don't know what you're talkin 'bout Akane." Ranma smiled a small smile. Satisfied Akane leaned back into the cool material of the couch and began taking deep long breathes to calm herself. The material under her slowly warming due to her body heat.

Just as things were starting to calm down in the small waiting room, the door to the small kitchen area slid open and Ryouga backed into the waiting room carrying a tea tray.

"Here's the tea you asked for doctor. Are they here yet..." Turning around, Ryouga froze as his gaze took in the sight of Ranma sitting on the couch right next to Akane. His eyes narrowed suspiciously as he noticed that her hand lay next to his.

Ryouga was just about to jump on Ranma and demand he leave Akane alone then apparently thought better of it. Instead Ryouga carefully walked to the table and set the tray down. Then slumped down on the couch and glared at Ranma. Akane looked up at Ryouga without expression, then looked back at Ranma. Ryouga deflated a lot with her obvious dismissal of him. Ryouga started to grow depressed. The doctor surreptitiously took notice of Ryouga's plight and decided he could put off talking to him until later. He had enough people flipping out tonight as it was, first Midori who was laying down in one of the back rooms right now under a mild sedative to help calm her nerves, now Akane, and if his internal clock wasn't way off, Soun Tendou should be dashing through that door right about...

"NABIKIIIIIIII! Don't worry baby! Daddies here! Where's my baby?! Where's my Nabikiiiiii?!" Soun jammed through the already open door like a bat out of hell, arms pumping and legs spinning like the wheels of a run away freight train, and leapt over the entryway steps. Running straight for Tofu, he seized the doctor's lab coat lapels and sank to his knees as he wailed under a waterfall of tears.

"You have to help me, doctor. You have to save my baby! My babyyyyyy! Oh Nabikiiii! Please doctor, please save my Nabikiiii! Can you help her doctor?!" Grinning on the inside, the doctor noted that Soun was in rare form tonight. Smiling, Tofu reached out to grasp the other man's shoulders in a gesture of support and understanding. If you knew the doctor even casually, you would be loathe to let his hands anywhere near your neck or shoulders, but Soun wasn't exactly in his right mind at the moment.

"There now Mr. Tendou. It will be all right..." The doctor trailed off as he went to work. Ranma watched expertly across the room as Tofu's magic fingers touched nineteen shiatsu points on the distraught father's neck and shoulders. Soun instantly slumped unconscious and seemed to be breathing easier. Cataloging the technique for later, Ranma watched as the doctor picked the unconscious father up in a fireman's carry and started towards the couch.

"Hello? Is everything all right in there? Hello?" The lilting musical chime of a young woman's voice sounded in the doorway. Kasumi Tendou. The ultimate picture of calm and beauty and control under any circumstances, stepped into the modest entryway of the young doctors business. She demurely slipped out of her street shoes, and into the very well kept light pink satin slippers sitting in the little box which was reserved for her by the nice doctor. The larger bin of complimentary indoor slippers provided for patients and visitors contained ordinary blue slippers. Her box was marked, "Tendou Kasumi " in beautiful scrawling Kanji. You could tell a lot about how someone feels about something just by seeing how they draw the characters for it. Her name was scrawled in loving sweeps and soft angles. Kasumi smiled her small private smile acknowledging the doctors' tender ministrations.

Tofu was frozen where he was, rooted to the floor as if he had always stood like that. His gaze locked onto the wall above the couch he had been headed for as his glasses instantly fogged up. Ranma, for the millionth time, wondered how his glasses managed to do that. Soun promptly fell from the doctor's grip and landing headfirst on the floor, remained unconscious as he flipped over onto his back.

"Oh father! You should be more careful. You are going to hurt yourself!" Kasumi scolded as she walked to his side and checked his head for serious injuries.

'Great just great.' Ranma lamented. 'First Nabiki gets hurt, then Akane flips out, then Soun loses it. Ryouga is wiggin out, again. Now the doctor has lost it ... the only sane people in this room are me and Kasumi... all we need is for Kuno and Kodachi to show and we can have ourselves a nifty little party, play some music, and watch 'em all get funky like a witches' monkey.' Ranma smirked and had to choke back a laugh at that last thought - causing Kasumi to glance his way for a second and raise an eyebrow.

Akane chose this moment in time to be unpredictable and jump off the couch and run for the examination room. Sighing, Ranma got up to follow her. Slowly. He was not in the mood to be caught in one of her mood swings. Since when had he taken to following her like a love sick puppy dog anyway? He thought absently as he followed. Glancing back over his shoulder, Ranma watched Ryouga from the corner of his eye start to get up and follow him, then settle for glaring after him instead.

'Weirdo. One of these days he is gonna push me too far ... ' Ranma made a mental note to stay clear of him for the next couple months if he could help it. Ryouga was nothing else if not persistent. The only bonus for that was it would be a cold day in hell before Ryouga could track him anywhere.

Akane paused at the door, placing her hand on it lightly and leaning against the door frame, she breathed a slow audible breath then slid the door open. Walking slowly into the darkened room.

Ranma sighed again, and refocused his attention on Akane. Ranma followed with his hands clenched into fists at his sides as he crept in behind her, making as little noise as possible. After all he was walking into a possible disaster area. Sliding the door open a little further to accommodate his wider shoulders, he stepped into the room and with his back against the side wall silently slid the door shut. His eyes adjusting to the dim inner recesses of the doctor's examining room.

Akane was sitting in a chair pulled up next to the table Nabiki was laying on. She had Nabiki's left hand grasped tightly in both of hers, and she was whispering to Nabiki. Ranma, thinking Nabiki was awake, decided not to intrude on their conversation and started to leave. But Akane's words stopped him.

"Oh, Nabiki. Oh, Nabiki, I'm so sorry. So sorry I wasn't there... please wake up... please be all right ... I promised ... promised mom I would always watch out for you ... I'm so sorry ... so sorry ..." Her voice cracking, Akane slumped over in her chair, laid her cheek against Nabiki's, and started to cry. Not the tears of hysterics, but the slow deliberate tears of guilt and fear.

Observing her wounds from where he was, Ranma noted that they appeared minor. Whoever had attacked her had only struck her once on the head, with some kind of blunt instrument, and her arms were slightly bruised from what looked like an arm lock from behind. That wouldn't bruise someone who worked out even a little bit in the upper body area, but obviously Nabiki didn't do so. Akane was seriously over reacting. 'But in comparison to Soun, I guess this is moderate.' Ranma chuckled grimly to himself then started to walk hesitantly over to her.

This was a very volatile situation. There was no telling how Akane would react to his presence. She could explode at his intrusion, or latch on to him as she had done in the

anteroom. He really didn't know all that much about her now that he thought about it. He had spent the better part of the beginning of their relationship together avoiding her, or showing off. He couldn't remember the last time they had just...talked. However she reacted, Ranma decided he would rather be elsewhere right now.

Cautiously he approached her from behind. Taking care to make a small amount of noise announcing his presence. The last thing he wanted to do was startle her. Reaching her, he lay his hands gently on her shoulders and waited for her to react. He got nothing. Pulling back, Ranma looked closer at the two sisters. Akane was draped over Nabiki on Nabiki's left side. She was lying over her like a policeman would do to protect an innocent from a psychopath's random gunfire, crying softly. Her left arm tucked under Nabiki's waist in a fierce grip, her right under her neck. Their heads cheek to cheek. Akane's eyes were squeezed tight and she was muttering something over and over again. It sounded like... "please?"

Astonished, Ranma saw Akane start to glow a dim yellow right before his eyes. As he watched the yellow got brighter and brighter. Soon the aura around her was as yellow as any dragonfly's coat; the fringe of the glow was shining a silky white. The room was now awash with the surging and pulsating light of Akane's aura.

Ranma had only seen Akane give off an aura a few times in his life. Usually right before he thought she was going to end his life. But those had usually been red or blue, the colors of battle. And they had never been this bright or complicated before. Usually just a faint glow of a single shade of color. This was a strong glow and it was multicolored.

Now Ranma considered himself a rather accomplished authority on the subject of auras. But he was almost positive he had never seen anything like this. As Ranma watched, he backed away from the two sisters, until his back met the table on the far wall halting him. Astonished Ranma's eye's locked on the sight before him.

Akane was now rocking back and forth, Nabiki still held under her like her own child. A low howling sound like a grieving mother's wail for a dead child started up somewhere outside in the closely approaching dusk. As the glow from Akane grew in intensity, so did the sound. As the crescendo mounted, Ranma had to squint his eyes against the fantastic surge of light pouring from Akane. Determined to watch, he shielded his eyes with one hand, as if he was shielding the sun.

Suddenly Akane raised her head and arched her back and neck with her arms extended upward in a 'V' shape. She started to scream a defiant scream to the gods. Light was pouring out of her open mouth and her eyes glowed white as the sun. The howling outside crested with her, and the windows on the other side of the room burst open and a wind that was alive rushed into the room.

The wind seemed more liquid than ethereal and carried with it the scent of lilac and pear blossoms, rushing spring water and fresh cut grass. As he watched awestruck the wind swirled around the two sisters and focused on Akane. It seemed to actually be permeating her! Slowly the glow that had been radiating from her seemed to sink into her. Her skin started to glow with the brilliant glow of the sun. Ranma's eyes were now burning with the effort of blinking back the tears streaming down his cheeks. He was too awestruck to even notice. Akane had never done **this** before.

Akane now silent arched her neck back with her mouth still open, like she was trying to catch rain drops on her tongue. She let her arms fall and held them at shoulder level like wings, as she seemed to be drifting within the wind. Accepting the winds caress she danced with it, spinning around in small circles as Nabiki lay still on the bed. The wind lifted her and held her dancing with her as she swayed in place. Her mouth slightly open now and her eyes closed, she allowed the wind to suffuse her with it's life force.

Finally the wind abated somewhat and, leaving Akane, started to swirl around the outside rim of the room. The wind swirled around the edge of the room creating a wall of wind. Akane, holding Nabiki in her arms, now started to focus the energy in her body. That was the only way that Ranma could think to describe it. As Ranma watched the glow flowed up from her legs and down from her head, all of the glow centering on her torso, then traveling down her arms. Focusing on her sister on the table, Akane placed both her hands lightly on Nabiki's temples. The glow then seemed to seep into Nabiki and began to spread throughout her as it had just been doing with Akane. Akane started to make a low rumbling sound.

As the last of the glow left her, Akane started to scream. Not a defiant scream of terror now, but of pleading. It started low and quiet and grew from there. As she did so the glow started to pulse within Nabiki and swirl crazily, gaining in intensity with the rate of Akane's scream. Nabiki's back arched off the table and her body shook violently. Slowly, Akane's scream died out and with it the glow. As Nabiki's body settled on the table, Akane stood above her, swaying back and forth.

'Uh oh' Ranma thought as he dived forward to catch her. Falling, Akane rocketed to the floor like a marionette with its strings cut. Ranma slid under her across the slick linoleum, arms and head first, and caught her, barely.

'**Ouch!**' Ranma thought as his skin came in contact with hers, which was alive with the feel of electricity. Her hair was disheveled, and her clothing was rumpled, but she was breathing. Oddly Ranma could still smell the same smells the wind had brought, coming from Akane. As he picked her up, he suddenly felt weaker. His energy seemed to be draining, like something was sucking the life force out of him.

Shrugging off the thought, Ranma looked down at Nabiki and did a double take. He had

seen her when he first entered. Her head had been bandaged with a little blood showing through, and the bruises on her arms and neck had been visible. Now her skin seemed unbroken and the bandage had fallen to the floor, showing her head to be as untouched as the rest of her. And was it his imagination or was she still glowing?

Just then, the door slid open and Tofu practically fell into the room. "What in the world happened in here?" He demanded in a rather **un**-Tofu like demeanor. He seemed genuinely shook up. "I've been trying to open that door for the past couple of minutes and it wouldn't budge. And the whole time I hear sounds in here like all hell is breaking loose. Now all of a sudden it jumps open like it's alive..." His rant trailing off, Tofu walked over to Nabiki's prone body. Running his fingers up her arm and trailing them over her cheek and finally her hair, he turned and looked very seriously at Ranma. "How did you do this?" He whispered.

Ranma returned the doctor's gaze for a moment then shrugged as best he could with a teenage girl in his arms. "I dunno doc. You'll have to ask her, I just watched. But that has to have been one of the strangest things I have ever seen."

Visibly reeling, the doctor leaned back and supported his weight on the counter top. Ranma pressed the palms of both of his hands to his eyes as if to contain his sanity. "It can't be, it just can't be." He muttered. "I mean I always suspected it could happen, and she showed some of the ancient signs... but what can this mean..."

Ranma was beside himself watching the doctor losing it. The doctor had never lost it - well, not counting Kasumi anyway. The doctor was who you went to when you lost it. If the doctor was broken then there was gonna be trouble. Who was supposed to fix the doctor? Sure the doctor lost it when Kasumi was around, but that was different. Glancing down at his fiancée, Ranma muttered, "Akane what have you done?"

"Ranma come here." Looking up, Ranma saw only a plain counter and had to spin around to see Tofu standing across the room in front of his overflowing bookcase. 'How in the hell does he **do** that?!' Ranma thought as he lay Akane down on a spare bed and went to go see the doctor. He was rummaging through the books, going deeper and deeper into the collection.

"Yeah doc what's the deal? Do you know what happened?" Ranma asked hopefully. Tofu seemed to know everything when it came to these sorts of things.

"I have an idea... but I wish I didn't..." He trailed off as he dug into his books. Finally he leaned back, pulling a dusty old tome with him. Brushing off the cover with a quick swipe of the hand, Tofu presented it to him. The cover had characters written on it, they looked like Chinese. Although Ranma couldn't read Chinese, he could recognize their characters. But this script he didn't recognize, it must be ancient. "What does it say?" He asked while handing the book back to the doctor.

"It says, 'The record of what shall come to pass.' This is a book of prophecy that I picked



up while traveling in China a long time ago, when I was studying the medicinal arts.

"You speak Chinese, doctor?" Ranma asked.

"Yes. I speak many languages." Tofu stated absently while flipping through the book.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" Ranma inquired. Tofu arched an eyebrow over the book he was reading as he replied, "you never asked," before he went back to searching the book.

"Yeah, but doctor Tofu, I recognize Chinese characters and these don't look familiar to me... how old is this book?"

"This book dates back to roughly to about 1750 b.c.e of the Shang Era. It has been continuously and painstakingly re-copied over the centuries in order to preserve its contents through the ages. Or so I was told." He said without looking up from his reading.

"Here we are. This is what I was speaking of. This prophecy here." Glancing at the book, Ranma saw a passage bracketed in red ink, with many notations in Japanese scrawled in the margins.

"What does it say doctor?"

*"~And so it came to pass that the creator wrought mankind with a small vestige of his powers. He made the sky for and of their eyes and gave them the earth to sustain them. And as the earth and air shall hold and nurture them so shall they turn their backs to him and forget Him whom hast delivered their bounty unto them. So shall He take back his gifts from his chosen and in the ages to come shall forget them. Thus their loss of faith and the corruption of their souls when they serve and pursue selfish ends. Shall herald the end of an era as mankind rends their own world asunder. And It shall come to pass that the creator shall take back his gifts and turn his back to those who would take their eyes from him. And Man shall henceforth lose all knowledge of the ancient arts save for a small remnant of the faithful which shall preserve this knowledge until such a day that mankind proves itself once again worthy of his benevolence. But lo all shall not be lost in this time. "When the hour is nigh for mankind's destruction, a warrior-savior shall be born in their midst as mankind's final chance." He shall be pure of heart, but unrefined in word and deed. Thus he shall have to prove himself in the eyes of those he loves, and hates, as one beyond reproach in his quest for righteousness and truth. In the time before the darkness to come he shall walk the earth seeking to better himself and awaken the old powers within himself and his charges. Let it be known that he who walks with the powers of harmony shall soon awaken the knowledge of old and so shall he be mankind's final hope and redemption. So it is written and so shall it come to pass.~"*

"And that means exactly...what?" Ranma asked dumbfounded.

"Well granted it's a little rough. That was the best I could make it out to mean anyway. Like all prophecy it speaks in past and present tense and in parable. Basically I think this is saying that in ancient times men could command... well magic.

Well probably not all men, but a lot of them. I think with the references to the earth and air

that it was a form of elemental magic. Combining these and other unmentioned elements in certain ways could probably accomplish almost anything. They could use magic for all purposes and for some reason it was lost to them since there was a great war going on, or it was used for war or something like that.

Strange that the records from and before the Shang Dynasty do not speak of any cataclysmic event like a war of this scale. So it would have either had to have been unrecorded, or the records were destroyed... or magic was used in some manner to make people forget. Anyway that is second to the final part of this passage. It says that man will be destroyed unless our savior can prove himself and help to reawaken the old powers. That would mean magic." Ranma looked at the doctor like he would a two year old.

"So in other words this is a religious book, and it is talking about that Jesus guy that all those missionaries keep talking about, or Buddha, or what?"

"No Ranma, look at how he is spoken of in the passage. He will be a normal man, and he will be a warrior, I have never heard of Jesus or Buddha being spoken of as a warrior. No Ranma if this is true then he would be our only chance of redemption. I have studied this for close to all of my adult life. I studied this even before I started to study medicine. And I have been seeing the signs in history and in current events that make me think he may be walking among us. Things like the crusades and the mass population relocation to North America and even the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima are spoken of in this book...and...it speaks of the first re-awakenings of magic being shown in the form of water. I happen to know some people who have encountered magic in the form of water." He looked at Ranma pointedly. Ranma had nothing to say, Tofu had succeeded in freaking him out.

"Of course...I could be wrong." Tofu laughed as he set the book down. Ranma sweat dropped.

"Man, doctor...don't do that to me! I thought you were serious!"

"Oh I'm serious all right, I just don't know how accurate I am. It has been a long time since I studied this tome...I have been...distracted." He blushed.

"Ow! What the heck happened to me?" Pivoting on his heels, Ranma saw Akane sitting up straight on the table rubbing her eyes.

"I feel like I just ran a twenty mile sprint ... Ranma ... Doctor... why are you looking at me like that? What?" Akane, starting to get angry, hopped off the table and started to walk towards the two; she was not in the mood for games. "Why are you two staring at me?!" She stopped when Ranma pointed behind her, to Nabiki. Turning around, she glanced at Nabiki then glanced back. Then she whipped her head back around and ran to Nabiki's side.

"Oh doctor you did it! She's all better now, you really are a miracle worker!" Akane stroked the back of her hand down Nabiki's hair. Smiling gratefully.

"Akane ... I ... I didn't do anything." Turning, Akane eyed the doctor like a mother would a child she suspected of having a fever.

"Doctor ... of course you did, who else could do this ... " She trailed off taking notice of the serious look in his eyes. The room seemed to grow a little colder as he spoke.

"You could Akane ... you." Tofu said quietly. The wind in the now early night howled outside.

"You must be ... joking. I could never do this, I don't have your gift doctor..." Turning her gaze to Ranma for support she saw something she hadn't even seen in his eyes before, doubt. Terror seized her heart.

"What do you mean I did it?! I can't even put a Band-Aid on some one without messing it up, how could I heal her?"

"Akane ... how do you feel right now?" The doctor asked as he made his way across the room to close the door and then over to the little corner where the tea was kept, and poured himself a cup. The warmth of the tea through the cup helped to keep him under control. He then placed the cup on the counter and lifted himself up with his hands to sit on the smooth cold counter top, and started to sip from the cup as Akane collected her thoughts.

"I feel ... I feel tired, but refreshed and sort of tingly all over, and for some reason I think I smell lilac and grass clippings. But I feel fine, what does this have to do with anything doctor? Are you playing games with me? Now is not the time doctor."

"Ranma." The doctor directed his attention to him. "Tell her what you saw." He gulped and nodded. Staring at the ground, Ranma started.

"You, well you ... geez ... I dunno how to describe it...you called the wind I guess, and started to glow yellow. Then you danced around the room screaming in a weird language as the wind whipped around the room, then you took all of the glow from your body and put your hands on Nabiki's head, and the glow went into her. Then you screamed again, and the wind left and you fainted. When I stood up after I caught you, I noticed that Nabiki was all better. Doctor Tofu had nothing to do with it." Akane looked around the room. It was in perfect order, as the doctor always kept it.

"If there was wind howling around in this room, why isn't this place a mess, you are not making sense." She demanded.

"Magic." The doctor said without looking up from his tea. "You called magic to aid you in what in your mind was a serious need. You called it and it came and obeyed you...you used it on instinct." Akane looked beyond incredulous.

"But... but Doctor... there's no such thing as magic." She stated simply. Like she was telling a child the world was round.

"Isn't there?" The doctor asked as he nodded his head to Ranma. Ranma looked pale.

Akane was not in the mood to be played with. "Ranma ... Doctor Tofu, stop playing games

with me. I know that Ranma has some kind of magical curse. But that's different, he got that in China in a magically cursed place. I don't have magic. It's not possible." With that she turned her back to them and went to tend to her sister.

Ranma and Tofu exchanged a knowing glance. Then Ranma walked silently towards the door. When it shut, Tofu spoke from where he was sitting.

"Akane, tell me about your mother, tell me about your childhood. Tell me about your sisters. Why are you the only one who studies the art?" He sat and sipped his tea and waited.

Akane stood stiffly for a minute then slumped her shoulders a little and walked over to the bench by the window and leaned against the window sill as she gazed on the peaceful night sky. Even from where she was she could feel the cold emanating from the window. She shivered. Then in a shaky voice she started to tell him what he wanted to know.

Ranma slid the door shut and stood with his hand behind his back still on the handle observing the room. It was a mess but it could be worse he guessed. Ryouga was sitting on the couch with his elbows resting on his knees and his head pressed into his hands. Probably crying. Kasumi was arranging things in the doorway, sweeping up some stuff, and doing her usual thing. Soun was sprawled on the other end of the couch with one leg up over the back of the couch, one hanging off the arm of the couch and his head lolling almost to the floor. He was out cold.

Ranma was about to head over to Kasumi and see if she wanted a hand. She never did, but she smiled so pretty when he asked. But before he could move, a young girl stepped into the room from one of the other back rooms. She had a cloth pressed to her forehead and she looked kind of woozy. She also looked kind of...familiar? Ranma decided to go introduce himself.

Midori wished she drank. Because if she drank then she would be able to compare this headache to that of a hangover, and say this was worse.

Her bleary eyes focused on the coffee table and the tea there, and she stumbled over to it. 'Man. Whatever the doctor gave me to help relax me sure left a zinger of a headache. But I hafta admit I do feel better.' She knew she had finally reached the low coffee table when her shins told her so. She winced slightly as she bent over to pour herself a cup. Idly she thought bitterly, 'A real gentleman would pour a cup for a lady' as she spied Ryouga slumped over on the couch...' Before she could complete her thought though, she saw held in front of her outstretched hands a steaming cup of tea.

Looking up, her heart stopped. There in front of her eyes, with a nice smile on and holding

out a cup of tea for her was, Ranma! Maybe the gods did hear prayers.

"Hello miss... what did you say your name was? I have the feeling we have met someplace before...?" Ranma trailed off embarrassed. He wished she would at least take the cup of tea, it was hot.

Midori took the tea reverently. She wondered if she should drink it, or save it? After all He had given it to her. Ranma smiled and waited for her to answer his question. Snapping out of it enough to speak, she answered shyly. "M-Midori, my names Midori. I-I sit behind you in first period."

Ranma snapped his fingers. 'Oh yeah that's right! She's the girl that gave me my backpack back I think.' Ranma smiled and said, "Well nice meeting you. I hope you have a nice night." And started to turn away.

'Wait, wait, wait!' Her mind screamed. Now that she had his attention she wasn't about to let him away that easily. Feigning weakness she moaned and stumbled a little. It had the desired effect, he appeared on her side and grasped her arm in support.

"Here let me help you to the couch, are you okay?" Ranma sounded genuinely concerned. He seated her and made to remove his hands from her arm, but she deftly grasped his hand and pulled him down beside her.

"Tell me what you're doing here, do you come here often? Do you know Dr. Tofu? Where's Akane at?" Midori had all kinds of questions. Ranma was starting to feel trapped. He patiently answered her questions while he scanned the room for an excuse to get up. He didn't see anyone except Kasumi. Desperately he tried to make eye contact with her. He didn't even know if Kasumi would be able to understand what he wanted, but he could try.

As if on cue Kasumi's eyes came up and locked on his. Pleadingly, Ranma looked at Midori who was chattering away then back at her and mouthed, '*help*.' Smiling, Kasumi nodded ever so slightly and returned to what she was doing. Ranma was crest-fallen. He was stuck here. Kasumi hadn't gotten it. Maybe he didn't know her as well as he thought he did.

"Midori isn't it? I've seen you at the market before right?" Astonished, Ranma looked up and saw Kasumi standing there, wiping her hands on her ever present apron. Her attention was focused on Midori. Midori had to break stride to answer Kasumi. When she did so, Ranma made his break.

"I, uh, think Dr. Tofu just called me...I, uh better go look."

"You owe me one," Kasumi whispered as he passed her. Incredulous, Ranma glanced back at Kasumi but she was deep in conversation with Midori. Talking about the best place to buy material and buttons and that kind of stuff.

'There's more to Kasumi than most people realize.' Ranma thought to himself as he smiled as he made his way back to Akane and safety. He knocked once on the door and waited.

A muffled, "come in," came from behind the door and he cautiously opened it. Akane and Tofu were much as he had left them. She was sitting by the window with a blanket wrapped around her shoulders, cradling an untouched cup of tea in her hands, it was still steaming slightly but by the look of it was almost cold. She was leaning back in her chair and talking almost in a monotone. Tofu was sitting on the counter top sipping tea as well, his looked fresh and just poured. There were tears streaming down Akane's face.

"So when I went to see mom that day... I, uh she called me over to her bed... then she asked me to do her a favor... to make her a promise. She told me that all of her little girls had special gifts, and that mine was strength. She said ... she said that she wanted me to always watch over my sisters and daddy, since she wouldn't be able to anymore..." Akane took a deep breath and sniffed. Gulping back an obvious lump in her throat she went on.

"Then she held me in her arms and sang me a lullaby, then she set me down and told me to go get daddy. Then ... then daddy and you went in to see her, and I never saw mom again..." Hanging her head down so her chin rested on her chest, Akane wailed in her own private anguish. Ranma started to walk towards her, to do what he could to ease her pain. He understood. His mother wasn't dead, but she might as well be for all the good it did him. Dr. Tofu however held out a hand to stop him.

"Akane... ?" the doctor asked. "Akane, if you could have healed your mother on that day, would you have?"

"Heal mom? Heal mom!? Y-yes of course I would have! But I was just a little girl. I would have done anything I could to have helped her." Akane clenched her right hand into a shaking fist. "Anything." As Ranma and the doctor watched, the irises in Akane's eyes started to glow a faint white. As soon as it had started, it stopped and she turned a tear stained face to the doctor and said, "but what's done is done. All I can do now is keep my promise."

"Indeed you can Akane." Signaling Ranma with a slight nod of his chin, the doctor bade him to her. Ranma went and stood in front of her and offered her a hand. Smiling up into his eyes, she tentatively took it and allowed herself to be helped to her feet. Ranma offered her his strength and she took it. Again he felt that odd sensation of being drained as he held her and walked her out into the anteroom.

Kasumi and Midori were still deep in conversation, and Soun was still sprawled on the couch... Ryouga was nowhere to be seen though.

'Uh oh.' Ranma thought as he laid Akane on the couch. 'Better go find bacon boy before he does something stupid.' Before he could do anything, Tofu caught Ranma's eye from across the room and sighing went back to see the doctor. This was turning out to be one hell of a night.

"You saw it too, right Ranma?" The doctor asked as he sipped his tea.

"What, you mean her eyes glowing? Yeah I saw it." Ranma looked awfully uncomfortable talking about Akane's eyes glowing. "So why did her eyes glow? And how did she do that to Nabiki?" Ranma asked.

"What you have seen tonight Ranma must not leave this place. There are forces in this world that would not be happy at all to have one with magic back in their realm. What you have seen tonight was a sorceress' promise being fulfilled. Akane has the inborn ability to sense the source of magic that infuses the world. But more importantly she has learned, without teaching of any kind, how to focus that energy to do what she wants. She did this by instinct invoking one of the oldest legends from ancient times. The promises of the good forces of magic were always kept... even from beyond the grave."

"She did what now? Doctor it's late, talk to me like I'm two." Ranma grated. He was getting kind of sick of this.

"She made a promise to her mother on her deathbed to watch over her family. Tonight she felt so anguished not because Nabiki was injured, she could see with her own eyes that Nabiki was fine. She was in torment because she had not been able to keep her promise. In order to set it right she has done something that I do not think has been done on this earth for centuries. She has called magic to serve her needs, to help her keep her promise."

"Okaaaay. So what you're saying is Akane can use magic to heal people right?"

"No Ranma, right now Akane has no idea how to use the power inside her. She still doesn't even believe that she did it. The only reason she was able to do so was because she made a sincere promise with the spirit of a sorceress and her magic demanded she keep it. But I think ..." Tofu said in a hushed voice. "Maybe... it might be possible for her with time and effort, for her to come to command her magic..." Tofu trailed off in awe.

"Okay who hit me with a bus?" Nabiki's voice demanded. Swiveling their heads in her direction, the two men saw Nabiki sitting up straight and looking around the room. Tofu silently signaled Ranma with a small shake of his head not to tell her. Ranma nodded.

"How did I... what happened to me doctor? How did I get better so fast?" Nabiki asked incredulously.

"Magic." The doctor smiled. Ranma shot him a disbelieving look. What was he doing?!

"Well okay doctor, whatever voodoo you do, keep on doing it. If you wanna call it magic that's fine. Am I okay now? Can I leave?" Nabiki asked in her no-nonsense business voice. She was back to her old self again. The doctor nodded.

With a grin, Nabiki hopped off the table and quickly made her way out the door. As she left, Ranma looked at Tofu askance, raising his eyebrows in question.

"She is not ready to hear it yet." Was all the doctor said. Hopping down from the counter

top, he returned his cup to the tea corner and started arranging odds and ends around the room. "I have some things to wrap up now Ranma, so why don't you start getting everyone ready to go home and I will join you in a minute. We can talk more about this later." Tofu shoed him out of the room, and Ranma found himself once again in the anteroom.

Ryouga was still nowhere to be seen. Kasumi was still talking to Midori, Soun was still out cold and Akane was sitting up and joining in the conversation like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. As Ranma's gaze swept the room, he caught the brief flash of cloth exiting the front door. It was the same color as the jacket Nabiki had on. Casually, he followed her to the door.

Ryouga was sitting atop one of the concrete pillars of the wall around Dr. Tofu's clinic. He was looking off into space and had his hands folded peacefully in his lap. Nabiki was making her way over to him. 'Ryouga may be a screw ball, but he would never hurt a girl.' Ranma thought so he ducked back inside.

Nabiki didn't know what to say. She had always been very self sufficient, ever since mom had died. She had never needed to be bailed out of any situation. It had been her own damn fault for being stupid enough to go to a meeting in that neighborhood and alone for that matter. She had quite a number of security personnel in her employment. But she had foolishly assumed that just this once it would be all right.

According to the doctor, Ryouga had saved her. As a business woman she owed him a debt of gratitude. As a person she owed him her life. Finally her hesitant footsteps placed her behind him. He spoke before she could.

"Hello there. All better I see. Good. I'm happy for you." He sounded about as empty and forlorn as anyone she had even collected a debt with high interest from. But she didn't let that faze her, she had obligations to meet.

"I owe you one. Big time. You ever need a favor and you come to me all right." She waited for a response.

"A favor? A favor huh? Okay make me into a person that Akane will notice. Make me better than Ranma." Ryouga answered after a long pause. He still had not turned to look at her. Nabiki was getting irritated.

"Well within reason. I have no control over Akane. But I am sure I could fix you up with a date with her..." She trailed off as he looked over his shoulder ... tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"A mercy date? No thanks. I would rather die. She doesn't love me, she never will." He seemed to forget that Nabiki was standing there. Turning back to face whatever he had been looking at he started to mutter ... "the world ... is a dark and lonely place ... lonely ... lonely ... beyond care ..." as he spoke he started to shimmer a faint blue, the edges of which were



turning black. Nabiki recognized a battle aura when she saw it. Stooping down she picked up a mid-sized rock and chucked it at Ryouga's back.

"Hey! Don't you go blowing up anything when I'm standing here, I just got better!" Nabiki huffed as Ryouga looked back at her incredulously.

"What was I ... did you ... huh..?" He looked at her again and seemed to snap out of something. "Oh, heh, sorry 'bout that." Before he could say anything else though, Dr. Tofu's voice shattered the relative peace of the moment.

"Ryouga can you come in here for a minute?" He shrugged and nodded to Nabiki then hopped off the wall and walked into the clinic.

'What an odd person.' Nabiki thought as she followed him inside. Midori was standing by the door with her backpack on and was studying her shoes sheepishly. Tofu was in the process of asking Ryouga to escort her home seeing as it was after dark and she didn't feel safe walking home alone in the dark. Ryouga nodded dispassionately. He didn't care about anything anymore tonight.

As they set off down the street with Midori in the lead, Ryouga brought out an inky black traveling cloak and donned it. The cloak gave him the appearance of a phantom shadow heeling it's master. Although seemingly without hope, he still had the presence of mind to keep an eye on his surrounding as he escorted his charge home. Where he went after that ... he didn't care. Nabiki watched him go until he was out of sight. Before she went back inside she noticed storm clouds were starting to roll in. They would soon blot out the moon. The musky night air had the tangy scent that one can smell right before it rains. 'We'd better move it.' She thought as she hurried inside to grab her two sisters and her goofy daddy.

Ranma was standing off in a corner talking in low tones with the doctor. The doctor was pointedly **not** looking in Kasumi's direction. Nodding his head slightly the doctor submitted to Ranma tying a blind fold over his eyes. Ranma looked rather self satisfied. Akane and Kasumi were getting their shoes on and were also talking quietly. It was as if an intangible signal had forbade raucous activity and everyone was unconsciously obeying it.

As Nabiki went to get the rest of her stuff, she watched Ranma shut off all the lights then stoop down and pick up her daddy. She noticed Tofu's blindfold and chuckled.

'Clever, very clever young Ranma, you're learning.' A blindfold was probably the only way to keep Tofu from losing control. Now if they could keep Kasumi from talking to him they should be all right.

Akane and Kasumi headed out the door and beckoned her follow; Nabiki hurried to catch up. Kasumi glanced back and commented to Akane how silly the doctor was. Akane rolled her eyes. Ranma took to the high ground as soon as he cleared the door. He didn't even seem to be slowed by his burden. But Nabiki noticed that Akane and Ranma kept shooting

each other reassuring glances as they walked.

Tofu brought up the rear. Trailing them with his sense of hearing. They reached the Tendou residence in what seemed like no time at all. Nabiki dropped all her stuff at the doorway and tromped upstairs. She felt unusually tired for this time of night. Somewhere in the city a dog barked then howled, soon others took up the cacophony.

Akane headed to her room, she was so tired and confused she didn't want to think anymore. Ranma took Mr. Tendou upstairs and put him in his room. Tofu followed him. Kasumi watched him from the landing. She was very impressed that Ranma could carry such a heavy burden all this way and not even appear tired. When Tofu was inside her fathers room, she followed up the stairs and went to her room.

Ranma made the rounds of the house as he did every night. He always made sure that everything was locked up at night before he went to bed. He had already invited Tofu to stay over for the night, so they could talk in the morning, and also because he had a nagging sensation of danger in the back of his mind, and having the doctor around seemed like a prudent idea.

With the house dark and the sounds of people settling into their beds winding down, Ranma made his way to the upstairs hallway. Silent as death itself, he opened everyone's door to check on them. Tofu looked up when Ranma looked in and smiled. Soun was still out cold ... whatever the doctor had done to him, he had done well.

Nabiki was also out cold. When he poked his head into Kasumi's room he stared at her in her bed for a minute, thinking her asleep. As he closed the door, he heard her whisper, "Goodnight Ranma, guard us well..." Ranma again reminded himself that there was definitely more to Kasumi than she let on. Blushing at her praise, he silently closed the door.

Last on his list to check on was Akane. Tip toeing to her Door, he stepped into the room and watched her in the moonlight. Her soft hair framed her face perfectly, and her lips gleamed with the sweet nectar of her breath. She was ... perfect. Creeping closer to her bed, he knelt down beside her and just listened to her breathing as he stared out the window. A lot had happened today. But he found that his feelings for her remained unchanged. Sighing in resignation, Ranma started to stand and head off to his room, and his stinky old snoring pop. A hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"Ranma... I'm scared..." Akane whispered. She watched him with those beautiful eyes of hers. Eyes full of hope and trust, and at the moment a tinge of fear.

"So am I." Ranma whispered back. "It'll be all right though Akane, you'll see." He made to finish standing, but her hand stayed firm. "Do me a favor?" She asked in a voice barely audible. Ranma nodded. "Sleep with me tonight?" She asked while biting her lower lip.

Ranma's world froze. Sleep with Akane? Sleep with her? Was she nuts?! All it would take would be one person to discover them and he would be her legal husband within the hour. But... was that such a bad thing? He liked her didn't he? But... were they ready for this? To go from innocent kissing to... this? Ranma searched deep into her eyes in question.

"Akane are you sure? Once we do this, we can't take it back you know." Akane blushed beet red.

"Not that! you goober. I meant actually just sleeping with me. It's cold and I'm scared and lonely. And P-Chan's missing again."

Ranma sighed with relief, and regret. But he now felt a little better. Nodding his assent, he started for the floor. "Not down there silly, in here... with me." She whispered sleepily holding open a corner of her heavy down comforter. Ranma gulped and nodded. He started towards the bed but froze when she spoke again.

"Wait, lock the door first... " Nodding again, he quickly went to the door and shut and locked it. Then he tiptoed back to the foot of the bed, and crawled next to Akane.

"You sure 'bout this Akane? You want me to change into a girl or sumthin?" Akane rolled over and looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

"Why Ranma? Can't I trust you?" She teased him. Ranma blushed and nodded his head.

"S-Sure you can." Nodding her approval, she turned her back to him again. 'I'm just not so sure I can trust myself' Ranma thought. Ranma lay on his back, side by side with Akane, with as much distance as he could create between them. Lying on top of the covers he stared at the ceiling and realized his heart was racing. He doubted he would sleep tonight. Akane smelled like ... well a girl. Perfume and soap and all kinds of other smells he associated with women were coming from her and her room. Her bed was also much softer than he was accustomed too. He was used to a simple futon on the floor. 'This is gonna be a loooooong night' Ranma lamented. He shook slightly from the cold, and thought about getting up and getting a blanket from the closet in the hall.

"Hey, silly... get under the covers before you freeze to death." Akane's voice scolded him without looking at him. Gulping again, Ranma gently rolled onto his side and lifted up a corner of the sheets and comforter. The warmth emanating from the interior was very appealing.

Scooting a little bit closer to her so he could cover them both with the covers, Ranma lay very still on his side. The inside was deliciously warm. Ranma had never shared a bed with anyone. Especially a beautiful girl.

Ranma gasped as Akane finally got tired of waiting for him to make a move and scooted back into his body. With deft pulls of her hands she scooped his right arm under her neck and

his left over her waist and made them clasp her in a hug. She wiggled her bottom closer to him and in doing so caused her pajama top to rise a little. The smoothness and warmth of bare mid-drift skin almost made Ranma faint from sheer sensory overload. Sighing contentedly Akane lay her head back down and seemed to go to sleep.

'At least she has pajamas on.' Ranma thought. 'If she didn't my nose would be bleeding all over the place right now.' With a resigned sigh Ranma nestled his chin in the crook of Akane's neck. They now lay together like two spoons in a drawer. The pleasant scent and feel of this beautiful person as her rhythmed breathing filled the still night air, finally lulled Ranma to sleep. His last thought was, 'Gee this isn't so bad after all... '

On a rooftop about two miles away a shadowed figure garbed in the blackest of black watched the Tendou residence through a pair of high powered binoculars. Glancing at his wrist watch, he noted the time then keyed a short sequence into a data pad on his opposite wrist. A short thin wire extended from a headset he was wearing, it beeped a go-ahead signal. He spoke into it softly. It was powerful enough to pick up the tiniest of whispers.

"I have the targets in sight. Proceed?"

"No. Wait for re-enforcements. They should be there a little before dawn."

"Acknowledged. Over." The transmitter hissed off with a snap. The man smiled an evil grin. Soon he would be able to take revenge for his fallen comrades.