

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic Series: "Ranma Gets A Clue"
Written by Robert "Asayogure" McAdams
Stories Archived at: <http://www.asayogure.com/rgac>
First Draft (5/11/2000)
Last modified (6/28/2000)

Chapter 9, "The Many Problems With Women"

Ouch. Kasumi's head hurt. Slowly her conscious self swam out of the abyss that she had slipped into. Breathing in slowly the cool slightly musty air of the room she was in Kasumi's mind tried to sort out many things. Where was she? She was lying down, she could feel that. The surface she was on was soft, and bumpy ... the couch? What was she doing on the couch? Ouch! Man her head hurt! She felt like some crazy little imp had been whanging away at her temple with a pint sized mallet for days. Her head was literally throbbing with pain. Chancing it, she attempted to crack her eyelids open to see what was going on ... big mistake. Hurriedly squeezing them shut again, she sucked her breath in sharply as the little needles of pain stabbed behind her eyes. Ouch ouch ouch ouch ouch.

Now she remembered. That man, that big, smelly, awful man had struck her. Kasumi had never, ever, been hit like that before. Oh sure, mom had swatted her behind a few times on the rare occasion she had been a naughty girl when she was little. But she had never been struck out of violence before. Lying there, Kasumi decided she respected Ranma even more now.

Bravely trying once again, Kasumi briefly opened her left eye, slowly her vision cleared and she could vaguely make out someone sitting slumped over in a chair beside her. It was ... no ... it couldn't be him. Quickly, she shut the eye again. The room was dark with all the lights out, and Kasumi judged the time of day to be about a half hour before dawn.

With a determined moan, Kasumi tried to sit up. The wall of pain that her motions caused, slammed her back onto the couch before she realized it. The commotion that her movement caused jolted Tofu out of his dazed stupor and took his eyes from the far wall, and the images playing again and again through his mind.

With a far away look in his eyes, Tofu snapped out of his thoughts on that weird and frightening dream, and stared at the face of his beloved. Laying the back of his hand across her warm and slightly sweaty forehead he checked for a fever, there was none. Kasumi's face was bruised and swollen. It was bandaged and puffy, her hair was tousled and her breath was probably terrible. But Tofu loved her fiercely. He would trade anything, anything! To be the one to suffer this pain for her. If only he hadn't been such a pathetic loser! If only he could have looked upon this woman and not had his mind turned into insta-pudding.

He had failed her. He had let her down when she really needed him. What if that man had

shot her, or used a knife? It could have easily been either of those options instead of a simple slap. Sure, a slap for most people wasn't that big of a deal. But it was kind of hard for Tofu to treat this as a minor incident. Love knew no reason. This was even worse because Tofu possessed the skills to have stopped all of this, but he had been babbling to a tree at the time, and Ranma had not reacted quickly enough. 'But I don't blame Ranma. I am to blame!' He thought in anguish.

'Never again, never again!' Tofu swore that oath to himself over Kasumi's prone and broken body ... okay it wasn't really broken but as guilty as he felt it might as well be. He would never again allow himself to lose control. If he had to, he would pour ice water into his veins. Whatever sacrifice he must make, so be it. Never again would he allow himself to lose control, and in so doing allow the one person he cared for more than any other in the entire universe come to harm. Never again!

Knowing that she would be in quite a lot of pain when she came fully awake Tofu reached under her neck and slowly started to massage the pain out of her. First the base of her neck, then higher, and higher, then right behind her ears, and finally her temples. Using both hands now the doctor crouched next to her, stretched out in an awkward position so as to not actually touch her more than necessary as he leaned over her. This was not a sexual thing, he was acting as a physician. He didn't deserve to touch her. But at least, at least, he could do this small favor for her, to allow her to awake without pain.

Finally she spoke. Her eyes were still closed, but more out of relaxation now than pain. Her voice was a scratchy whisper, hesitantly, and very quietly so as to appease the wicked little demons dancing around inside her head she spoke into the cold, quiet, dark room.

"I don't blame you, you know?" She asked quietly.

"I blame myself." Tofu answered detached and quiet, without passion, his tender care never faltering. "I cannot undo what has been done to you, but I swear to you, I shall seek your vengeance."

"Tofu ... I beg of you. Don't allow yourself to become changed over this. Don't allow that which is evil in our world to change who you are inside. I will be all right. You are just in shock right now, you'll see, it will be all right." She spoke to him as she always spoke, soft, kind and soothing. This whole conversation was going downhill, and yet at the same time it was bizarre. Their first real conversation! He wasn't running into anything, wasn't acting goofy, he was in complete control. The irony was just sickening.

But she never would have wished it, if she had known the terrible price he would have had to pay in order to shed his shyness. The wounds on her face would heal a lot faster than those now festering on this man's heart. Maybe, maybe it wasn't as bad as it seemed. Tofu seemed pretty shook up, and more so than this incident seemed to merit, maybe something else was eating at him in addition to her condition. Soon the sun would rise, and spirits would rise with it, and the house would start up again as it always did, and life would go on normally.

Or at least as normal as it ever got around here.

So they stayed and sat, in silence. Listening to the sound of each other breathing, each of them thinking private thoughts, and each of them worried for the other.

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Ranma was not a happy camper. Why did HE always get the crappy jobs. Why was it that whenever something distasteful had to be done they all swiveled their heads HIS way?

Muttering to himself, Ranma hugged the thin protection that his sole blanket provided tighter to himself and shivered in a corner of the roof of the house in the early morning air. It wasn't quite summer yet, and the nights still dipped to a chilly 10 to 15 degrees Celsius at night.

Flashing back to last night, Ranma bitterly replayed the scene over in his mind again. Warily he had trudged up the stairs, each step making a slight creaking sound as he went. He was ready for a night of well earned rest. He had just checked on Tofu and Kasumi one final time, both of them still unchanged since the incident had happened. As he cleared the last step Ranma came face to face with the whole family.

"And just where do you think **you're** goin' boy?" Genma had started.

"Ranma, you have a sacred duty to this family and our household, now is not the time for letting our guard down son." Soun had leapt in.

"Yeah Ranma, **someone** has to stand guard tonight just in case more of those maniacs come back, and I just couldn't think of anyone more capable than you sweetie." Nabiki had chimed in. Akane just stood there and looked at him sadly, guiltily knowing full well the family was rail-roading him, but also knowing she would sleep sounder knowing Ranma was guarding them.

"Don't worry boy, I'll come change places with you in a few hours so you can get some sleep..." Genma had lied through his teeth. Soun also piped in his resolve to watch over the family in their time of need, or something like that. Ranma hadn't been listening at that point as he nodded and sighed and brushed past them. Resolutely he had walked down the hall and grabbed a blanket from the hall closet as he went. Without looking back he jumped out the window to stand his watch.

So he had stood guard. For the first hour he had grudgingly marched around the roof top, silently watching and listening for any sign of someone. That quickly got old though, and then Ranma had resolved to just find a high perch and watch and listen from there. The chimney seemed as good a place as any. Sitting cross-legged atop the scratchy unfinished surface of

brick and mortar Ranma scanned the still night. Someone should be coming to relieve him soon right?

About an hour later Ranma had poked his head down over the rooftop and peered into the guest room to see Genma snoring away in Panda form, as expected. He had then crossed the roof to the opposite side of the house, with the faint hope that Soun might be getting up as he had promised. Only to find the window latched shut with the shutters drawn tight, and a sign on the window reading, "Guard us well son." And a happy face in the lower right hand corner.

Well, it had been a dim hope at best. Tromping over to Genma's side again, Ranma grabbed a small rock from the rooftop as he went and hanging down in front of the window with his toes curved over the roof edge, he slid the window open and proceeded to bounce the rock off of the fat panda's stomach, and smirk as it skipped like a flat stone on water and careened off the old man's forehead.

The panda snorted and waved its hands around frantically for a second, then snapped its eyes open half way and quickly rolled over on its side and rummaged around on its side for a second, the low squeak of a marker on wood could be heard. Then the panda rolled back over on its back and threw the sign at Ranma unexpectedly.

Ranma, caught off guard, caught the sign, but only after it had nailed him square in the chest. Startled, Ranma didn't even have time to do anything fancy to save himself, and went sailing off the roof with the momentum of the thrown sign. As he fell he yelled, "stupid old man!"

Crashing with the sound of broken branches and the popping of joints, Ranma thrashed around furiously in the scratching bushes. After a moment Ranma finally managed to right himself. Indignantly grabbed up the sign from the ground and prepared to chuck it through the open window when it suddenly slid shut with a clang that almost bounced it back out of the frame, then a board went up crosswise across the window frame, and a black and white blur could be seen hammering it home. Then the panda pulled one eyelid down and stuck it's tongue out at the boy, and shut the drapes.

Cursing, Ranma dropped the sign. In sloppy lettering it read, "Go 'way boy or I'll sell ya to the monkey house."

"Figures." Ranma muttered as he sighed and resolved himself to the fact that he had locked out of the house, and stuck out here for the remainder of the night, so he might as well do what they wanted him to do.

Sullenly he jumped back onto the roof and grabbed up his blanket and whipped it around his shoulders with a sharp snap, then found the highest corner on the roof, and slumped

down into it in defeat. The sand paper like feel of the roof tiles did a pretty good job of keeping him awake. It was rather difficult to find a comfortable position on them. Wrapping the blanket about him he ceased his noise making for the night, and set about listening for any noise in the night that didn't belong there.

At least there was a moon out tonight, and it wasn't raining. Not even a cloud in the sky as a matter of fact. If it had been raining ... he would have broken in that stupid window. Ranma shivered involuntarily thinking of rain. 'Stupid old man.' Ranma thought moodily to himself.

Sitting there hour after hour, Ranma's mind started to fog over, and he knew he was losing the war against sleep. Glancing at the horizon, he knew that day break was only another half hour or so away at the most, if he could just hold out until day break he would be okay. The family would get up then, and then they would be responsible for themselves. Ranma had never been very good at two things: resisting sleep and controlling his ravenous hunger. If either of those things were confronting him, he tended to cave in.

Scratch ... scritch ... crack.

Ranma shot upright peering alertly into the twilight. "What the hell was that?" Ranma whispered to himself. Sitting upright and slowly turning his head from side to side, Ranma listened to the night for the sounds to repeat themselves. Minutes passed and only silence met Ranma's attentive ears. Muttering to himself, Ranma settled back down again. His tired mind was playing tricks on him.

Scratch ... scritch ... crack.

"Okay, that time I know I heard something ..." Ranma started to say.

Scratch ... scritch ... crack!

Spinning around hurriedly, Ranma caught sight of a dark blur sprinting up the rooftop. Before he could react, the blur was upon him. The dark shape bounded up the roof and leapt off of Ranma's head.

"Whoo hoo hoo hoooo! What a haul, what a haul!" An elated Happosai whooped as he skipped off of Ranma's forehead and continued across the rooftop. Ranma's shoulders slumped as the adrenaline drained out of his system. It wasn't an unknown maniac. It was their well known pervert. Only slightly less annoying he guessed.

"It figures ... just when you think things can't get any crazier, or any worse, the old freak shows up to bounce off your head ..." Ranma trailed off as he rubbed his head and watched the old pervert bounding across the rooftop.

Suddenly the old freak skidded to a stop. Turning his head slowly back in Ranma's direction, he regarded Ranma with a feral grin. Then reversed gears and sprinted back the way he had come.

"Ranma! **Sweeto!** You waited for me? How sweet it is! Here I have just the little number for you to try on too!" Happosai elated as he jumped into Ranma's arms.

Ranma just stood there for a moment staring into the sparkling happy eyes of the old freak. Happosai stared back with a silly grin on his face. Several seconds passed and Ranma took a deep calming breath.

"You know ... you get on my nerves sometimes dontcha?" Ranma asked.

"Yeah, but I don't really care." Happosai answered smugly.

"Why you little ..." Ranma attempted to throw the old man down, and found it rather difficult to do, seeing as the old man was now clinging to his arms tenaciously. "Hey you, leggo!" Ranma howled and vigorously shook his arms. "Hey! I said leggo!" Ranma yelled.

"Whoo hoo hoo hoo!" Happosai giggled. "Ranma baby, come ta papa!" Happosai trumpeted. Then wiggling around in his shirt, Happosai produced a flask of water, and without a pause, bit the cork and dumped its shockingly cold contents onto the now female Ranma. Again they just stood there standing and staring at each other, Ranma with a disbelieving look of shock and anger on her face, Happosai with a self satisfied smirk. The wind whistled and a dog barked in the distance. Ranma slowly drew the cold night air in through clenched teeth, then went crazy.

"That's it I've had it with you, you old pervert! Get offa me! ... Hey, get your head **out** of there ... **I am not a plaything!**" Ranma screamed as Happosai proceeded to bury his head betwixt her ample breasts and wiggle around in delight.

Finally having enough, Ranma swung both arms inward in a dual finger jab aimed for Happosai's head. Flexing the first two fingers tightly and crossing them, she aimed for the base of his neck. And stabbed herself in the sternum with the unexpected absence of the old freak.

Suddenly feeling a rebounding weight upon her neck and head, she slowly reached up and lifted the bra off her head that Happosai was using to anchor himself to her, holding the dangling Happosai in front of her again Ranma snarled, "you realize I have to kill you now dontcha?" Ranma said through clenched teeth.

"May I ask for a last request?" Happosai asked in his, "innocent," voice, with his, "Bambi Eyes," going in full force. Shrugging, Ranma answered, "sure."

Reaching around behind himself and digging around in his panty pack Happosai pulled out

a skimpy pink sheer and diaphanous low cut bra, swimming with lace and sequins, you just couldn't get more feminine than that, and danced it around in front of Ranma's nose. "Model this for me would ya?" Happosai snickered.

"Die freak!" Ranma ranted as she punted Happosai into lower earth orbit. Standing there shoulders heaving and breathing raggedly Ranma cursed after the departing old man. Finally tiring of it she slouched then looked down, and screamed. The old freak had managed to clasp the bra around her before she punted him, including the shoulder straps!

"One of these days ..." Ranma silently promised to the wind as she hurriedly ripped the garment off. Then jumped as a baseball bat went sailing past her head.

"Shaddup would ya? Some of us are still trying to sleep!" Nabiki's head was poking out of her window as she leaned out craning her neck up to see Ranma. Just as quickly as she had appeared she whipped her head back in the house and slammed her window, leaving Ranma standing on the rooftop in a dazed stupor.

"That's it, I'm outta here." Ranma muttered as she hopped off the roof and landed in the garden with the slight smushing sound of wet grass and soft earth. Landing in a half crouch, feet together and hands in pockets, Ranma set off out the gates and down the street.

"Maybe Ukyou's place will be open ..." Ranma thought out loud. Her stomach growled audibly at the thought of some food. Maybe if she was lucky Ukyou would let her sleep in the back room for a few hours ... what was she thinking? If she went to Ukyou's after what had happened at the school, and after the steps she had been making with Akane, she would never hear the end of it.

Sighing aloud for the umpteenth time that day Ranma jingled the yen she happened to have in her pockets, and decided it was enough for a meal at a diner somewhere. Shrugging her shoulders, she set off for a favorite one on the opposite side of town. The sun was just starting to come up but hadn't quite cleared the horizon yet, and the sharp clean smells of morning dew and sprinklers on asphalt filled the air. Already the city was coming alive, traffic was filling the streets, and the human sounds of a city were growing.

Several minutes and many hopped rooftops later, Ranma opened the door to her favorite diner. It wasn't her favorite because the food was great, or because the service was good, or even because the prices were reasonable - which they were. It was because nobody knew who she was in this part of town. They didn't recognize her on sight, nor know enough of her reputation to see her Chinese clothes and guess who she was. This was one of the very few quiet spots Ranma had left in this town, and she guarded its location jealously.

Bowing politely to the restaurant owner, Ranma asked for a table and a kettle of hot water right away. Being a diner they always had one or two on the stove so as to be able to serve tea to the customers. Smiling, the restaurant owner shuffled off to the kitchen area then quickly returned with the kettle. She knew this particular customer, and always kept a kettle on low heat ready for her. The first time the customer had asked for the kettle she had

complained that the water burned her skin ... however she had managed to get enough of the water on her skin to find that out.

Seating herself, Ranma smiled gratefully and poured herself a brimming cup full of the warm water, then when she thought no one was looking, dumped it on her head. The restaurant owner saw of course, she saw everything that went on in her diner. But a customer was a customer, even weirdos. She would play along with the customer and pretend she didn't see anything, as long as that made her happy.

Sighing with relief, the once again male Ranma leaned back in the simulated leather padded booth and propped his menu in front of him. Scanning the menu, he quickly decided on the miso soup meal, and some tea. Almost as if by magic a waitress appeared as soon as he placed his menu back down, a silly smile on her face and pen and paper ready. Once she had taken the order and had gone, Ranma sat back with his cup of tea and allowed himself to slip into a stupor. Finally, finally he could relax. Here he was temporarily safe from insanity that was his life.

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"Um ... I don't mean to complain ... " Midori trailed off staring at her shoes as she faithfully followed Ryouga through the twilight streets of Nerima. "You were very kind to walk me home and all ... but ... it's almost day time now ... and we haven't made it to my house yet ... and my dad will be worried. Can I lead now?" Midori asked hopefully to Ryouga's silent back.

Ryouga paused a moment in front, then shrugged and stopped. "Sure, why not." Was all she got from him. Eying him curiously, Midori sidled up to the side of Ryouga, trying to get him to make eye contact. All he did was stare straight at his shoes. Sighing, Midori was about to set off for home, when her stomach growled. Shrugging, she asked Ryouga, "hey, I'm hungry. Are you?" Ryouga grunted noncommittally.

"One of the great conversationalists, he's not." Midori muttered under her breath, then louder she suggested, "I know a great little diner close by here, lets stop for some tea and something to eat. We have been walking all night, and I'm pooped." Nodding his head once, Ryouga stood there impassively. Sweat dropping, Midori nodded to herself then set off, occasionally glancing back to see if he was still there.

Reaching the diner, Midori eagerly slipped inside, only briefly glancing back to see if Ryouga was still coming. He was, slowly but surely stalking down the street, his inky black traveling cloak swirling in the air currents as if it were alive. His eyes were dark and hooded and his face was set and impassive. She supposed that he was scaring the people on the street as they sucked their breath in as he passed them by, or flat out leapt out of his way, but he didn't seem all that scary looking to her.

Walking up to the restaurant owner, Midori asked for a booth for two as she waited for Ryouga to catch up she looked about the room. Casually sweeping her eyes across the room, Midori's gaze passed a young man in an ebony black sleeveless Chinese frog-tied shirt with a high Manchurian collar. The inside was ivory white as were the ties and the collar. His black hair was braided into a pony tail, and he seemed to be half asleep. Moving on she continued her observations, then realization hit her.

Snapping her gaze back to Ranma's table, Midori almost squealed in delight. It was HIM. The guy from the doctor's office, who sat in front of her in class. The one with the incredible body and those piercing blue eyes! Hurriedly motioning to the restaurant owner, Midori told her to forget the booth, telling her she would sit with a friend already here. Shrugging, the restaurant owner nodded.

Visually taking a moment to compose herself, Midori drew herself up to her full height and sucked her tiny waist in further and threw out her breasts. Now almost completely off balance, she practically staggered over to Ranma's table.

Standing next to the table, she cleared her throat in an effort to gain his attention. Nothing. Clearing it a little louder this time, Midori placed both hands on the table edge and leaned over, exposing a small amount a cleavage, to her delight, and practically stared in Ranma's face nose to nose.

Startled, Ranma snapped out of his drowsy stupor and accidentally did the first thing his battle hardened mind called for, he lashed out with a blazing chop straight for her throat. Seeing who had startled him, Ranma managed to yank the chop away from her throat at the last second.

"What in the world! ..." Ranma started to yell. Then remembering where he was, dramatically lowered his voice. "What did you think you were doing?" Ranma growled at the obviously terrified girl who was now standing out of arms reach from the table, clutching her throat with both hands, looking more than a little terrified. Most people just usually said hi when they saw her. "I could have seriously hurt you lady, you just don't sneak up on people like that." Ranma scolded.

He tried to look stern, but the girl looked ready to cry. If there was one thing that Ranma couldn't stand, it was a girl crying because of him.

"I ... I ... d-didn't mean to sneak up on you sir ... I ... I just w-wanted to say hello ..." Midori's wavering voice sounded on the brink of tears as she then sniffled and backed away another step. Inwardly sighing mightily, Ranma stood up and indicated the seat across from him.

"Please ... sit down. Hey ... it's all right, I don't bite." Ranma said as he smiled his "lady-killer" smile. Sniffing again, Midori complied and sat rather stiffly across from Ranma.

Smiling, Ranma started to signal for the waitress when she magically appeared next to him again.

"And what will your lady friend be having today?" The waitress smiled.

"J-Just some ... tea please, strong." Midori added shakily as an after thought. She was too shook up now to eat anything. That had scared the hell out of her! The waitress nodded and left again.

'I wonder if that waitress trained under Cologne.' Ranma thought idly thinking about her magic appearing act. Swinging his attention back to the girl, Ranma tried to strike up a polite conversation with her.

"So you are up early today. Did you make it home safely last night?" Ranma asked. Blushing, Midori answered.

"Well ... actually, I haven't quite made it home yet. This is my neighborhood, but Ryouga and I spent the better part of last night trying to find it, he seemed like he wanted to lead so I let him ... did you know he has a rather odd sense of direction." Sputtering, Ranma started choking on his tea.

Choking it down, Ranma resumed laughing. Midori started to grow defensive. "Hey, it's not MY fault. I didn't know that he would get us lost ... hey ... come on ... it's not THAT funny ... hello ... are you listening to me?" Midori shook her head in wonder as Ranma slipped under the table as peals of laughter shook him.

Modestly Midori swung her legs towards the aisle, just in case he was a pervert. Giggling out of control, Ranma finally managed to shoot a hand up from under the table and latch onto the edge. With a mighty effort, he pulled himself up to lay lengthwise across the booth bench clutching his belly with both hands, and taking deep breaths trying to calm down.

Midori leaned over the table to look at him in wonder, what the heck had been so funny? Finally Ranma sat up slowly, wiping a tear from his eye as he chuckled.

"Ryouga having an odd sense of direction ... heh, that was funny." Ranma grinned goofily. He had needed that. His light mood was contagious and Midori was soon grinning along with him.

"So, where is 'ol bacon breath anyway?" Ranma quipped.

"Bacon breath? You mean Ryouga? Is that some kind of a nick name?" Midori asked. Grinning, Ranma nodded, and replied, "oh yeah. He loves it. You should always call him that." Midori nodded and made a mental note to do that. There was apparently a weird side to this young man's life.

"He should be coming in here soon. He was right behind me ..." She trailed off as the

implications of what she was saying sunk home. Gasping a quick, "be right back," she ran out the door calling for, "bacon breath." Ranma fell over laughing again. She would be a while locating him. If he wasn't already a mile away.

Five minutes later, she entered the diner again, dragging a rather sullen looking Ryouga behind her by the hand. Snorting, Ranma smiled again. As they sat down Ranma just couldn't resist saying something.

"Got lost again, huh Ryouga? You'd think you'd know your way around this town by now, seeing as you must spend months at a time wandering around it." Ranma joked.

Ryouga, just in the process of seating himself, jolted to his feet again. Fire lit his indignant eyes.

"Who asked you! You have no idea the hell I go through day in and day out! So just shut up Ranma, you pervert." Ryouga snapped and started to sit down again.

"Hey! What did I tell you about callin' me that, bacon breath?! You take that back!" Ranma raised his voice as he stood up.

"Bacon breath?! Are *you* who she got that from?! **Die Ranma!**" Ryouga shouted as he lunged across the table for Ranma's throat. Ranma met his hands in mid air and they stood there, hand to hand, muscles straining, eyes locked, across the table from each other. Midori was growing a little uneasy. They hadn't acted like this last night.

"Hey! Hello?! Guys ... could you ... hey! Knock it off!" Midori yelled, then tried waving her hand in front of their faces ... nothing. People in the restaurant were starting to stare. Embarrassed, she went to the next level and reached across the table and grabbed a hold of both their noses.

"I said, **knock it off!**" She huffed. Slowly, they lowered their arms, but continued to stare at each other. These two had a bad history between them, that much was obvious. It was also obvious that they intended to carry that past into the present.

Finally breaking eye contact with Ryouga, Ranma's eyes swept the room, to find every single pair of eyes in the diner staring at their table. Sweatdropping, he watched the restaurant owner making her way to their table.

"You people are crazy. Please leave. Tea was free, on the house. Please leave." She firmly stated, pointing to the door. Sighing, Ranma and company complied. Ranma had lost yet another safe haven from his crazy life.

Ranma's all too brief good mood was slipping away from him again. Slowly, he walked down the street with Midori right next to him, and Ryouga trailing behind. Unlike Midori, Ranma did not keep glancing back to see if he was still there, he didn't care. His depressed

steps made slight dragging noises on the sidewalk as he mopped.

Quietly, Ranma walked with Midori the rest of the way home. Slowly her spirits started to lift again. Maybe he did like her after all, he was walking her home wasn't he? Deciding to chance it, Midori made a decision.

When they finally reached her home, Ryouga hung back looking depressed as usual. Her house was pretty. It had a high wall around it, painted white with a red border. Two cherry trees dancing in the slight breeze flanked the entry gate and a flower bed circled the fence. Around the flower bed was a healthy green patch of grass, and separating the estate from the sidewalk was a small white fence. The type you might see around a horse corral.

Ranma walked her up to her gate, and politely waited for her to go inside. She stood there looking at him, as if waiting for something. Confused Ranma looked at her down cast eyes and waited for her to go inside. Suddenly, Ranma understood, she wanted him to kiss her. Confused, Ranma stood still, hoping she would knock it off and go inside. But, huffing, Midori stood up on her tiptoes and leaned in to kiss him.

Glancing up out of the corner of his eye, Ryouga watched the spectacle unfolding and grinned. Midori leaned in close to Ranma, her hands clasped behind her back shyly as she tried to kiss him. Ranma stepped back. Stunned, but not done yet, Midori tried again, this time closing her eyes as she went in. Panicked, Ranma did the only thing he could think of, he put his hand over his mouth.

Midori's lips brushed skin that felt like lips, and let her lips linger there for a moment, then opened her eyes, and found herself staring into Ranma's hand. Her heart sank.

Humiliated, she slapped him, hard, then she pivoted on her heel and sprinted into her house, tears streaming from her eyes and choking on her own wracking sobs.

"Geeeeeeez ..." Ranma sighed as he rubbed his cheek. "I didn't mean ta make her cry. What was I supposed to do? I couldn't just let her kiss me, every woman in this city watches me like a hawk, if any of them found out about that, I would have to move to a new country." Ranma muttered to himself.

"Cry me a river Ranma. At least you **have** women throwing themselves at your feet. Akane is the only girl I'll ever love, and you **have** her love, and what do you do with it, you toy with her like you did this girl, you make me sick Saotome." Ryouga growled.

"What did you say?!" Ranma shouted indignantly spinning around with hands on hips to glare at Ryouga. "Bring it on bacon breath, I could use a warm up." Snarling, Ryouga dropped his pack from under his cloak and snapped the cloak over his shoulders, freeing up his arms.

"It's about time **someone** taught you some manners Saotome!" Ryouga started to walk towards Ranma, then froze. Curious, Ranma turned his gaze to match Ryouga's, and felt his heart catch in his throat. A rather angry looking gentleman was storming their way, and he looked to be of the right age and appearance to be Midori's father.

"Uh oh." Ranma muttered, this wasn't gonna be good. In his extensive dealings with love sick, crazy girls, Ranma had found that adding family members to the equation was always a bad idea. Idly, he toyed with the idea of running away, then shrugged and stood his ground.

"Hey you! What did you do to my daughter?! Yeah, you, punk I'm talking to you!" The father yelled as he shook his fist and stormed their way, Ryouga, a merry grin spreading across his face hooked his thumbs through his belt loop and leaned back upon a nearby fence and just watched. This was going to be funny.

"First she stays out all night because she tells me that some doofus gets her lost on the way home! Then she tells me that some other guy just accosted her in front of her own house! I want some answers buddy!" The irate father yelled, now standing toe to toe with Ranma. Ranma noted with some discomfort, that this guy could use a breath mint.

Ranma, of course, could wipe the floor with this guy, but in doing so he would sink to the low levels of the art, such as his father applied them, and that would be a fate worse than death. Besides, then Midori would *really* hate him. So taking a deep and calming breath he tried to explain the situation to the rather large and angry father standing before him. "You gotta lot of nerve trying to molest my daughter in front of her own house!" The irrational father exploded cutting off Ranma's attempt to explain.

"Look, you got it all wrong, I never touched your daughter!" Ranma jumped in during a pause of the father's ranting.

"So, my daughter isn't good enough for you to touch, is that it punk?" The father demanded and shoved a finger into Ranma's chest, pushing him back a step.

"No sir! Your daughter is very pretty! I would be honored to date her." Ranma back peddled hoping to appease this crazy person. Ryouga in the background was chortling like crazy. Ranma's explanation had an undesired effect, the father's eyes lightened and he slapped a muscular arm around Ranma's shoulders.

"Great! I'll call the church, we can marry you two today!" Ranma looked horrified at the sudden change in direction this was taking. In the background Ryouga broke out into peals of laughter. Looking askance at his unwanted partner in crime, Ranma saw him sprawled on the grass clutching his belly in uncontrollable laughter. He swore to himself to kick him after this was over.

"Um, as much as I would like that sir ... I would have to ask my mother's permission first. Here I can give you her phone number." Ranma lied through his teeth as he made up a phone number and recited it to the suddenly happy, if not rather crazy father. Swearing to return as soon as he had his mothers blessing, he hurriedly walked back out the way he had

come.

Pausing above Ryouga who was now rolling around on the grass in fits of laughter he gave him a swift kick to the ribs.

"This is so not funny you goof ball." Ranma growled as Ryouga's laughing slowed a bit due to his kick, but started right back up again.

"Oh but it is ..." Ryouga gasped between laughs. "Ranma I swear you should have seen the look on your face, it was classic!" Ryouga giggled then resumed his full out belly laughing. Shrugging, Ranma hopped over the fence and dashed away from the area, this part of town was now just as dangerous to him as most of Nerima.

'Great, just great, **another** girl has lost her mind over me. Maybe it's my cologne?' Lost in thought, Ranma started to trudge back towards the Tendou dojo, and another day of insanity. Maybe he could catch a nap too. And panda boy was getting a beating today, with his own sign, with a brick taped to it, Ranma grinned.

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Tofu sat in quiet meditation in one of the Tendou guest rooms. All the shutters were closed and the door was shut. The only illumination in the room came from a candle lit atop the small lacquer table he was sitting at. Silent, except for the slight crackle as he turned the pages Tofu poured over the contents of the ancient tome, searching for any clue to that bizarre dream from last night.

Most of the tome consisted of reports of bloody battles that had happened, bloody battles that at the time *would* happen, and now as Tofu sat there, *had* happened, such as the bombs dropped on Japan. But that wasn't what he was interested in. He wasn't even really reading the tome, he was simply looking for one character. The Chinese character for Princess.

If anything about that dream was in here, then the unnamed Princess would be in here. Come to think of it, *none* of the people in that dream had had names ... how odd. Finally he reached the end of the tome. Nothing. Maybe it had just been a *very* realistic dream. Maybe he just had an overactive imagination. Maybe. But he doubted it.

Tofu was just about to put the book away when his fingers brushed the bindings of the inside cover close to the book's spine. There was a distinguishable lump along the top portion of the inside seam. Almost undetectable had the book been brand new. But with age, the clever manipulations of the book's cover could be seen now, if one cared to look closely enough.

With baited breath, Tofu slowly peeled back the top layer of the inside cover and found a metallic plate, hammered paper thin, covering the inside cover. Slowly he undid the ancient fastenings that held it in place and lifted it up. Cleverly concealed in the hidden alcove was an oil cloth-covered metal tablet. Etched across its face were the tiniest Chinese characters he had ever seen.

Haunted, Tofu sat in utter silence as he held the booklet in his trembling hands, and read the first sentence:

"They stormed the imperial palace in the middle of the night." His heart in his throat, he read on skipping over the unnecessary details, "... As our remaining troops crashed into the wall of the oncoming horde, we set about guarding the Princess. I was certain we would die in that room. The Guardsmen created a human wall before the entrance to her room. Half of their number on the outside singing their battle song, the other half in the inside, my Lord Captain among them ..."

An hour later, his eyes strained from reading the minuscule text. Tofu lay the metal booklet down upon the inside of the book's now broken binding. The last lines of the young vassal's accounting of the origins of the Jusenkyo valley flashing across his mind's eye.

"I pray that this record shall survive the ages, and I will set about making sure it does so, somehow. I have the sinking feeling that Huàide pùrén is not dead enough yet. I fear that he may yet again be able to touch this plane. For as this sword wrought by the Princess' own hands lays beside me, so do I believe that he will walk these lands again. I weep for that day. But there is some hope, the court sages who managed to escape, tell me of visions they have received just recently of a saviour, a man that will stand against the Dark Mage to save the world, and at his side, MUST stand his other half, for if SHE does not stand with him, then all shall be lost. So sayest I, in the name of the Princess. ~ Goyung Laou-Cho, Loyal servant to her majesty and the noble Captain of the home guard. May they rest in peace, and I with them soon I hope. I harbor no more love for this wretched plane."

"My god ..." Dr. Tofu Ono whispered to the silent room. Outside the wind howled in empty fury, and the clouds started to roll in, a storm was coming, fast.