

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic Series: "Ranma Gets A Clue"  
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Epilogue, "To Compromise Is To Agree To Make Nobody Happy"

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Notes:

This is the long promised epilogue to my fan fiction story, "Ranma Gets A Clue." I am sorry it took so long, but paying the bills and graduating college took priority over writing free stories for you freeloading people mooching stories off the Internet ( I kid because I love ^\_- ) I am sure this epilogue doesn't tie up **every** loose end in my story, or in the Ranma 1/2 universe, either. But it isn't meant to. It is meant to bring the story to a more gentle close, tie off a few of the more predictable loose ends, while leaving some of the more bitter ones up in the air.

Thanks to all of the tens of thousands of people who have read my stories over the years (and that is just going by my website counter!), who have left me nice words of encouragement, or even criticism. It all helped -- except for the few asshats out there -- you know who you are, and you are still banned. =)~

This is a free story made available over the Internet, so I am making you no promises about what you will get out of it -- but I hope if you have bothered to read the rest of the stories in this 12 chapter series, you will get out of the epilogue what you need for closure. If you really like my writing, remember my name, because I am working on becoming an actual published author -- who like, gets paid and stuff, and maybe even on to some book shelves. ^\_-

Also, watch this website for the launch of a Star Wars themed fan fiction. It is the story of a young **male** Jedi Knight and his much younger **female** Padawan whom he is stuck raising and training after a disaster with his first Padawan. I will put that story up on FF dot net and also on my own website, when I have finished it in its entirety. Until then, though, I may post the first chapter to tease you.

Cheers, and enjoy the read, and thanks for coming along for the ride! I am really, really done with this story this time. It isn't perfect, but it is what it is now. No more I sez, **no more!** ;-)

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Shampoo had a blinding headache. That stupid violent girl must have hit her harder than she had thought. She tried to shake her head to clear it, so she could get back up and continue the fight. Shaking her head made her dizzy though, and forced her to lie still until the dizziness passed. Weirdly, she smelled familiar kitchen smells being carried on the crisp cool air, like what she normally smelled at home. Akane must have really hit her hard! Before she could move again, she felt the cool, reassuring, hand of her Great Grandmother on her cheek. Good! Great Grandmother was here, **she** would help her claim her rightful husband.

"Are you all right, child?" Cologne asked her softly in her native language of Chinese.

"I'm fine Great Grandmother. Are you here to help me fight?" Shampoo asked, in Chinese as well, as she abruptly sat up, shaking the cool cloth off her eyes which had been blinding her. Instead of seeing Akane standing over her with a smirk on her face, and Ranma's beautiful blue eyes, she saw the inside of her family's hut in the combat village of Nyuchiehzu in Joketsuzoku -- where she had met Ranma all those years ago. Had it really been so long?

"Where ... what ... why am I home?" She asked Cologne.

Her Great Grandmother, in turn, turned away from her, almost in shame, and replied from over her shoulder, "I brought you here, after you lost your fight with that Tendo girl. It's over, Shampoo, it's time to move on."

"You **what?!**" Shampoo screamed, turning a few heads in the village towards their hut.

"Now, calm down, child. It isn't like Ranma was the only possible husband for you in the world." Cologne chided her as she calmly moved around the sleeping area Shampoo was currently in, to make her way to the kitchen area and make them both a nice cup of strong tea. That would surely help.

"Great Grandmother, how could you?! You, who have always been my strongest supporter to my claim on that male!" Shampoo rounded on her, stamping her foot in fury, whipping her hair around in righteous anger.

"That's right, Great Grandchild. I was. Until you lost a fair fight to an equal opponent, with the public wager, made in front of many witnesses, that if you lost, you would give him up. You lost." Cologne shrugged.

"But ... " Shampoo trailed away. It was coming back to her now. Akane had used some sort of chi-based attack on her after she had paralyzed her arms, and then she had blacked out. But ... but ... Ranma ... she let out an anguished howl and sank down to her knees in tears. Her heart was thundering in her chest, she tasted bile in her throat, and the world felt like it was dimming and caving in around her -- slowly she toppled over and lay still on the floor, weeping.

Cologne sighed and turned around to head back to her Great Granddaughter. She pulled Shampoo's head into her lap and stroked the girl's hair softly, singing and humming softly to her the ancient songs she had sung to her when she was still a little baby. Shampoo wept heavily, burying her face in her Great Grandmother's robes.

"There there, child. It will be okay. Heartache never fully heals, especially if it is from your first love. But, it does eventually mostly go away. I speak from experience here. It will get better, once you have moved on." Cologne cooed softly into her ear.

Instead of the relaxing affect she had hoped these words would have on her Great Grandchild, Shampoo instead stiffened and then moments later shot to her feet with a fire lit in her eyes. "No! I will not give him up!"

"But you must, child." Cologne reminded her. "You made a fair wager, and you lost in front of witnesses.

"I don't care! I don't care!" She screamed in a fury. Cologne sighed.

"Well, what do you think you can do about it?" Cologne asked her pointedly.

"I ... I ... " Shampoo stumbled as she tried to think of a plan.

"There, you see, there is nothing you can do." Cologne stated matter-of-factly, as she stood up and moved once more to head to the kitchen to make some tea.

"I'll kill the Tendo girl, that's what I'll do!" Shampoo said in a deadly quiet voice, causing Cologne to drop the tea kettle she had just picked up.

"You'll what?" Cologne asked quickly as she spun around to face her grieving Great Grandchild. Shampoo stood stock still, with her arms draped at her sides, and her head down, almost like she was crying again. Then, slowly, she brought her head up, but instead of tears, there was a dangerous, wild gleam in her eyes.

"That's right. I shall simply kill the obnoxious girl. It isn't like I couldn't have killed her far before now. I already gave her the kiss of death a long time ago anyway, when she tried to interfere with a lunch I had made for Ranma. I have always gone easy on her, because she was weak. But now ..." she giggled in empty mirth, "... now she has beaten me, a female warrior of the Nyuchiehzu tribe! I have every right to track her down, give her the kiss of death, and kill her!" Shampoo said those last two words with an ever increasing, almost hysterical, volume. Without another word, she spun towards the door, grabbing her Chinese short sword on the way out the door, and started marching out of the village, knocking people of the village out of her way as she went.

Cologne sighed deeply, and watched her go sadly. This could only end in heartache. Ranma would never permit her to kill Akane. With a sharp whistle, Cologne summoned Mousse. He appeared in a blur to stand on the pole above their door.

"Yes, old ghoul?" He asked snidely. He had been in a bad mood ever since Shampoo had returned from her lost fight, all bruised and unconscious.

"You have picked up some bad habits from Ranma, boy." Cologne growled at him. He only shrugged.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Shampoo is awake." She replied.

"Great!" Mouse grinned and made to hop down to the ground level and enter the hut, Cologne held up a hand to stop him.

"She woke up, realized she lost, and immediately set out to go kill Akane."

"Oh ... I see ... well ... that does present a problem, doesn't it?" Mouse muttered to himself, sitting down instead, still on the pole.

"See what you can do about it, will you? I am washing my hands of this entire sordid affair. I should never have allowed it to continue for as long as it has. If she kills the girl, fine. Ranma will never accept her, and she will return to us. If she fails to kill the girl, then Ranma will still reject her, and she will return to us. Either way, she will return." Cologne said simply, and then walked back into the hut. Truly, she was starting not to care how this whole saga ended up, one way or the other, she just wanted it over.

In the shadows behind their hut, the white eyes of several scheming Amazons blinked quietly, as they listened, and plotted. Their whisper quiet footsteps went unheard by both Mousse and Cologne as they quickly retreated with their stolen information.

With a sigh, Mousse leapt off the roof top, and began tracking Shampoo through the green rolling hills outside of their village. She was already out of the village, so he couldn't just follow her. He would have to find her first. Not that she would allow him to travel with her anyway. He smiled to himself slowly though, as he imagined the day she would. Maybe, just maybe, he could turn her rage and grief over losing Ranma to his advantage. There was always hope...

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Ryoga sat in Ukyou's Okinomiyaki bar and grill for the 5th straight day in a row. He had been there off and on for weeks now. He was oddly conflicted. On the one hand, he no longer changed into that damned pig when splashed with cold water any more -- something which he was still elated about. On the other hand, Ranma and Akane were now closer than ever. But, Ukyou was here for him -- she talked to him, and smiled at him, and she was very pretty. She could even cook! Which, although it pained him to admit, was something Akane was still having a very hard time learning. But, but, **but** ... Ukyou **wasn't** Akane! And he loved Akane, and only Akane! Didn't he? Oh, the misery!

Ukyou, for the second time in the day, saw Ryoga start to emit the dreaded black aura of misery and despair he would output seconds before that freaking ki attack of his. Casually, she reached behind her back and unsheathed her battle spatula, and whacked him over the head with it, defusing the situation.

"Ow! What'd you do that for!" Ryoga yelled with his face now squashed onto the bar surface. He sat up again and shook off the second smacking of the day. They didn't so much hurt, as startle him. His black aura had disappeared though, and that was the important thing -- to Ukyou anyway. She already had one hole in one of her walls from him, she didn't need another one.

"You were building up a black cloud again, sugar." Ukyou said to him in a false cheery voice. Truth be told she was sorta growing tired of him. He had been a great shoulder to cry on immediately after the "incident" -- but lately, she was growing to realize why the poor boy didn't have a girlfriend -- he was so **gloomy!** On top of that, the getting lost thing could be cute, but when you sent the fool boy just into the back room to fetch a jar of pickles, and he was gone for half an hour, that grew old fast. He also wasn't that bright. Since he had been lost for a large portion of his schooling years, and spent an even larger portion of those years training in the martial arts in the wilderness, he didn't have so much in the way of *book smarts*. Not a huge problem, but not a huge asset either. True, he did have a big heart, he was kind and honest, and reliable (so long as you could keep him in sight and not allow him to wander off), and he was a **great** security guard for her shop. Not that she really needed one -- but it was nice to know she had backup handy, should the need ever arise. Ukyou sighed deeply. Why was she analyzing this poor guy like this? It wasn't like **she** was interested in him. She was just trying to help him get over Akane, as he helped her get over Ranma ... wasn't she? She scrunched her nose up in confusion and shook her head to clear the troubling thoughts before she said, "hey sugar, quit dwelling on her. Let her go. She and Ranma are locked together real good now, and we need to move on. Can I get you an okinomiyaki or anything?" She said with a wink and a smile.

"No thanks, Ukyou. I ... I'm not hungry. I think ... I think I am going to go for a walk." He said gloomily as he stood up suddenly.

"Do you still have it?" She asked.

"Have what?" He responded.

"The card I gave you!" She growled as she used one of her cooking spatulas to flip a small piece of batter at his nose.

"Oh! Oh that! Yeah, I got it." He said as he dodged the batter and started fishing around in his pockets, finally holding up a laminated business card of Ukyou's with her name and the address of her shop on it. Trailing from one of the corners of the card was a thick string which had been glued to the card, and the other end of the string was safety pinned into his pocket. He had used the card to give directions to cab drivers over the last few weeks, to get him back to Ukyou's. He was sort of unofficially staying with her now. He had no place better to go anyway. With a sigh, he put his hands in his pockets and started walking, with no destination in mind really.

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Lord Tatewaki Kuno sat cross legged on the meditation stone in his chambers. Outwardly he was peaceful. Inwardly, he burned with the holy fires of impassioned rage, intermingled together with righteous indignation. He had been wronged worse than any man had ever been wronged before! Just thinking about it made him clench his fists in anger. Someone, somehow, had managed to sneak into the Kuno estate and vandalize every single one of the pictures and posters he had of the pig-tailed girl! Including the "premium" shots he had purchased from Nabiki at her insane prices, which he kept in the secret safe under his bed, and not even his sister or his father knew the combination to. All of them, **all of them** had somehow been vandalized so that her image had been erased from the images! Someone, someone would pay **dearly** for this outrage -- and he had a sneaking suspicion that svengali, Ranma, was the person who needed to pay!

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At the Tendo dojo and household, life was moving forward. Ranma and Akane were still snuggly with each other -- they held hands occasionally, they shared a kiss every now and then, and they cuddled with each other in front of the TV. They were still not married, but they had stopped protesting about it -- they were not sleeping with each other yet, though -- which made Kasumi very happy. They went to school along with Nabiki, who was graduating this summer. Kasumi still tended the house. Soun still taught classes in the dojo, and Ranma and Genma assisted him with teaching those classes, along with Akane when she could spare the time -- as she was a lot more focused on school these days. In the evenings, Genma and Soun sang and drank, and played Shogi and Go. All in all, the Tendo household was a lot more harmonious than it had been in a long time. The only sore spot was Master Happosai, but even he had been quiet for many days now. He was probably on some extended, cross country, panty raid or something.

It was late in the afternoon, with the night fast approaching. The summer air was still warm enough to keep the chill of night away, and Kasumi was in the backyard taking in the day's laundry, humming to herself. Tofu stood next to her, chatting softly with her, making her laugh, and being close to her. Kasumi's heart was so full, she almost floated around the house these days. Unlike Ranma and Genma, Tofu was **not** living with the Tendo family. He came by to see Kasumi daily, usually in the early morning before he opened his clinic, and then again after he closed the clinic for the day. He had become Ranma's replacement early morning buddy with Kasumi, which was a good thing, because Ranma spent a lot more time chatting quietly with Akane these days -- and he didn't have as much free time to socialize with her sisters anymore. Kasumi and Tofu finished gathering the laundry and started to head inside. Little did they know that the night was about to get very ... interesting.

Across the yard, a quiet female voice called out, "hello? Is anyone there?" The voice was coming from outside the gates to their main entrance. The gates were closed for the evening. Kasumi

paused and cocked her head to the side to listen closer. The voice sounded again, a little louder this time, "hellooo? Is anyone home?"

"I hear it too." Tofu confirmed to her, without being asked.

Kasumi smiled and set the laundry down, straightened up and said, "well, let's go see who is calling at this late hour then. Tofu unlocked the gates and pushed one of them open, to reveal a woman standing there quite composed and calm -- unlike many of the female callers in recent years. She was dressed in a traditional kimono and was carrying a long, wrapped bundle slung across her back.

Kasumi's mouth opened into a wide grin as she ran forward quickly and swept the woman up into a hug. "Nodoka! It is so good to see you!" She said as she released her.

"And to see you as well, dear." Nodoka smiled politely as she straightened her kimono out again and resettled her bundle.

"Dr. Tofu, this is Nodoka. Nodoka Saotome, Ranma's mother." Kasumi said in a formal tone. Tofu smiled with understanding, bowed low to her and offered her his arm.

"Here to see your son, are you?" He asked, innocently.

"Not really. I have almost given up on ever seeing him again." Nodoka said sadly as she took his arm and allowed him to escort her into the grounds of the Tendo estate. "Still, I do dream about seeing him again ... a man among men ... one day." She said dreamily as she allowed herself to be escorted inside.

"Oh, I think today might be your lucky day, Mrs. Saotome." Kasumi said with a wink and a smile, as she followed them.

Nodoka perked up immediately. "Really? Is he finally here?" Kasumi only smiled in answer.

They walked up to the front door and let her in. Neither Kasumi nor Tofu announced their guest. They could both sense a rising charge of electrical anticipation and almost frantic energy building around Nodoka though. Both of them hung back and followed her as she made her way into the house, looking for Ranma. Her eyes fell on Genma first, sitting cross legged across from Soun, playing games like they usually did in the evenings. He stiffened in fright for a moment, before his mind caught up with his instincts and he remembered that he and Ranma no longer changed, and the threat of seppuku was now over. He grinned and pointed across to the room to where Ranma and Akane were cuddled together, watching TV -- both of their backs facing towards the family room.

Nodoka's heart leapt into her throat as tears sprang up in her eyes. "Ranma! My boy, my boy, my boy! Raaanmaaaaaaa!" She yelled with abandon as she tossed aside her bundle and leapt across the room to him.

Ranma's head was just turning at the calling of his name when she crashed into him and Akane both. "Mom-- oof!" He started to say when she fell on him, burying her face into his neck and crying uncontrollably. Since Akane had been the "small spoon" in front of him as they cuddled, and Ranma was now twisting around to address his mother tackling him, she suddenly found herself sitting on the ground, dumped there rather unceremoniously.

Akane stood up quickly and was also panicked for a second dreading any sort of cold water getting near Ranma -- before she too remembered the curse was lifted. "M-Mrs. S-Saotome ... so good to see you!" She stammered.

By this time the entire family had gathered around to watch the happy reunion. Ranma now was sitting next to his mom with his arm around her shoulders, and stroking her hair, *shh shushing* her, trying to calm her down. She still had her face buried in his neck, and was still crying unchecked in between murmuring to herself, "a man among men, a man among men!"

Many minutes later, the entire family was gathered around the dining table, kneeling formally as they watched the reunion of mother and son, and husband and wife. Nodoka had composed herself and was now sitting formally at the opposite head of the table, opposed to Soun, who looked uncomfortable. Their curses might have been lifted, but everyone was still rather uneasy that something was about to go drastically wrong. Nodoka wasn't holding her sword, but it was now unwrapped and laying on the ground next to her, close at hand, as she grilled her husband and son. Both of whom were kneeling to her immediate left and right.

"So, Genma ... it seems I was wrong to doubt you. Ranma seems to have grown up just fine. He seems strong, manly; his relationship with his chosen fiancé seems to be going well. So, I have just one question ... if things have been going so well for so long, why couldn't you have **come home?!** Why are you still **here?!**"

"I -- uh, well, you see ... " He stammered.

But Nodoka cut across him, before he could come up with anything, "and you, son, you couldn't send your poor worried mother a letter every now and then? A postcard? A picture? **Anything?!** You couldn't even make yourself available the last time I came to visit? A son's duty is to his mother until he is married to his wife after all. Poor Ranko had to save me when that geyser went off the last time I visited! Where **were** you?"

"Actually, mom, that **was** me ..." Ranma chimed in, looking up at her sheepishly. "I saved you from that geyser, that was me. I couldn't stay long because me and pop were right in the middle of a ... a training exercise, but that was me that saved you. Akane can back me up here." He said softly. Nodoka immediately locked eyes with Akane, who nodded enthusiastically that it was true.

"Oh, my son, my only son! You truly are a man among men!" She said with tears coming to her eyes again and a shiver ran down her spine as she leaned over and hugged him again.

"Actually, mom, I would prefer to be thought of as, 'just a guy,' if you don't mind." Ranma spoke up sheepishly as she hugged him, drawing a kick from Genma under the table, who mouthed, "watch it," to him silently, before going back to looking down at the table surface humbly as she sat back up and eyed the two.

Nodoka's eyebrows drew down in suspicion for a moment, but then she smiled again and said, "not to worry son, I will not embarrass you. It is enough that we know about your manliness. Now, on to happier news. Now that we are all together again, we should discuss your marriage being finalized with Akane, and you and she moving in with your father and I back at home. I think you will agree that the courtship period has been more than adequately observed, don't you, Soun? They seem to be well matched and accepting of the marriage. I see no further need to extend the engagement." Nodoka suddenly addressed the Tendo family head. Both he and Akane looked down at the table and blushed furiously.

"Well, you see ..." Soun started.

"It's not that we don't ..." Akane also chimed in.

"Excellent!" Nodoka cut them off before they could finish. So, your fathers and I will discuss setting up the ceremony, and once that is all taken care of we can see about moving you and Ranma into our place and taking one of Soun's daughters off his hands. Nodoka smiled serenely, but also dangerously, eliciting an, "oh my," from Kasumi.

Ranma and Akane shot worried looks at each other briefly across the table. Things had been going **so well!** This could ruin **everything!** They just weren't quite ready for marriage just yet! Before anyone could raise any more protests though, Nodoka stood up, and announced, "well, I am off to bed then. I will see you all in the morning." Everyone stood politely, then looked at each other worriedly as she made her way out of the room.

"Don't worry, Ranma, Akane ... I'll talk to her." Soun said.

"Yeah, me too boy, don't worry. She's just a little over excited right now." Genma said with his hand behind his head. "Anyway, I guess I better go see to getting her setup in a bed now." He said before hurrying out of the room after her. The sounds of he and Nodoka starting to argue could already be heard as he followed her up the stairs.

Akane and Ranma linked hands silently, and exchanged worried looks as the rest of the family politely dispersed to give them some privacy. They talked long and seriously long into the night. Not that they came to any decisions or made any plans of action -- as usual.

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The next morning saw the sun rise slowly over a worried household. Not that Ryoga Hibiki knew about any of that. He sat upon the nearest hillside overlooking their compound, thinking furiously of a way to turn things around in his favor. A neighborhood dog lay by his side, calm now, but earlier he had had to fight the mutt for the right to sit on this hilltop. Now, being vanquished, the dog lay alongside Ryoga and panted contentedly.

Ryoga sat and watched the house for a long time, as the sun came up. He shivered a little bit from the night's cold, but the heat of the dog helped. As the sun finally peaked up above the horizon, he decided to make his way down the hill to a rooftop closer to their house. He could watch and listen to how things were going, and see if Ranma was treating her right. And ... if Ranma wasn't ... then he could step in and try for one last time to win Akane's heart. His mind made up, he smiled weakly and then leapt into action, leaving the dog behind, and the last of his fears about this moment. Today was the last day he could try to win her, he realized.

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Three sets of eyes watched him leap away, rooftop to rooftop, from the shadows of another nearby hill. They had hoped he would be able to lead them to Akane and Ranma, and their hopes had paid off ... eventually. Whisper silent, they followed him down the hillside, and towards the Tendo dojo, and Amazon justice!

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Shampoo made her way calmly up the streets of Nerima, which she knew so well now. She was walking for once, instead of riding her bike. The Cat Cafe was closed, and she was no longer a delivery girl. Her Great Grandmother had closed the cafe before she moved back to China. As she walked, she imagined arriving at the Tendo dojo, giving Akane the kiss of death, killing her, and claiming Ranma for her own, all in one glorious morning! She shivered in delight at just the thought of it. Oh, today was going to be a good day, she could **feel it!**

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Mousse trailed her, watching her silently, and worrying. She had come straight here from China. No detours, no stocking up on weapons or supplies for elaborate plans or traps. She was still carrying her sword, now strapped to her back. Mousse was convinced that this time it was for real. Just like when she had hunted Ranma when she thought he was female, she fully intended to kill the Tendo girl. He hoped Akane was on her toes, and Ranma was around, or today could get ugly. Mousse resolved then and there to stop Shampoo, and show his strength, if the situation required it. It would bind her to him, and force her to marry him -- and that was **not** how he wanted to win her heart -- but he couldn't very well let her murder the Tendo girl either. He owed Ranma too much to let that happen. He sighed heavily and continued tracking Shampoo from as far a distance as he could get away with, and keep her in sight.

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Lord Kuno Tatewaki sprinted towards the Tendo estate in the crisp early morning air. His trusty boken left at home today, in favor of his favorite katana, which he had named *cutter*. Sure, it was a common name, but this was no common sword, and he no common swordsman, so the name didn't need to be embellished. Today, Ranma was going to **pay** for his lies, his deceit, and his sinful ways! His freshly pressed blue keikogi snapped satisfyingly in the wind, and his neatly pressed hakama swished nicely in a familiar rhythm as he ran. Today was going to be a **good** day. He smiled a grim smile to himself.

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Ranma and Akane woke up early, and quietly snuck outside to the dojo to train and to talk, like they did most mornings after "the incident." They were both wearing their uniforms and black belts, feeling the need to be formal today, for some reason. They bowed to each other and then started light sparring to warm up. It took a long time for one of them to get the courage to speak. Finally, Akane broke the silence.

"What are we going to do?" She asked as she ducked a kick of his.

"I don't know." He replied as he caught her counter strike on his forearm and turned it away harmlessly past him.

"Are you ready for this? For marriage?" She asked as she spun out of his redirection and swept low to try to sweep his legs as she carried the spin to help her momentum.

"I have no idea." He answered as he jumped over her sweep, somersaulting over her head, and landing lightly on his feet behind her. "How about you?" He asked as he kicked at her back.

She immediately sensed his attack and rolled forward to dodge and reclaim her feet. "I have no idea." She mirrored him.

"Well, great, I guess that's decided then." He said with a wink in her direction as they squared off for another round. She was getting much better at avoiding him, making him work much harder to tag her during sparring matches. She still wasn't as good as he was, but she was head and shoulders better than she had been when he first met her.

They wound down their sparring session a little while later, both of them slightly winded. Not wanting their time together to be over just yet, though, Ranma suggested helping her stretch.

"Sure, Ranma, that sounds great." She agreed readily with a knowing smile, and immediately sat down on the floor and started stretching -- boys were so transparent sometimes. Ranma paused for a moment to remember the last time he had been in this dojo, helping this girl stretch, and what that had led to ... "you gonna help me, or do I have to kick you?" She joked over her shoulder, catching him day dreaming, and staring at her, which caused her to blush. He smiled sheepishly and crouched down to push her forward and help her stretch. His touch was still electric on her skin, but she was able to control her response to it much better these days. He still liked to touch her whenever he could, in private of course. The family was still too much of a busybody for his tastes, but they weren't doing anything too serious anyways -- just stretching. He was also proud that his hands no longer trembled when he touched her. After all, control was important to a martial artist. They shifted from stretching to massaging soon after that, and Ranma was quite proud of himself as he eased the tension out of her shoulders and she moaned appreciatively. It wasn't long after that that they were lying on the floor in each other's arms, kissing each other deeply.

Nodoka watched them quietly from the shadows of the house, and smiled softly to herself. Her son **was** indeed a man among men! Quietly, she slipped back into the house to find Soun and Genma and continue talk of the wedding preparations. With the way those two were going, they were going to **need** to be man and wife soon. She smiled to herself in approval.

Many hours later, the family was gathered around the table near the porch. The patio doors were open, and the morning was beautiful. The Tendo family, however, was not noticing it. They were too busy shifting uncomfortably in their seats, avoiding each other's eyes, and trying to not listen to the Saotome family squabbling.

"That's my word, and that's the end of it, woman!" Genma yelled at Nodoka.

"I don't think so, husband." Nodoka countered. She was angry, but at least she had left her sword on the floor. She had no need of it anymore, but she still liked to carry it around. Genma or Ranma, or even Akane for that matter, could have easily disarmed her of it, if it came to it. But, still, it was better that she wasn't wielding it. "I say they have been engaged long enough, and the time has come for them to wed!" She continued.

"Listen ... Mom ..." Ranma tried to interject.

"Quiet, boy, let your father handle this!" Genma snapped at him.

"Quiet yourself, old man, **I get to have a say on when and if I get married!**" Ranma shot back.

Nodoka's eyebrows shot up at the tone in both of their voices. "Is this how you have raised him to be 'a man among men?' To speak with such disrespect to his elders?" She asked in a dangerous tone of voice.

"Hey, I promised I would raise him to be a man among men, not to be a diplomat. Men are rude sometimes, what can I say?" Genma shrugged.

"Um, hello?! Can we get back to the subject please?" Akane chimed in. "It is nice that you are all reunited and all, but Ranma and I are still in school, and we are just not ready to get married yet!"

"Akane, dear, please stay silent. I know your mother is not around to teach you proper manners, but you do need to know when to hold your tongue, especially when speaking to your future mother-in-law." Nodoka snapped at her, a far cry from the kind woman who had visited them earlier and tried to help her learn to cook. Apparently Mrs. Saotome had a temper.

"Well now, see here! That was uncalled for, madam." Soun bristled from his place at the head of the table, slamming his paper down, and taking the toothbrush out of his mouth. "My little girl is *quite polite*. My dear departed wife may no longer be here, but I raised her right, and my oldest girl, Kasumi, did a fine job in instructing her in her bridal training!" Both Nabiki and Kasumi sat back with their jaws hanging open in shock. They had never heard their father speak like that before. He had real steel in his voice. It was kind of scary.

"Says the man with his engaged daughter sitting at the morning table, in a dirty, sweaty martial arts uniform -- fresh from an undignified make out session with my son on the floor of your dojo." Nodoka deadpanned. It was now Ranma, Genma and Akane's turn for their jaws to hit the floor.

"Wha-- how -- when--?" Ranma and Akane both sputtered.

Genma's face reddened with fury and he opened his mouth to yell at her, as she had finally managed to push him over the edge, when Ranma's eyes suddenly widened and he twitched his head behind Genma to signal him, grabbed Akane, and pulled her out of the way. Genma turned and gasped and started to jump up to meet the unseen attack, when the oddest thing happened, the telltale *shiing* of a sword being drawn was heard right as Nodoka leapt past her husband and met the attacker in full force, kicking up a huge dust cloud.

When the dust cleared, Nodoka was standing calmly, her sword held at horizontal guard over her head, blocking Shampoo's overhead killing strike, which had been aimed at Akane, before Ranma pulled her to safety.

"Who ... is ... you?" Shampoo said through gritted teeth, once again in her broken Japanese, as she strained against Nodoka's sword.

"I am Ranma's mother." Nodoka replied simply, before faking upwards with her sword -- causing Shampoo to change her grip on her sword and resist downward. She then slid her sword out of guard position, dodged out of the way, letting Shampoo's sword overbalance downward, and brought hers around in a quick low short strike to knock Shampoo's sword out of her hands in an expert disarm maneuver. Mousse let out a low, appreciative whistle from his hiding place among the shadows of the fence. He had been about to rush her, when Nodoka had stepped in. She clearly knew what she was doing. He decided to sit back and wait and watch for the moment. Maybe Ranma's mommy would take care of everything and he wouldn't have to reveal his strength to Shampoo.

"Holy crap, Ranma, your mom is a bad ass Samurai!" Nabiki whooped excitedly.

Genma gulped nervously as Nodoka looked down at him briefly. "What, did you think I was going to spend those 10 years waiting for you two to come home, and do nothing? Since I needed to carry the family sword around, I figured I might as well learn how to use it." She said with a smile.

"G-Good plan ..." Genma said weakly, wishing he had broken that sword as soon as she had set it down last night.

Shampoo stood stunned where Nodoka had disarmed her. She couldn't believe it. **Another** outsider Saotome female had beaten her? Were they a family of fighting freaks? Before she could move to reclaim her sword, and at least die trying to kill the Tendo wench, Nodoka's sword tip was suddenly hovering centimeters away from her throat, like she had sensed her intentions.

"Now, girl, what can I do for you?" Nodoka asked with quiet seriousness.

"**DIE!**" Three voices shouted in unison from behind Shampoo. Shampoo jolted and turned around, as Nodoka raised her sword back into guard position at this new threat. Three more sword wielding Chinese Amazons jumped down to the ground from the rooftop behind Shampoo.

"Okay, now this I didn't see coming." Mousse muttered to himself as he prepared himself to move. Before he could move, though, Kuno came barreling through the gates, sword drawn and yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Raaaaaanma, this time you have gone too far!" Kuno screamed. He pulled up short when he saw the 4 angry Amazons though. "Ranma, where are you?" He yelled from behind them. "I challenge you!"

"Who is this fool?" One of the girls asked Shampoo in Chinese.

"He's a local. He thinks he's good with a sword. He isn't." Shampoo replied.

"Oooh, he's cute." Another of the girls cooed.

"Don't bother, he's a weakling, he would never be able to defeat you." Shampoo set her straight, making her sister frown.

Dr. Tofu managed to choose this moment to make his morning entrance to see Kasumi. He also stopped short of the house, to take in the situation. "Well, hello there. Who are your friends, Shampoo?" He asked innocently, with his best winning smile.

"Ooh, never mind, I want him instead!" The girl who had thought Kuno was cute squealed.

"Ooh yourself, he's mine!" Another of the girls said with a feral grin.

"Be careful, sisters, this one actually **is** as formidable as the other one **thinks** he is. He is also taken with the eldest girl in this family." Shampoo cautioned them.

"Yes, speaking of this family, let's take care of business and head home, sister. This whole thing has gone on for far too long, don't you think?" The leader of the three girls chimed in, gripping her unsheathed sword even tighter, causing her knuckles to whiten.

"I do not **need** your help, sisters. Please stay out of this." Shampoo growled at them.

"Um ... what the holy hells are you girls chattering about? None of the rest of us speaks Chinese!" Nabiki called out from the house. "Quit being rude!"

Tofu actually did speak Chinese, but he wisely kept his mouth shut, and his eyes off the Amazon girls. He did grin to himself though.

The leader of the girls arched an eyebrow in Nabiki's direction, before addressing herself to Shampoo again. "I can see you have these people well in fear of your wrath, sister." She said sarcastically. Shampoo growled at this. Nobody moved in the sudden silence after that, everyone watching Shampoo and her Amazon tribe sisters, and what they would do next.

Ranma and Akane were now standing right behind Nodoka, looking uneasy, but ready to fight. Genma was standing with arms crossed and looking as burly as he could manage, right in front of Nabiki and Kasumi. He would protect them, should the need arise. Soun was standing up at the head of the table, looking stunned.

Finally, Akane couldn't stand it any longer. She stepped out around Nodoka and made her way over to the Amazons, breathing in the cold morning air deeply in a rage. Ranma hurried after her. Nodoka shouldered her sword and watched them with a raised eyebrow. It would be interesting to see how her son handled this.

"Well, what do you want?!" Akane asked Shampoo pointedly. "We had an agreement, or don't you remember? You were **supposed** to give Ranma up and never come after him again after I **beat you** in our fight." Akane emphasized, "beat you," with deliberate slowness as she locked eyes with Shampoo.

Shampoo bristled and clenched her fists. She jerked towards her sword, then stopped, and jerked towards Akane, clearly warring with herself on whether to just smack Akane now, or to get her sword first and **then** smack her. Before she could decide though, all three of her Amazon sisters thrust their swords tip first into the ground and then walked towards Akane, now that they knew which one she was. They approached Akane one by one, and kissed her tenderly at the base of her jaw, near her neck, tipping her chin up and holding her head delicately as they kissed her. Akane stood there in shock, her arms held wide, her back stiff, and her fingers flexed.

Nodoka, Kuno, Tofu, and Ryoga (who was watching all of this from another nearby rooftop) all dropped their jaws in amazement. The rest of the people present knew what was going on, so they weren't as shocked.

Even so, Nabiki couldn't let it go without at least saying *something*. She let out a low, long wolf whistle as the Amazons all gathered around very close to Akane, almost like they were all going to hug her, and stared her in the eyes. "Way to go Akane, I always knew when you said you, 'hated boys,' that you might try playing for the other team some day!" Nabiki shouted with a raised victory fist in the air. Kasumi raised an eyebrow at her in disapproval. Not **everything** was as funny as Nabiki seemed to think it was.

Akane stood there looking stunned, hand to her cheek in shock as the Amazon girls smirked and backed away from her. She knew they had been giving her the kiss of death ... but ... still ... that had been kind of kinky. Ranma slapped his hand to his forehead. Mousse mirrored him from the shadows of the wall. "Aw, man ... didn't we just get **done** with this kiss-of-death nonsense?!" Ranma complained.

Kuno was riveted to the spot. His eyes were open wide, and he was drooling slightly. That erotic overload had gotten close to damn near killing him. Nabiki observed him from a distance, and kicked herself for not taking pictures of them kissing Akane. She could have bought a new car and a

freaking **house** for what she could have charged him for pictures like that. Ryoga was also in a similarly paralyzed state in his hiding place on his rooftop.

"Kiss of what now? Soun, did you know that your daughter you have engaged to my son was a lesbian?!" Nodoka rounded on Soun, turning her back on the situation, to glare at him. In that instance, with the only sword wielder on the field of battle distracted, the Amazons struck.

The three girls all grabbed their swords in one smooth motion, and then leapt forward to attack Akane. Akane tried to backpedal, but tripped over a rock in the garden, and fell backwards clumsily. Ranma leapt in front of her before the Amazons could reach her, and an immediate stand-off began. The Amazons glared at Ranma, but didn't advance on him out of respect for his known prowess. Shampoo stood stock still and watched it all in a daze, almost like it was not really happening. It seemed so surreal.

With a growl, the leader of the Amazons twitched her head left and right, signaling her companions to flank Ranma, and get to Akane. Akane was now standing up, but clearly favoring one of her ankles. She must have twisted the other in her fall. Soun was moving forward to help, as was Nodoka and Tofu. Tofu was flat out running to get there from across the yard, actually. Kuno was still stock still and drooling. Ryoga jumped down from his rooftop perch to the top of their outer wall, and was starting to run to help. However, before anyone could reach them, an explosion hit right in front of Ranma -- an explosion of concealing white smoke -- which stopped everyone in their tracks.

When the smoke cleared, Mousse was standing in front of Ranma, he had a curved blade of some sort in each hand, and he was wearing his glasses. He gave a brief warrior's nod to Ranma, who nodded back in kind, and then turned around to pick up Akane and leapt with her back to the relative safety of the porch. Shampoo watched him go with her heart breaking. He hadn't even bothered to look at her or talk to her since she showed up. He had eyes only for Akane.

"Do not interfere, Mousse. We have given her the kiss of death, and now she must die!" The leader of the Amazon girls growled at Mousse in Chinese.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you do that." Mousse stated simply.

"Fine then, you die too!" The leader yelled as she signaled her companions to attack. Mousse smirked and held his ground as they rushed him. When the first girl's blade reached him, he dodged back and let it pass harmlessly in front of him, the second girl's blade he batted into the first, sending them both off balance. The leader, approaching from his front tried to swing over her companions' redirected swords, but Mousse kicked the first girl's sword wrist, causing her arm to jerk up, bringing both crossed swords up to block their leader's strike. All three swords rang together in a tooth jarring clash. Before they could untangle themselves, Mousse flicked some sort of hard steel ball towards the center of their swords. It hit with a small explosion and flames. When the smoke had cleared, all three of their swords were fused together. Shampoo arched an eyebrow in interest. She had never seen Mousse fight like this.

The three Amazons wasted no time in altering their tactics. They dropped their swords as one, and turned on Mousse with clenched fists, intending to beat him into submission. Mousse dropped one foot back into a guard position, back hand held high over his head, and front hand held low at waist level. With a wink he waved them forward with his front hand, in a taunt, which enraged the girls.

They rushed him as one, forcing him to back up and alter his stances as they attacked him. They were actually much more coordinated when fighting unarmed, than they had been with their swords. One girl faked low with a kick, causing him to block low, the next would fake high with a back knuckle

strike, causing him to block high with his other hand, and before he could recover from the first low block, the third girl landed a vicious solar plexus strike that would have dropped almost anyone.

Mousse did take a step back and double over, which caused the Amazons to smirk themselves this time, as they moved in for the kill. When they walked within striking distance, however, he dropped to the ground and spun into a quick sweep which knocked them all from their feet. They back flipped out of the sweep, but regarded him with a much more cautious eye as they approached him again. Shampoo started to smile as she watched this. Something magical was happening.

Mousse stood up straight again, and once more assumed a guarding stance and then taunted them to attack him. They obliged in a rush that was less coordinated this time. Because they reached him at different times, he was able to use the girls themselves as shields against each other. He would knock one girl's strike away and spin her into the attack of the next girl, while those two were recovering their feet, the third girl would attack, and on it would go. Finally, after almost a minute of this, Shampoo screamed, "enough!" Which stopped all of the Amazon girls in their tracks.

"Can't you see he is playing with you?" Shampoo hissed at them in Chinese, ashamed for her sisters that they did not realize how outclassed they were, and had not yet submitted to him to ask him to marry them, as was the law of their tribe. "He has all of you beaten, and yet you fight on against a stronger male! That is not our way!" She admonished them.

The girls, in turn, bowed their heads and nodded. They backed up from Mousse in a line, and bowed to him, waiting for him to make the next move. Mousse, however, had known this was coming, and walked to each in turn and grasped them by their shoulders to straighten each one up. He then kissed each of them on the opposite cheek as the one used for the kiss of death, which released them from their obligation to marry him. The girls each held a disbelieving hand to their cheeks -- not knowing whether to be relieved, or insulted. Without a word, they backed up, then leapt over the outer wall, and onto their journey home, back to China.

Ranma piped up at that. "Don't tell me that it's **that** easy to get an Amazon to give up on marryin' the guy that beats her!" He yelled in disbelieving anger. Mousse grinned back at him and nodded. Ranma growled. "You're lucky I owe ya one, pal, or I might have to beat ya for not tellin' me that."

"Yes, Ranma, is true." Shampoo said to him in her broken Japanese. "Can refuse marry Amazon girl when defeat her, if give kiss of rejection. You want reject Shampoo?" She asked with genuine sorrow. Ranma froze up and looked at Akane with a big gulp in his throat.

Akane shrugged and whispered to him, "oh fine, if it will make her go away for good, just go ahead and do it." Ranma moved to obey her, when her hand shot out and grabbed his wrist tightly, "just ... make sure ... you don't enjoy it too much." She whispered in a stronger tone of voice.

Ranma stood up solemnly and walked over to Shampoo, who was still standing next to the sword his mother had disarmed her of. He paused in front of her, and looked her in the eyes for probably the last time. She had tears in them. "I'm sorry, Shampoo." He said in a whisper, as the entire family watched with held breath.

"I'm sorry too..." She said as she closed her eyes in a wince, as he gently tilted her chin up like he had seen Mousse just do, and kissed her on the cheek where he had seen Mousse do it. Shampoo stiffened up, almost like he was hurting her, then relaxed and leaned her cheek into his lips. As Ranma pulled his head away, she intertwined her fingers into his hair, and pulled him into a full and proper kiss goodbye. It was now Ranma's turn to stiffen up like he was being hurt. Akane glared at

them, as did Mousse. Ryoga broke the brick his hand was resting on at his place atop the wall. Nodoka smiled at her son's manliness with the ladies, and Nabiki whistled another wolf whistle.

Shampoo finally released him many moments later, wiped a tear from her eye, and then walked over to where Mousse was standing. She looked up at him in what seemed like the first time in a long time. He looked much older, stronger, and handsomer than she had him pictured in her mind's eye. She gave him a wink and crooked a finger at him, indicating he should follow her. "Let's talk." She said as she walked out of the front gate, and out of Ranma's life forever.

Akane, not to be outdone, and damn the consequences, hobbled over to where Ranma was standing in shock, and grabbed him roughly and kissed him full and hard on the mouth. Ranma pulled away from her at first, because so many people were watching, but she just grabbed him again and kissed him harder. He shrugged, and picked her up in his arms and kissed her back. This time Kasumi let out a wolf whistle, which made Nabiki and Soun fall over. Tofu laughed as he watched them staring at her in shock. "What, you think you are the only one in this family father taught to whistle, Nabiki?" Kasumi said with a wink.

Ryoga wiped away a tear forming in his eye, and stood up solemnly to leave. Akane had clearly made her choice, and it was time to move on. Maybe he would go see what Ukyo was up to ... and maybe he wouldn't ... but it was time to move on. He leapt down from the Tendo family wall, never intending to return.

Nodoka smiled and resheathed her sword before turning around and beckoning to Soun and Genma, "come on you two. Let's talk about getting these two married before they start giving us Grandchildren."

Soun immediately put his back up again, and picked up the argument right where it left off. "Now see here, I still don't think that now is the time!"

"Nonsense, they are clearly ready." Nodoka said casually as she walked past him into the house.

Soun turned to follow, and the sounds of their arguing could be heard continuing into the house. Before Genma or Ranma or anyone else could follow to continue the argument, they heard a sound they had been hoping they wouldn't hear for a while.

"...haul..."

"...a ... haul ..."

"what ... .. haul ..."

"...-hat a haul ... what a haul!"

"Oh no!" Akane exclaimed as she jumped down from Ranma's arms to scan the rooftops. Nabiki and Kasumi both immediately looked around for the day's laundry, hoping no panties were on the top of the wash.

"It can't be." Ranma started.

"I thought he left." Tofu continued.

"You thought wrong!" Happosai yelled with glee, appearing on the top of the Tendo rooftop, with a bulging sack strapped to his back.

"Hey there, old freak, finally got bored raiding panties and came back here, huh?" Ranma taunted him. Instead of getting angry, though, Happosai smiled a dangerous smile down at Ranma.

"Nope, ya wretched ingrate student of mine. I have been busy getting what I need to solve all of my problems." He said with glee.

"And what's that?" Ranma growled, getting into a battle stance.

"This!" Happosai yelled as he leapt down from the roof. "Happo-fire-**burst!**" He yelled as he started dropping firecrackers.

Ranma smirked and started batting them away before they could explode. Unexpectedly, one of the them burst when he struck it, dousing him with cold water. A water balloon? How juvenile.

Everyone in the yard gasped. Happosai landed behind Ranma and grinned. "Hello there, Ranko." He said with a lecherous smile on his face, and a bra suddenly in his hand.

Ranma turned around and glared at him. "That's not funny, you old freak! I. Am. A. **Guy!**" Ranma emphasized.

"Oh, ... Ranma!" Akane gasped as she held a hand over her mouth in shock. Nabiki and Kasumi were mirroring her. Genma was rolling around on the ground laughing. In a sudden cold panic, Ranma put his hands on his suddenly too wide hips, and felt upward, finding assets he thought he had left behind him for good.

"Oh no!" He moaned in dismay.

"Oh yes!" Happosai yelled back in elation. "How sweet it is!" He yelled in joy as he leapt towards Ranma, who punted him away from him.

"You went all the way to China to fill up water balloons from the spring of drowned girl?" Ranma asked incredulously, as Genma continued to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, pop? This aint funny!" Ranma rounded on Genma.

"Oh, don't worry, I brought enough for everyone!" Happosai grinned as he chucked a black and white balloon at Genma. It splashed over him and suddenly a familiar panda was rolling around on the ground laughing.

"W-W-Why?" Akane yelled at him.

Happosai shrugged, "I don't really like change." He said with a sly smile. "Now, then, Ranma-honey. Why don't you try on this bra for me?" He said with grin.

"Why don't ... **you** ... dry up ... and **die!** You old **freak!**" Ranma yelled as he rounded on him and punted him away from the house with the most vicious kick he could muster. He stood panting in rage watching the old freak sail away into the distance.

"So ... back to China?" Kasumi asked cheerfully.

Ranma's shoulders slumped in defeat. "Yeah, back to China..." he cast a nervous glance at the house where he mom was still arguing with Soun. "... and soon!" He gulped.

"Not to worry, Ranma. We can leave today, if you want." Tofu said merrily.

"Great, and this time, I am wrecking those spring before I leave!" Ranma promised.

Akane laughed and hugged Ranma as they hurried out of the gates, past the still comatose Kuno, and towards Tofu's boat. Akane didn't care if Ranma changed into a girl or not, he was still her Ranma, and he was hers forever now.