

# I.C.

## A FanFic by the RanMaFan, inspired by Ranma 1/2, by Rumiko Takahashi.

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Plot : The final installment in the series, this one tries to focus on how Ranma comes to terms with Jusenkya's legacy, how a friend can help, and how a good is repaid twice over.  
Also focuses on how Shiyoru copes with a permanence that only Ranma has felt twice before, and the return of the forces of Yin and Yang.

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Legend : (C) Besides a name means the character's cursed form. (Without alias)

{xxxx} means a new chapter.

(xxxx) means an insignificant action on the character's part as well as minor additions to the story.

\*xxx\* Are for certain sound effects & stressed words.

*Italics* are for past/special events that are shown "on screen", and for emphasis on certain words. Also for "read aloud" thoughts.

<xxx> are for thoughts within sentences.

Note : For the duration of Shiyoru's "special occasion", I shall be using the name Shiyona. (Taken from That's what friends are for, this is Shiyoru's female alias.) Glass will be used for Porcelain from time to time.

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{The morning arrival}

Nerima, Tokyo. Hometown of the famous Tendou Dojo and home to the wierdest and most chaotic happenings in the world, renowned for its strange weather patterns and the stranger happenings that it causes. However, this morning, there is nothing unusual going on.... yet.

Soun : "Ah, Saotome-kun, what a beautiful morning, eh?"

Genma (C) : "Yes, Tendou-kun." (Cursed form Genma uses signs by default.)

The two fathers are playing a game of shogi. Apparently, Soun is winning. The two are sitting at the doorstep in the bright morning sun, enjoying their game over cups of steaming green tea. As Soun puts down another piece, Genma stares at it intently, wondering where to place his next piece. Nervously, Genma places his piece down. Soun laughs haughtily as he realizes that Genma's fallen into his trap and Genma knows it. However, just as Soun is about to place his winning piece down, a loud knock comes from the main gates of the Dojo.

Voice : "Delivery for a Mr. Saotome Ranma!"

Soun stops short of placing his piece down, and turns to look with Genma. Soun gets up and tells Genma.

Soun : "I'll go get it. DON'T YOU \*DARE\* TOUCH THE BOARD!"

Genma nods. Soun walks towards the gates and opens them, and sees the postal delivery boy there. The boy is holding a small package in his hands, an envelope tied to its top with rafia string. Tucked under his armpit is a clipboard, a pen in his breast pocket. Soun glares at the delivery boy.

Soun : "Ranma's just left for school. I'll get it for him."

The delivery boy sighs in relief and hands the package over to Soun. He takes it off the boy's hands, expecting it to be very light.

He ends up half-stumbling and balancing himself as his arms nearly pop out of their sockets at the package's weight. The delivery boy, now relieved to be rid of the weight, takes the clipboard from his armpit and the pen from his pocket and hands it to Soun after he puts the package down.

Delivery Boy : "Sign here please."

Soun signs his name, the boy nods and says his thanks, then leaves. Soun closes the door behind him, and looks at the package. He flexes his fingers and grabs the package, grunting at its surprising weight. He waddles back into the house with the heavy package in his hands, his arms all the way down because of its mass. When he reaches Genma, he notes with irritation that Genma has rearranged the pieces. Again. Genma looks at Soun's package, and points a sign at it.

Genma (C) : "Who's it from?"

Soun : "No idea."

The two of them stare at the package, then Soun puts it down in the living room floor, surprised it doesn't go through it. They keep staring at it, then at the envelope tied to the top. Soun looks at the words on it.

*"If Ranma isn't home, please read this, Mr. Tendou."*

Soun shrugs, untying the string as he does so.

Soun : "Well, alright."

He opens the envelope and reads the letter inside.

*"Hi, Mr. Tendou. Been a long time, hm? Anyway, if Mr. Saotome is reading this, please get Mr. Tendou here too. Alright, on to what I wanted to say. You remember me, Shiyoru? Anyway, I'll be coming over sometime this week for a while, so please inform Ranma and Akane, all right? And don't even think of opening the package this letter comes with. It's for Ranma."*

*-Yours,  
Wong Shiyoru. "*

Genma looks over Soun's shoulder as they read it together, eyeing the package all the while. They look at each other after reading the letter. Genma grins, his carnivores showing, and straddles over to the brown-paper-wrapped package. Soun looks on nervously.

Soun : "Saotome-kun! You know this is private property! It's for Ranma only!"

Genma only lifts a sign in response.

Genma (C) : "Well, Ranma is a Saotome, and he is my flesh and blood. I should have first honors of opening it on my son's behalf."

Soun : "Saotome-kun....."

But Genma doesn't hear him. He looks at the unassuming paper wrapping, and sets to work in with his sharp panda claws. However, as soon as he strikes the paper, a sharp screeching is heard. Genma draws his (filthy) paw back in surprise as his paw shakes a little from the scratching. Soun comes over and looks.

Underneath the paper is something shiny. It is silver in colour. Genma grins evilly, the shine in his eyes not only that of the metallic gleam underneath. Soun looks worried.

Soun : "Don't do this, Saotome-kun!"

Genma just carefully tears away the paper anyway, and stares at the contraption underneath. It is a medium sized metallic box, polished to a perfect shine. On it are blinking lights and bleeping controls. Looking at the box, Soun notices a finger-print scanner and a retina scanner. Genma looks disappointed.

Soun : "So much for *that* idea. Come on, back to our game, which you so conveniently cheated in."

Genma (C) : "I didn't touch the board, honest! I just moved the pieces around, no board-touching involved!"

Soun slaps his head and sighs. The two go back to their game, the strange box left alone on the floor. This time, Genma is winning.

-=-=-=-=-

In school, Ranma is busy chewing on his pen as he looks at the question set before him on the test paper.

Ranma : <Oh man! I KNEW I should've paid attention to that lesson Hinako taught us! I'm going to get it this time!>

While he is still stuck on the first question of his english test, the other students are scribbling away furiously at their papers. Ranma looks up from his paper to see Akane in front of him, hunched over her paper, scribbling quickly. He looks to his left and sees Daisuke licking his lips to moisten them as he contemplates his answer. He sees Ranma staring at him and shakes his head with that "Don't even think about it" look. Dejected, Ranma stares back at his paper.

"*Question 1 : Construct a sentence using the word 'Cute'.*"

Ranma : <Cute cute cute cute, what does cute mean?> (Remember, he's thinking Japanese.)

He thinks through all the words he's learned so far in English, which is not to say much. His hair begins to stand on end as he strains his brain for the meaning of the word. At one point, he nearly crushes his pen, but lets go before he loses the only pen left in his pencil-box. Finally, he gives up and looks at the next few questions.

"*.....sentence using the word 'Oxymoronic'..... 'Emotion'..... 'Confused'.... give meaning of 'Irony'..... 'Platonic'.....*"

Ranma : <Aw man aw man oh man oh man oh man! I can't do this paper!>

But deciding to give it his best shot, Ranma takes a deep breath and begins to scribble.

\*RIIIIIING!\*

Ranma : "WHAT!?! So fast!?"

Ranma moans as the bell rings, signalling the end of the test. However, his moan is lost in the crowd as his classmates begins exchanging answers while Miss Hinako collects the papers.

Hinako : "Now, now, class, you know I hate delinquents who talk too much."

The class shuts up quickly, and as Akane is staring at her paper, having managed to finish it with time to spare, she feels a slight knock on her back. She turns around and looks at Ranma, and consequently at his \*nearly\* blank paper. Ranma has a dejected look on his face and Akane grins evilly. She picks up the paper ball Ranma flicked at her and opens it, writing something on it quickly. She passes it back to Ranma.

"*Told you you needed my help. Baka.*"

Ranma sighs as he realizes how true it is. As Hinako comes up to his table, she stares at his paper and sighs.

Hinako : "Well, at least you managed to get in *something* this time."

The rest of the class snicker for a while as Hinako collects his paper. Ranma just flattens his face against his desk as his face flushes red at the humiliation. Him, Ranma Saotome, 2nd Generation of Anything-Goes-Martial-Arts, able to take on any foe and defeat him in physical combat, but losing hands-down when it comes to academic related battles. As soon as Hinako collects the papers, class is dismissed for P.T and as everyone gets up, Akane walks up to Ranma, all smiles. He scowls at her.

Ranma : "Ahh, whaddaya so happy about?"

Akane : "I did offer to tuition you in english."

Ranma : "How good is your english anyway?"

Akane : "We'll find out soon enough. But it's better than yours anyway!"

Ranma : "Hmph, I wouldn't believe that anyway."

Akane : "Ngaah! Jealous!" (Sticks a tongue out)

Akane skips away, leaving Ranma fuming. He gets even angrier as he hears how "easy" the test was as the other guys pass by him.

Classmate 1 : "Hey, you got the meaning on ironic?"

Classmate 2 : "Means something reflects the opposite of what is really going on."

Classmate 1 : "Yes! I got it right!"

Just then, Hiroshi comes running up to Ranma and slaps him on the back. Ranma staggers from the unexpected blow, but regains balance just in time.

Hiroshi : "Yo, Ranma! How's the test?"

Ranma : "Sucked."

Hiroshi : "Hm, from what Hinako said, it must've been hell. For you at least."

Ranma : "Yeah, don't bug me."

Hiroshi : "Alright, seeya in gym!"

He runs off to join the rest of the guys as they approach their lockers, Ranma listening out for the familiar voice of girls screaming and Happosai cackling.

In the girls' locker room, Akane is busy stripping off her blouse getting ready to dress for gym, ever alert for signs of Happosai. Pulling on her shorts, she pulls the mallet she stashes in her locker out to get ready to pummel the old hentai. A friend walks up to her.

Hanai : "Hey, Akane, where's that old pervert?"

Akane : "Don't know...."

In the boy's locker room, Ranma is leaning against his (empty) locker, looking at the locker room's clock.

Ranma : <5....4.....3....2....1....>

Voice : "Whee hay! Here I am, my amply bossomed beauties!"

Ranma : <Right on time.> "Hey, guys, I'm going to get that old man. Tell the coach, all right?"

Guys : "Right, Ranma."

In the girl's locker room, Happosai makes his daily appearance without fail. Even ready for him as they are, the girls are still unable to catch the small, speedy and incredibly hentai old man with their brooms. Chest after chest he glomps onto, laughing all the while. Finally, he spots Akane.

Happosai : "Ohh! Akane! Come, let your grand-pappy give you a good hug!"

Happosai leaps off Yoi's chest, fortunately covered with her P.T shirt, heading straight for Akane, eyes glimmering with tears.

Akane : "Grand-pappy my mallet!"

Akane screams as she heaves out the mallet from her locker to slam into Happosai's face. She is too slow and misses the old man. Akane stares in shock as Happosai continues, undaunted, towards her chest.

Happosai : "Hee hee! Akane....."

\*blam\*

Ranma : "Back off, pervert."

Akane stares at Ranma, having just burst through the door just in time, stepping on Happosai's head.

Ranma : "There you go, Akane. Have fun beating him up."

However, Akane's response is not one of gratitude. Ranma notes this and turns a shade paler.

Akane : "RANMA NO BAKA! How DARE you come into the girls' locker room without permission!?"

Ranma : "Hey! I just wanted to help, that's all!"

Akane : "I would've taken care of him myself!"

Ranma : "Yeah, how!? By pulling him off your chest!? You know he's harder to remove than a limpet on rock!  
He'd pull your breasts right off... if you had any worth mentioning!"

Akane's hair frizzles as she hears this comment. Every other girl is staring at Ranma, who just realized what a big insult (and mistake) he's just made. Akane turns several shades of red, then to purple. She picks up the mallet she dropped in surprise at Ranma's unexpected entry and lifts it.

Akane : "AND YOU THINK YOU'RE SO *GREAT*, BEING HALF GIRL!?"

Akane ends the sentence with a massive heave of her mallet. Ranma manages to let out an emphatic "eep" before being slammed in the chin towards Venus. Akane takes a few breaths as she sees Ranma join the Milky Way as a twinkling star.

Akane : "Ranma no baka."

The rest of the girls continue changing, and as they walk out the door, each one steps on Happosai. Akane gives him a contemptuous look before slamming the door shut behind her.

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In the air, Ranma is considering his options. Feeling his chin, he notes the painful bruise that has formed there. He notices that he also needs a shave on his flat(tened) chin. Then he looks down at the school below him, and considers returning for P.T. and the rest of school.

Ranma : <My grades are bad enough as they are. I need to pass this year!>

Then he thinks about Akane and her mallet, and the comment she made about being able to defend herself.

Ranma : <Damn, shouldn't have said all those things. I know what those girls feel like when Happosai's on me. But Akane shouldn't have come down so hard on me just because I came into their locker room. After all, I *DID* save her from Happosai.>

As he feels the wind rushing up and ruffling his hair, he realizes he's coming down. Having done this before, he aims straight for the school in a spreadeagle for maximum maneuverability. Actually, he kind of likes skydiving ever since Akane first showed him the painful way of flying.... only without the pain.

He aims for the swimming pool, where the landing will be most painless. He considers the effects of cold water on himself.

Ranma : <I hate changing. The guys bug me. But I've no other choice... gotta make it without a scratch.>

\*gooosh!\*

Ranma touches down in the swimming pool as coach Isha looks out the window, looking for Ranma. He sees the water column and nods back to the class.

Coach : "Hm... Ranma's back. We can begin."

Outside, at the swimming pool, Ranma-chan is dragging her soaked form out of the pool.

Ranma (C) : "Gah. One of these days, I've got to bring a spare set of clothes with me."

Happosai : "Whoo hoo! Ranma! Back so soon! I was getting lonely!"

Happosai, from out of nowhere, leaps towards Ranma-chan, arms spread. Ranma gives him a hard kick towards the Groombridge system, not in the mood to play around. Just then, one of her classmates yell out to her from the gym hall, loud and clear.

Classmate : "Hey, Ranma! We're waiting for you!"  
Ranma (C) : "Coming!"

Ranma runs towards the gym hall shoeless, doing her best to dry her hair out. As she enters the hall, the class has already started on their first item, leaping the wooden horse. The coach glares at Ranma as she walks in.

Coach : "You're late. Go sit down and wait for your turn."  
Ranma (C) : "Hai, sensei."

Still dripping wet, Ranma walks over to the group of guys sitting on the floor and takes a seat, cross-legged. She places her hands in the small space formed by her crossed legs to stop herself from falling over.

Ranma (C) : <I got to get used to this position.>  
Daisuke : "Hi, beautiful."

Daisuke pops out from behind Ranma and rests his arms on her shoulder.

Ranma (C) : "Cut it out, Dai."  
Daisuke : "I still wished you were a girl all the time. You're cuter."  
Ranma (C) : "Cut it out, Dai. It's not funny."  
Daisuke : "You're a much better gymnast as a girl.... and with what they wear, you'd be the envy of them all!"  
Ranma (C) : "Cut it out, Dai. It's not funny. It's very embarrassing."

Ranma punches Daisuke in the arm lightly and pushes his chin backwards to emphasize the point. He is caught by some of the other guys, who are all chuckling and grinning and irking him. Ranma looks, and snorts.

Ranma (C) : <Really! Who do those perverts think I am! I'm male for goodness' sakes!>

Meanwhile, the coach makes the boys and girls go out alternatingly, and soon, he calls out Akane.

Coach : "Akane."  
Akane : "Hai."

She passes Ranma as she walks, the two of them exchanging angry stares. Then she faces the springboard and the wooden platform, and runs. She hops gracefully onto the springboard and does an inverted flip into the air, landing on the padded surface with her hands, supporting her weight solely on them as she brings her body down, legs spread to make space for the hands. Then she raises her body into the air while closing her legs and straightening them, then swings. She uses the momentum to flip into the air two times before coming down to land, all the while concentration etched onto her fine face.

\*clap\* \*clap\* \*clap\*

Akane curtsies at the positive response of her showing off. She gives Ranma a smug look and joins her friends again, chattering about her feat. Ranma forgets what she was saying earlier on and glares at Akane.

Ranma (C) : <So what if Akane can do that? I can do better!>  
Coach : "Ranma."

Ranma cracks knuckles as she stands up and walks towards the springboard. Then she grins.

Ranma (C) : <Too easy. I can use my girl's body to do stunts anyone would be jealous of!>

She runs, and somersaults onto the springboard, flying high up into the air, spinning as she does so. Then she

comes down on one hand, legs in the air, and swings them, using the momentum to carry her into a somersault and comes down on the other hand, using only the fingers this time, legs in the air. Then she does one final swing of the legs to send her off the wooden 'horse'. She flips a few times in the air before landing on one foot, easily and without much effort written on her delicate features.

\*cheer\* \*whistle\* \*wolf calls\*

Ranma (C) : "Thank you. Thank you all."

Ranma says in a arrogant voice, as if she'd been expecting this all along. Feeling somewhat elated now, she skips back to the guys and sits down. Daisuke comes up, again, and claps Ranma on the back, causing her to nearly fall over in surprise.

Ranma (C) : "What did you do that for!?"

Daisuke grins, then leans on one of Ranma's shoulders.

Daisuke : "Hey, great show, Ranma!"

Ranma (C) : "Thank you."

Daisuke : "But did you have to make Akane look like *that*?"

Ranma (C) : "Huh?"

Ranma looks at where Daisuke is pointing, and sees Akane, her face shrouded in a black veil of anger, turning various shades of purple and red. Ranma scratches the back of her head.

Ranma (C) : "What did I do this time?"

Daisuke : "You humiliated her, I guess. Your show made hers look like child's play."

Ranma (C) : "Really? You all know I'm the best anyway!"

Daisuke : "You didn't have to do it in front of everyone here."

Just then, Hiroshi comes over and leans on Ranma's other shoulder, having heard the conversation.

Hiroshi : "You think she'll stay that way?"

Ranma (C) : "Nah, she'll get over it. She always does."

Hiroshi : "I still think it's a bad idea to make her angry."

Ranma (C) : "Thanks for the thought. Now can you guys get off my shoulders? It's bad enough having weight...  
*here.*"

Ranma-chan gestures towards her chest with a hand, the two guys looking. They look at each other, grin, and give her a final push before moving back, nearly causing her to fall over again.

Over at Akane's side, Akane is fuming. She is beyond words. Her face is a mass of blacks, reds and purples.

Akane : <RANMA BAKA! Did you have to show off and embarass my little feat in front of EVERYONE in class!>

Her friends all look at her and stay away, knowing that they can only make things worse. Akane, unbeknownst to her, is clenching her teeth visibly, and her hands as well. In fact, she is clenching them so tightly that her nails are digging into her palms, causing them to bleed. She doesn't notice all of this though, her anger and embarrassment getting the better of her. However, she does manage to notice her body is trembling. She quickly stops and tries to calm down. That's when she notices the slight pain in her palms. She holds her hands up and looks at the bloodstained mess she made.

Akane : "Ouch. How'd I get these?"

One of the girls, looking at Akane's change of behaviour, sees the bloody palms and calls out to the teacher.

Sakura : "Sir! Akane's palms are bleeding!"

The coach tells the other students to continue while he attends to the problem. He walks over to Akane and squats besides her. Akane quickly forgets her negative feelings as she looks at her palms, nail-marked. He notices the same things.

Coach : "What's the matter? You clench your hands too hard again?"

Akane : "I think so...."

Coach : "Alright then. Go to the school infirmary and get that patched up. You've got the rest of school ahead of you."

Akane : "Hai."

Akane gets up to leave for the infirmary, but the coach lays a hand on her shoulder.

Coach : "You'll need someone to help you do those up."

All the girls, hearing that their friend would need some help, quickly volunteer. The coach doesn't have them in mind, but appreciates their effort. Then some of the guys, who figure out what is happening, volunteer very enthusiastically. The coach ignores them. He turns his head and scans the crowd of boys.... and the out-of-place girl in them.

Coach : "Saotome! Come here!"

Ranma is snapped out of her conversation over the hottest manga series of the month and stands up, walking towards coach Isha.

Ranma (C) : "Yes, coach?"

Coach : "Help Akane wrap these up."

Ranma (C) : "!!!"

The two look at each other with a small hint of animosity. Ranma rolls her eyes towards the ceiling and shrugs.

Ranma (C) : "Ah well, since the 'self-sufficient' kawaikunee iinazuke needs some help, I guess the least I could do is help."

Coach : "That's the spirit."

Ranma offers to help Akane up by pulling her wrist, but she adamantly refuses the help, getting up on her own. The two leave the gym hall towards the infirmary.

As they walk, Ranma looks at Akane, who steadfastly refuses to meet her gaze.

Ranma (C) : "I can't understand why you HAVE to be so petty! All I did was show what I could do to the rest of the class!"

Akane remains quiet. Ranma continues.

Ranma (C) : "And since you know I'm your better, I'm most likely to outperform you in *most* endeavours."

Akane still remains silent, but her face softens a little knowing that Ranma acquiesced to some of her other skills she can perform better than Ranma anyday. Ranma knows this too.

Ranma (C) : "Except maybe poisoned cooking and being uncute! HAA HAA HAA!"

Ranma laughs out loud, and hard. Akane's eyes turn into dangerous slits as she slowly turns her head towards Ranma, still laughing, fists at the ready. Ranma doesn't seem to notice, and Akane concentrates on her target as she forms a mallet in her hand. A big one.

Akane : <Baka.>

As she concentrates, she notes down every aspect of Ranma right down to the laugh. Her anger is fueled by the



envy she feels looking at Ranma's \*cute\* face as she laughs. She is temporarily surprised at how cute Ranma really is now, then throws hesitation to the wind as jealousy decides to take its cue.

\*kapow\*

Ranma flies into the air, courtesy of Air Akane. Incidentally, she flies through the window into the infirmary, and a tinkling can be heard as the glass shatters upon impact. Akane looks, then continues towards the infirmary. Alone.

For the rest of the day, Ranma-chan, now bandaged on the head and with various band-aids and patches all over her body, finds that school just gets worse and worse. Their Maths teacher, Miss Kitano, gave them a surprise test in which Ranma had no idea of what Trigonometry meant. Then for their physics lesson, Ranma blew a beaker up in Mr. Makoto's face when she mixed the wrong chemicals together. Their Literature teacher, Miss Yuki, had them do a literature essay six pages long within the allotted one hour. Finally, Ranma forgot her homework when it came to history and as a result was made to stand in the hallway with four buckets of water.

Ranma (C) : <Well, at least it's the last lesson on the last day of school before the weekends.>

"Osage no onna!"

Ranma (C) : <Kuno!?!>

Ranma looks to her left, and sees nothing. She looks to her right, and sees Kuno. He is running up towards her in his school uniform, bokken in hand.

Kuno : "Where is that evil villain, Saotome Ranma!?! The vile one who put a curse on thy fair self, forcing you to be ensorcelled within his evil grasp!?! I shall defeat him and rescue you, oh fair maiden of the pigtail for making you suffer by standing here in the hallway, forced to carry buckets of water! Oh, the degradation!"

Ranma (C) : <Do I need this!?!>

Kuno comes running up to Ranma, arms spread open in the hopes of hugging her. But Ranma, while her hands may be full, still has her feet.

\*squish\*

Ranma (C) : "Beat it, Kuno. Don't you have classes to attend?"

\*squeee..... \*\*pop!\*

Kuno pulls his face off Ranma's shoe and shakes his head.

Kuno : "Our teacher is absent. We got off early."

Just then, Nabiki walks down the corridor chatting with her classmates. She turns and sees Ranma.

Nabiki : "Oh, hi Ranma. Hi Kuno-baby. Have fun, you two."

Ranma splutters as she watches Nabiki walk by without even a hint of help-for-hire.

Ranma (C) : "B..b...g...a.....n..Na..."

Kuno : "Osage no Onna! Let me take you away from all this chaos of Furinkan high! Let us sail the seve....."

\*BAM\*

Kuno flies through the roof of the school building as Ranma sends him into the clock tower with a kick.

\*ding\* \*dong\* \*dong\* \*dong\*.... \*dong\* \*dong\* \*ding\* \*dong\*.....

Ranma drops her buckets of water, opens the classroom window and hops into her seat, so conveniently placed besides the window, and grabs her bag. She bids the teacher farewell with the rest of the class and leaves quickly. Walking in the hallway where the crowd thins out, Ranma is busy thinking about something else. Just then, someone does an impromptu frog-leap on her left shoulder. Incidentally, there's a bandage there where the glass cut her. Ranma winces, the cut deep enough to elicit some extreme pain.

Ranma (C) : "Ouch! That hurt!"

Daisuke : "Sorry, pretty."

Ranma looks at Daisuke, and Hiroshi standing besides him. The two look both serious and kidding at the same time. Ranma wonders how they can do that.

Ranma (C) : "What is it guys?"

Hiroshi : "It's Akane."

Ranma (C) : "What about?"

Daisuke : "She's still fuming."

Ranma (C) : "And?"

Hiroshi slaps his head and shakes it. Daisuke just looks as if he was told that Kodachi wanted to marry him. Ranma looks worried.

Ranma (C) : "Hey, honest! I don't know what to do! What am I supposed to do?"

Dai and Hiro look at Ranma-chan.

Daisuke & Hiroshi : "Go apologize!"

Ranma looks taken aback.

Ranma (C) : "What!? Me? Apologize to that uncute to...."

\*biff\*

Akane : "Say what?"

Akane has buried her elbow in Ranma's head and is grinding it in for all she's worth. After she's done, she walks down the corridor and leaves. Ranma stands up, rubbing her head, sticking her tongue out at Akane.

Ranma (C) : "Ngaah! Uncute! Tomboy! Horrible cook! Who'd want to marry you!"

Then she notices the two guys looking at her. She puts on a look of irritation.

Ranma (C) : "Oh all right. I'll listen to whatever you two have to say. But let's talk on the way to Ucchan's, alright?"

{Curiosity, Cursiosity, Comfortability.}

\*slam\*

"That Ranma is such an idiotic fool!"

Akane slams the gates of the Tendou Dojo, her home, wide open and walks in, muttering angry things at Ranma. Soun and Genma look up at her, sweating. She gives them a cursory glance, then continues on towards her bedroom. Soun looks at Genma.

Soun : "Saotome-kun, is Akane angry?"

Genma (C) : "You tell me. She's your daughter."

Soun : "You have an impromptu one yourself. And you've definitely seen her angry. Now you tell me."

Genma considers this. He holds up a sign.

Genma (C) : "No, she's not angry. Everything's fine. Let's go back to our game."

Soun grabs Genma's sign and bashes his head with it. Soun speaks again, this time his voice dripping with sarcasm.

Soun : "Well, if that's the case, I guess we can go talk to her and ask her why she's acting so strangely, since she's not angry."

Genma (C) : "She's your daughter!"

Soun : "Yes, but she's marrying your son. If we don't know what's wrong, how can we help them get together?"

Genma (C) : "Psychiatric Therapy?"

Soun whacks Genma's head with his stolen sign and drags the whimpering panda upstairs.

In Akane's room, Akane is lying on her bed, crying. She is hugging a pillow to her face so the tears will be soaked up and her sounds be muffled.

Akane : \*sniff\* "Why... does that... baka.... have to...." \*sniff\* "Pick on me....all the time!?" \*sob\*

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

Akane looks up from her pillow and looks at the door.

Akane : "Go away!"

Soun's voice from the other side :

Soun : "Akane-chan, what's wrong? Can we help?"

Akane : "Everything's fine! Now get lost!"

Outside, Soun looks at Genma, who is shaking his head in disapproval at the idea of going in. Soun sighs.

Soun : "Fine. Be the coward and leave my daughter in times of need. But know that if Ranma cannot marry Akane, you will be held responsible."

Genma quickly turns the knob on the door.

Soun : "Thaaaat's the spirit, Saotome-kun."

Soun walks into Akane's dim room, the light pouring in from the outside stretching his shadow on the floor. He looks at his youngest daughter, lying on the bed, shaking. He walks over and sits down on the bed by her side.

Soun : "Come on, baby. You know I care for your welfare. I'm your father! Go on, tell me what's wrong?"

Akane stops crying for a while. She looks at Soun, her father, and sits up besides him, resting her head on his arm. Soun looks at Genma, waiting outside the doorway, his panda frame too large to fit through the doorway.

Soun gestures to Genma to shut the door. Genma does so.

Father and daughter, now alone in the room. Soun slowly rocks Akane like he did when she was a real baby. He slowly strokes her hair, calming her.

Soun : "Akane-chan, please tell me what's wrong. Is it Ranma? I thought you two were getting along just fine?"

Akane nods, her head rubbing on his arm. She holds her father's arm for support. Soun notices the bandage on her hand but says nothing.

Akane : "...yes... I think so. At least, I think we were."

Soun lets out a sigh of disappointment.

Soun : "What did he do this time?"

Akane : "He.... humiliated me.... he humiliated me in front of the entire class and insulted me."

Soun nods. He thinks of all the times Ranma humiliated Akane in front of everyone else.

Soun : <Nothing unusual..... is it?> "What did he say?"

Akane : "...you wouldn't understand."

Soun : "Try me."

Akane looks up at her father, his face unusually serious. He notices this too, and looks down at Akane, smiling in his usual idiotic style, lightening the mood.

Soun : "Trust me, I'm your otosan. I know these things, Akane-chan"

Akane : "I'll try."

Akane stops for a moment to take a breath and recompose her face into something calmer, stopping the flow of tears from her reddish eyes.

Akane : "He said that I am a horrible cook. I am an uncute tomboy. He outperformed me in gym class today without any effort."

Soun thinks a while. He notices that Akane's voice stopped short at the last phrase. Always a sign that there's something else to say. He says in his sternest voice.

Soun : "You aren't telling me everything, Akane-chan. Out with it. I can't help if you don't say everything."

Akane pulls away from her father and looks at him, recalling the painful words Ranma said.

Akane : "...he.. he.. he also said....."

At this, she breaks down, her calm demeanor fracturing into a thousand shards on the floor as she starts crying again. Soun takes this to be a bad sign.

Akane : "He..." \*sniff\* "...he said.... I...I...I...."

Soun : "Hm?"

Akane : \*sob\* \*sob\* "Had no breasts worth mentioning!!!" \*bawl\*

With this, Akane punches her bed and starts crying full swing, then she buries her face in her hands and turns away from her father, pride hurt and irreparable. Soun keeps quiet, the only sounds now that of Akane crying and trying to pull herself together. He looks at her dim form, shaking convulsively with every tear shed.

Soun : "Did he, indeed?"

Akane nods, not pausing to do anything else.

When Akane finally stops crying and turns around, her father is nowhere to be seen.

==--==

".....So I say, thatshe mywe noswshe!"

\*laughter\*

Ranma and her two friends are walking down the sidewalk towards Ucchan's, the best Okinomiyaki restaurant in

town. They see Ukyo setting out her banner outside, indicating she's open for business. Ukyo also sees the trio coming down towards her.

Ukyo : "Hi, guys. Hi, Ranchan."

Dai, Hiro and Ranma (C) : "Hi Ukyo/Ucchan."

Ukyo : "So, sugar, come for some free food?"

Daisuke and Hiroshi point at Ranma.

Daisuke & Hiroshi : "Only this one. We're full fledged, non-stingy paying customers."

Ranma looks flustered and turns red, stuttering.

Ranma (C) : "Hey hey hey hey! Watch it! I can pay if I need to! I'm no freeloader!"

Daisuke and Hiroshi look at each other, laugh, and Daisuke does a cheap impersonation of Ranma-chan.

Daisuke : "*Oh, I'm no freeloader!*"

Hiroshi following soon after....

Hiroshi : "*Even though I destroy the dojo I live in and eat the food there without contributing to its upkeep!*"

Both of them laugh, while Ranma feels her cheeks turning very red and very hot. Ukyo sees a Ranma-chan with a face red enough to fit her hair, and a look in her eyes to tell her that it's not good for her conscience. She quickly walks over to the two guys and taps their shoulders.

Ukyo : "Eh, sugar?"

Daisuke & Hiroshi : \*hee\* "Yes, Ukyo?"

Ukyo : "I think that's enough."

The three look at Ranma, eyes lowered and turning away from their gaze, face slightly reddish, scuffing her shoe against the floor.

Daisuke & Hiroshi : "Yeah, that's enough."

Ukyo smiles, then cheerfully walks over to Ranma and taps her shoulder.

Ukyo : "Ranchan, honey, come on in. Okinomiyakis on me."

Ranma looks up and smiles, and the four go in. Konatsu is there, wiping the floor while whistling a tune. The pretty, petite boy looks up and sees Ukyo. He kowtows to Ukyo on the spot.

Konatsu : "Ukyo-sama, the floor is nearly done."

Ukyo : "Thanks, Konatsu. After you're done, would you mind helping me get my friends a drink?"

Konatsu : "Not in the least, Ukyo-sama!"

Ukyo leads the three towards the seats in front of her hot grill, and gets them to sit down while she makes four Okinomiyakis. As she flips them, Ukyo looks at the three.

Ukyo : "So, Ranchan, what brings you and your friends here?"

Ranma (C) : "Oh, er.. that.."

Daisuke : "Nah, just another argument between him and Akane."

Hiroshi : "Yeah, weren't you there, Ukyo?"

Ukyo nods, but having left immediately after school doesn't know much else. Hiroshi nods and continues.

Hiroshi : "Well, Akane seems really steamed over this affair. Goodness knows what Ranma here said, but I think

he made her genuinely angry this time."

Ukyo : <All the better to elope with Ranchan.> "She's always getting angry, Akane, ne?" <I thought things were better between them after Ranchan's wedding was destroyed by us...>

The three nod solemnly. Ukyo finishes touching up the okinomiyakis with some sauce and serves them. One for Hiroshi and Daisuke, and two for Ranma. Or, "Ranchan" as she calls him. Ranma crams both into her mouth at the same time while Hiroshi and Daisuke slowly carve theirs up to bite-sized pieces. Hiroshi continues between mouth-fuls.

Hiroshi : "Seems that Akane went home in a rage. Nobody dared stop her or talk to her. We were trying to get Ranma here to apologize to her...."

Daisuke : "Which only made things worse. He insulted her in her presence....."

Hiroshi : "Which was probably one of the main reasons why she was so angry."

Ukyo listens, and nods. Konatsu brings out their drinks and then goes and finds something else to do.

Ukyo : <Well, I'd like to get Akane away from Ranchan.... but not this way. It wouldn't be fair. Say.....> "Say, Ranchan. Did you say something about Akane this morning in the locker?"

Ranma stiffens at the remark. She looks at Ukyo and nods dumbly. Ukyo snaps her fingers.

Ukyo : "Of course. You know what you said right, Ranchan?"

Ranma (C) : "Er.... no."

Ukyo : "....."

Voice : "***Ra.....n.....m.....a.....!!!!!!***"

Ukyo, Daisuke, Hiroshi and Ranma all turn towards the wall to their left as a monstrous voice calls out. They also notice, (to Ukyo's utter dismay) a huge bulge in the wall of the restaurant which slowly cracks. It bursts open and a monster-head Soun comes through it. Ranma shrieks. So does Ukyo. Daisuke and Hiroshi are too scared to do anything.

Soun : "*Raaanmaaaaa....! How DARE you insult Akane so badllllyyyy.....!?*"

Ranma just stares at Soun. Soun "floats" up to her and stares at her, giant eye to eye. She is too scared to do anything. Suddenly, the giant, purple skinned, yellow eyed, long tongue monster in front of them transforms back into a normal Soun, tears in his eyes. He grabs Ranma by the arms, lowers his head and cries, Soun-style.

Soun : \*Sniff\* "Boo hoo hoo! Ranma! Why did you make Akane so angry today?" \*wah\* "Do you know how hurt she is right now?" \*sob\* "She cried her heart out because of you!" \*sniffle\*

Ranma looks shocked. She looks around and notices everybody else is giving her a dirty look. She grits her teeth and asks.

Ranma (C) : "What'd I say?"

Soun cries even louder, his tears soaking Ranma's shirt.

Soun : \*baw!\* "How could you not know!? She said you said she had no breasts worth mentioning of course!"

Ranma looks surprised.

Ranma (C) : "I don't remember saying that...."

\*click\*

Ukyo has a finger on the "play" button of a tape recorder.

"***RANMA NO BAKA! How DARE you come into the girls' locker room without permission!?***"

"***Hey! I just wanted to help, that's all!***"

"***I would've taken care of him myself!***"

*"Yeah, how!?! By pulling him off your chest!?! You know he's harder to remove than a limpet on rock! He'd pull your breasts right off... if you had any worth mentioning!"*

Silence reigns as a wind blows through the shop, even though the doors are closed. Konatsu struggles to find the source of the draft. Soun looks up.

Soun, Ukyo, Hiroshi & Daisuke : "Ranma....."

Ranma has always had a perverted smugness of her own full-bodied figure as a girl, which she time and again tries to deny. Easily the best looking in school, she's always insulted Akane's measurements, using her own body as an example. Talk about irony.

She looks unsure and points at the tape recorder, disbelief written on her face.

Ranma (C) : "Did I say that?"

Everyone nods. Ukyo looks disappointed.

Ukyo : "Really, Ranchan. I expected better of you. You are, of all things, Akane's fiancée. What do you do? You insult your own future wife's assets. You're better off with me. I won't mind the insults."

Ranma nearly lands on the hot grill face first, but stops herself at the last moment. She looks up at Ukyo.

Ranma (C) : "Did I really say that?"

All four nod.

Daisuke : "That, and the fact that you made Akane look like a total idiot in front of everyone in gym class, yes."

Ranma gets up and runs a hand through her hair.

Ranma (C) : "Now what do I do?"

Daisuke : "Think of a way to kiss and make up with Akane."

Hiroshi : "The sooner the better."

Ukyo : "And that would mean today, honey."

Soun : "Now would be better."

Ranma nods dumbly, then gets up and walks out the restaurant.

Ranma (C) : "I gotta think about this."

The four watch Ranma walk out the doorway. Daisuke and Hiroshi turn to look at Ukyo. Soun just looks at everyone.

Daisuke : "Amazing. He's actually feeling guilt."

Hiroshi : "Something we've never seen before."

Soun : "Who said Ranma's completely the same mentally as a girl?"

Ukyo : "Ranchan....."

Soun, Hiroshi, Daisuke and Ukyo : "....of course."

=====-

In the Dojo, Akane looks out the window of her room. The sky is clear and a beautiful shade of blue, a cloudless sky reveals the brilliant sun, its not uncomfortably warm rays shining into her room and onto her face. A breeze blows, ruffling Akane's hair.

Akane : <Sometimes I wish Ranma and I could just.... TALK for once. Not argue.>

She looks out into the landscape before her, the koi pond beneath her, and into the sky, shielding her eyes from

the sun. Birds chirp in the fruit trees Kasumi grows in their lawn, making the place seem cheerful. Akane sighs.

Akane : <Was Ranma right about my measurements?>

Akane pulls the curtains open, letting sunlight stream into her room, making the place that much brighter. She stands in front of her full-body mirror and looks at herself, paying attention to her figure.

Akane : <What is it about me that Ranma doesn't like?>

She cups the base of her breasts and hefts them, feeling them bounce a little in her bra as she lets go. She gently squeezes one to test its firmness. Not too soft, not too hard.

Akane : <Looks fine to me from the outside. Feels alright.>

She puts her hands on her hips and turns a few experimental turns, admiring herself from as many angles in the mirror as her head can turn.

Akane : <Looks alright down here.>

Finally, she decides to do the ultimate test. She first closes her curtains, then walks over to her closed door and locks it. Then she returns to the mirror and strips down to her underwear. She looks at her dim reflection in the mirror. What she sees is a somewhat full figure, athletically slim but well rounded at the hips, breasts and other areas. Slight muscle tone throughout her body indicates physical fitness of a high degree, without compromising too much figure. Akane looks at herself closely.

Akane : <What is it about me that Ranma doesn't like?>

She feels her skin. Smooth, unlike some rough, calloused skin she's felt before. She looks at herself, then at the reflection in the mirror. She stares at it, willing it to tell her what's wrong. She gets an answer... sort of. Suddenly, a reflection of Ranma-chan appears suddenly in the mirror, naked. Akane gasps and turns around, but sees nobody around. Looking back in the mirror, she sees herself, alone again. But that brief moment was enough for Akane.

Akane : <Ranma has long legs, that's for sure. They seem to keep going to her abdomen. And that's one well shaped abdomen....>

Akane starts comparing herself to the Ranma-chan she saw in the mirror, noting similarities and differences.

==--==

Outside, near Dr. Tofu's clinic, a dejected Ranma is walking along the sidewalk, looking at the pavement.

Ranma (C) : <I know I always insult Akane over these matters, and I know I have one hell of a figure. But I'm... a guy for goodness' sakes! Why do I keep insulting Akane over girlish matters like these!? I should act like a man!>

\*bump\*

Ranma (C) : "Oh, sorry!"

Tofu : "Ranma? What's the matter with you? You look down."

Ranma looks up to see Dr. Tofu Ono standing in front of her, glasses glinting in the sunlight.

Ranma (C) : "Ara... hi, Dr. Tofu."

Tofu : "Ranma, are you all right? Do you need to come sit down in my clinic for a while?"

Ranma (C) : <Ah, what hurt can it do?> "All right, Dr. Tofu."

Tofu opens the metal gates and leads Ranma in. He is currently free of patients, so he can attend to Ranma.



Sitting on a chair in Tofu's office, Ranma slumps. Tofu looks at Ranma's cuts and bruises, and at the bandages.

Tofu : "You look like Akane's been at work on you."

Ranma (C) : "Tell me about it."

Tofu walks over to his medicine cabinet and opens it. He gets out some antiseptics and bandages. When he returns to treat Ranma's wounds, he notices her sad eyes and dejected face. Things not normally associated with either form of Saotome Ranma.

Tofu : "Why so sad? Did you lose a fight?"

Ranma shakes her head as Tofu lifts an arm up to apply antiseptics and dressings. Tofu adjusts his spectacles.

Tofu : "Want to tell me?"

Ranma nods her head glumly. Tofu frowns as he dabs antiseptic on a serious cut.

Tofu : "It's Akane, isn't it?"

Ranma nods.

Tofu : "I don't normally see you so sad after making Akane angry."

Ranma (C) : "No, I don't."

Tofu : "What did you she say to you? More importantly, what did you say to her that made her say what she said to you?"

Ranma rubs the base of her neck with her free hand as Tofu works on the other, wondering how to put her reply in words. Finally, she opens her mouth to say the answer she thinks is the best answer.

Ranma (C) : "Doctor...."

Tofu : "Yes?"

Ranma (C) : "You aren't a girl, but neither am I, right?"

Tofu : "I think so, yes. Go on."

Ranma (C) : "But.... since I'm stuck in this girl's body, I don't know why, I keep feeling all sorts of emotions I shouldn't be feeling as a guy when someone makes a comment about me."

Tofu : "Mmm hmm... next arm please...."

Ranma (C) : "Comments like my measurements, my prettiness, things like that that make me think my manhood is diminishing. I feel all sorts of things as a girl I don't normally do as a guy."

Tofu : "Do go on."

Ranma (C) : "The thing is, I made a comment about Akane's bust."

Tofu : "I see. And?"

Ranma (C) : "Well.... I said something really mean about it. I think I would've felt the same way, although not as if I cared."

Tofu : "Do you? What did you say?"

Ranma (C) : "I said she didn't have any busts worth mentioning."

Tofu stops working on Ranma's arm and looks up at her, glasses fogged. Ranma's face is a mask of anxiety and uncertainty, uncertain what Tofu will say to her and a little frightened of what he might say. Tofu nods, his glasses returning to normal, then goes back to working on her remaining cuts that were unattended and unnoticed to by the school nurse.

Tofu : "Well then, Ranma, I strongly suggest you apologize to her quickly. I'll tell you this much. Girls are, by and by, concerned over their sexuality. Any comment expressing doubt about their figures and well.... I think you know better since you're one yourself."

Ranma (C) : "B..b..but I'm NOT a girl, for goodness' sakes! Not mentally! I won't be like a girl for sure!"

Tofu gets up after applying the last patch to Ranma's body, and cracks a few knuckles. He picks up the unused gauze and medicine and returns it to the medicine cupboard. But then he takes out another object, kind of like a

deoderant stick, and returns to a curious Ranma. He sits on a chair opposite her and offers the thing to Ranma.

Tofu : "Ranma, I want you to take a sniff at this."

Ranma (C) : "What is it?"

Tofu : "A test. Go on."

Ranma, deciding the doctor won't hurt her, does so. He leans over and takes a whiff.

The effects nearly knock her out. A split-second after she took the breath, her world turned a fuzzy red, and she felt her cheeks heating up. Then she felt light-headed, and happy. Then she finds herself on the floor, Tofu rushing over to help her up. She groans a little and rubs her head as she realizes her head struck the floor hard.

Ranma (C) : "Ugh... what was *THAT*?"

Tofu : "Gomen, Ranma. That was a special male-hormone sniff stick. It's kind of a test I use on some of my female patients to gauge their reactions to male hormones for reasons I won't discuss now. Expensive, but it works. This one allows me to gauge your mental workings."

As Tofu helps Ranma up back into the chair, she eyes the stick carefully.

Ranma (C) : "That was one hell of a hormone smelling stick. I nearly K.Oed!"

Tofu : "You only took a slight whiff. A strong one would've probably put you into a coma for a month, judging by the response you gave."

Ranma looks at Tofu. She rubs her head forcefully, waking her up completely.

Ranma (C) : "So what was the result, doctor?"

Tofu : "Tell me first, did you feel happy?"

Ranma thinks, and nods.

Tofu : "Then your thoughts should be considered strongly affected by female emotions. Hormones to be more precise. And very strong ones too."

Ranma considers this. Then she stands up nods at Dr. Tofu.

Ranma (C) : "*Thank you*, doctor."

Tofu watches as Ranma walk out the door, slamming it behind her. He shakes his head.

Tofu : "Poor Ranma. So confused. I wish I could do something for her \*cough\* him."

Outside the clinic, Ranma is fuming that even Tofu won't try to help raise her spirits, not even with a little white lie. Indeed, he even told her that she even thought like one! The nerve!

Ranma (C) : <Hmph! I don't need him for this! I'm going home!>

Ranma stomps all the way home in a very unmanly gesture of petty anger.

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At the dojo, Soun is reading the sports segment of the newspaper, Genma the comics and Nabiki the financial segment.

Soun : "Hm... my favorite team won 30-12. Hah, Genma's team lost 1-92!"

Genma (C) : "bwoarkok, har har, bwoor."

Nabiki : "Lucky I didn't invest in these stocks. I would've lost a hundred yen. Ah, lucky me, these stocks are up."

\*slam\*

The three stop what they are doing and look at the newcomer.

Soun : "Welcome back, Ranma."

Nabiki : "Hi, Ranma-kun."

Genma (C) : "Hello, son."

Ranma ignores the three as she walks past them, heading straight towards the bathroom. Soun looks at Genma.

Soun : "Saotome-kun, your son seems very angry today."

Genma (C) : "Yes, Tendou-kun."

Soun : "I wonder. Why do these two always argue?"

Genma (C) : "You just asked Akane."

Soun : "Not Ranma. Not yet."

Genma (C) : "What about telling him about Shiyoru?"

Soun : "Ah, that...."

In the bathroom, Ranma has stripped down all the way to her singlet and boxers. Examining herself in the mirror, Ranma stares angrily at it. She bends over to look at it closer, examining her unmanly features.

Ranma (C) : "What do you think you're looking at, girl? I'm a man, hear that!? I'm not going to let a curse ruin my whole life, you hear!?"

Looking at the mirror while she speaks, she sees her red-headed reflection staring back, mouthing the same words. Ranma's angry demeanor breaks down and she sighs, removing the rest of her clothes.

Ranma (C) : "Who am I kidding? I'm going to be stuck like this until I find Nannichuan or die. Why did I have to be *\*this\*!*?"

She looks at her own body as she laments. A large chest dominates her view. She walks into the bathroom, eager to return to her original body.

It hasn't even been five minutes since Ranma took a soak in the hot water before someone is heard knocking at the bathroom door.

Ranma : "Who is it?"

Voice : "Ranma? I forgot to tell you. Someone's coming over soon."

Ranma : "Geez! Who's it this time?"

Voice : "The other one. There's also a gift for you. It's waiting in the living room."

Ranma : "Oh. Thanks, uncle Soun."

Outside the bathroom, Soun wonders how Ranma could recognize his voice even though he was holding his nose.

Back in the bathroom, Ranma looks at his hands, now rougher and more calloused than his female form's.

Ranma : "What is it about the curse I hate so much? Being a girl?"

Ranma thinks about all the times being a girl has helped.

Ranma : "But I wouldn't have had half the troubles I usually do if I hadn't been cursed!"

Ranma continues thinking about himself, and all the times how one situation was handled from two different perspectives.

Ranma : "Now that I think of it, I was thinking differently towards the same problem. But that's no reason to believe Niangnichuan is working through me! I was just under different levels of stress, that's all!"

He thinks about the activities he does in both forms.

Ranma : "....."

He remembers.... more fun as a girl. More fighting as a guy.

Ranma : "What am I thinking!?"

He quickly gets out of the bath and towels off. He slips on a pair of his normal black pants and a blue-gold chinese vest over his normal underwear.

Ranma : "Wonder what the gift is?"

Ranma steps out of the bathroom and walks into the living room. He spots the strange metal box. Soun, Genma (having just splashed a kettleful of hot water on himself,) Kasumi and Nabiki are sitting around it, and then Kasumi sees Ranma approaching.

Kasumi : "Ah, Ranma-kun. Here's the present."

Ranma walks over to an empty spot at the table and sits down. He looks at the box.

Soun : "It needs a thumbprint scan and a retina scan. Yours, I think."

Genma : "Open it son, and let's find out what's inside."

Nabiki : "I hope there're gold bars inside."

Ranma looks at them and they quieten down. He looks at the box, then at what is apparently the retina scanner. As he looks into it, there is a flash of light and Ranma reels back, blinking.

Kasumi : "Are you all right, Ranma-kun?"

Soun : "Ranma, are you all right?"

Ranma blinks a few more times to get the light out of his eyes before he replies.

Ranma : "Yeah."

Everyone looks relieved, then stares at Ranma. He looks around.

Ranma : "What?"

Then he remembers the fingerprint scanner. He places looks at the box warily, and puts his finger on the scanner. A slight hum is heard. A synthesized voice speaks.

Voice : "Thank you for using SecTech Security Devices. Have a nice day, and apologies for the retina scanner."

After ten seconds of boring, synthesized music, the side of the box facing Ranma opens with a clank.

\*clank\*

Ranma peers inside the box, everyone else peering at him. He reaches a hand in and pulls out..... some notebooks and a few pieces of paper. A note is attached to the largest notebook. Ranma reads it out loud.

*"Hello, Ranma.*

*Nice of you to open the box. I heard you were doing badly in school. Here are some of my notes. Good luck in your tests!*

*P.S I'm arriving this Saturday, and I'm looking forwards to a rematch with you!*

*Yours,  
Wong Shiyoru. "*

Kasumi : "Say Ranma, isn't Saturday tomorrow?"

Ranma : "Uh huh...."

Apparently, both Nabiki and Genma are disappointed at the contents of the box, being only notes for school subjects. However, Ranma takes one look at them and smiles.

Ranma : "Alright, I'm going up to study now! Later!"

Soun, Genma and the two Tendou sisters look on as Ranma bounds up the stairs, papers and books in hand.

Genma : "Strange, I've never known my son to be so enthusiastic about studying."

Soun : "Maybe he's changing, maybe not."

Upstairs, Ranma is looking at the notes in his hands. He walks to his room and dumps them besides the futon he sleeps on. Then walks out and down the corridor towards Akane's room. Seeing the door closed, Ranma knocks on it. A slight ruffling is heard, and Ranma waits patiently.

Akane : "Come in."

Ranma slowly turns the knob on the door and peeps in.

Ranma : "Akane, it's me."

Akane looks at the figure's head at the doorway. Ranma can't see her face from here, it's shrouded in a shadow. He asks quietly.

Ranma : "Can I come in?"

Akane nods. Ranma opens the door and walks in, then closes it behind him.

Akane : "What do you want, Ranma?"

Ranma looks a little flushed as he walks over to the curtains to open them. Akane turns her head away from the light that streams in. Ranma turns around.

Ranma : "Akane.... I... just wanted to....."

Ranma tries to find the right words in his head to apologize.

Ranma : "I... I...."

Akane : "What is it? Get on with it!"

Ranma keeps struggling for the phrase he should use to apologize. Finally, he just blurts out :

Ranma : "I'm sorry."

Akane gasps in surprise and turns her head towards Ranma. Ranma can see she's been crying, the red marks on her face not completely gone yet. He turns his head away and looks at the floor, twiddling his fingers.

Ranma : "Yeah, I know. I'm sorry I said all those nasty things. All right?"

Akane : "Thank you. Apology accepted."

In the ceiling, Soun is crying as he watches the scene from the attic, Genma besides him. (How in the world...?)  
(*Maybe Hammerspace interdimensional trans-portal travel? -Ed.*)

Soun : "I'm so happy, Saotome-kun! Our two children are getting along again!"

Genma : "Yeah, but can we leave now? I'm getting hungry."

Soun : "Food food food, is that ALL you can think about, Saotome-kun!?"

Back in Akane's room, Ranma is blushing from what he just said. Akane is still looking at him.

Akane : "Is there something else, Ranma?"

Ranma : "... er... well... actually, I just wanted to say you have very...err... well..."

Akane : "Are you afraid I'll club you?"

Ranma nods.

Akane : "Alright, I promise I won't hit you, nor insult you this time to whatever you're going to say ok?"

Ranma nods.

Akane : "Well?"

Ranma : "Oh.. er... <Argh! How am I going to tell her without sounding like a pervert!?!> I think you're very nice, Akane. I think you look nice. <There! All out!>"

Akane looks at Ranma incredulously, a slight smile on her face.

Akane : "Mean it?"

Ranma looks nervous. A bead of sweat rolls down his cheek and off his chin. But, he nods weakly. Akane smiles more brilliantly now.

Akane : "Thanks."

Up above, Soun is dancing with two open paper fans, hopping from foot to foot, silently cheering.

Down beneath, Ranma looks up.

Ranma : "Er... well, since there's nothing else... I think I'll be leaving."

Ranma walks towards the door, and is about to open it when Akane suddenly speaks.

Akane : "No, Ranma. Wait."

Ranma stops dead in his tracks. He turns around.

Ranma : "Yes, Akane?"

Akane : "Come sit down besides me."

Akane pats the bed besides her. Ranma swallows, and loosens his collar. More sweat forms on his face. There is a moment of silence between the two before Akane speaks, a slight hint of impatience in her voice.

Akane : "What are you waiting for?"

Ranma : "H..h... hai."

Ranma walks over to sit down besides Akane. Akane looks at Ranma's nervous face and laughs.

Akane : "No, I won't splash you with cold water. Neither will I smash your head or do anything bad."

Ranma : "Then what DO you want to do?"

Akane : "I want to talk with you."

Ranma : <Oh, that's easy enough.>

{Dilemma.}

Akane and Ranma are sitting together on Akane's bed in her room, the curtains opened to let the light in. Ranma is fidgeting uncomfortably on Akane's bed. She notices this and holds his hand, which makes him even more uncomfortable. Then he notices that her hand is very rough. He looks down and sees the bandage on it. He points

to it.

Ranma : "That hurt, Akane?"

Akane : "No, but thanks for your concern."

The two look at each other again, silent for a while. Then Akane speaks up.

Akane : "Ranma, what made you say what you said this morning?"

Ranma looks surprised at the question. He scratches his head and thinks about what happened that morning. He shrugs.

Ranma : "Dunno. Guess I was just angry."

Akane : "Why was that?"

Ranma : "Because I tried to help you and all you did was scold me?"

Akane thinks back to what happened that morning. She remembers that she did scold Ranma when he stomped on Happosai's head en route towards Akane. She thinks about the boastful claim she made then.

Akane : "I guess I shouldn't have scolded you. I really wouldn't have been able to stop Happosai."

Ranma : "Yeah, yeah. I guess we were both idiots. But I had to come in then, or...."

Akane : "Yeah. Next time though, at least come in as a girl. It's not as embarrassing."

The two look at the floor again, quiet as they wonder what to say.

Ranma : "Say, Shiyoru's coming tomorrow."

Akane : "Really? We haven't seen him and Porcelain in a long time."

Ranma : "Well.... since the last time....."

Akane : "Yeah."

The two think back to when Shiyoru was knocked down by a bus in his girl form, and lost his memory. Ranma shudders at the time when Shiyoru was in every sense a girl, even though he had the opportunity to change back into a guy voluntarily. Ranma thinks about the times HE was FORCED to be a girl. Once with that full-body-cat-tongue, and once with Herb and his chiisuiton.

Ranma : <But Herb didn't turn out all that bad. Not when we were beating his brother up.>

Images of Regal return to Ranma's mind, so many months ago. All the trouble he caused them all just because of some aspect of Jusenkyo which forced them there. Ranma is glad Regal turned out to be quite a decent guy at the end.

Ranma : "You know, Akane, Shiyoru's been having all the luck with his curse."

Akane : "Why's that?"

Ranma : "Because everytime he was forced to be a girl, it was only temporarily. He could change back anytime he wanted to."

Akane : "The time you made him run across the road and get hit by the bus when Nodoka visited?"

Ranma : "Yes, and I don't like to be reminded about that time. But something scares me."

Akane : "What's that?"

Ranma : "Shiyoru once said he promised to be the best son his father ever had. When he got the curse, he just broke down like a girl!"

Akane thinks back to the times Shiyoru visited them, remembering his story the first time he told it. She reasons that Shiyoru, like Ranma, hides his true face under a facade of cockiness and sureness, but is infinitely more apt to show his real feelings instead of store it into the bitterness it would become after too long.

Akane : "Well, Shiyoru's life has been quite sheltered.... his masters were strict, granted, but they never did things which would test his emotional resistance. That's why he acts this way, I think."

Ranma : "True.... what about Porcelain? She has always been strong.... especially when Shiyoru needed our help."

Akane : "Yeah, but I don't know much about her. Must've grown up in a tough place."

Ranma : "They almost seem like they were made for their curses.... unlike me."

Then she thinks about all of Ranma's other cursed friends, and Ranma's father, "Mr. Panda".

Akane : "Ranma, ever thought *why* you all were cursed?"

Ranma shakes his head.

Akane : "Ever notice all your other cursed friends most of the time?"

Ranma shakes his head.

Akane : "Well.... I thought about it. You ever see any one of them complain about their curses?"

Ranma shakes his head, seeing the point.

Ranma : "But I'm different! I won't just lie down and accept defeat, I'll fight till the end!"

Akane sighs as she sees what Ranma is pointing at.

Akane : "Ranma, fighting isn't everything. You'll probably hurt more people if you fought."

Ranma : "But that's the man's way, isn't it?"

Above, Genma is nodding in approval.

Akane : "It's a foolish way if it's the man's only way of solving things."

Ranma : "You seem to like fighting. You're always beating me up."

Akane : "That's because you make me angry."

Ranma : "Not all the time."

Akane : "No, but I still get angry. But everytime after I beat you up, I usually think to myself how stupid it was."

Ranma : "Usually?"

Akane : "Well, sometimes you can't seem to pick up the clue and we end up screaming at each other endlessly, if that's what you mean."

Ranma : "Hm."

Just then, Kasumi announces that dinner is ready. Ranma stands up and opens the door, letting Akane out first.

As soon as they leave the room, Soun and Genma open one wooden panel and drop into Akane's room, nodding and grinning.

Soun : "They're getting along! They're actually getting along!"

Genma : "All because of our hard work and efforts, no doubt!"

Soun : "Let's celebrate tonight, Saotome-kun!"

The two men walk out the door and down the staircase. In Nabiki's room, Nabiki presses the stop button on her tape recorder as she removes her ear from the drinking glass on the wall. She opens her bedroom door and walks down for dinner.

At the dinner table, Kasumi is busy serving the bowls of rice when Happosai returns. Soun and Genma look at him and all hopes of a celebration die as he hops over to his usual space and receives his own bowl of rice. Ranma eyes him with disdain, as does Akane. Happosai just eats without noticing them.

Ranma eyes Happosai warily as he eats his own dinner, watching for signs of perverseness that might be detrimental to his health. However, the dinner goes uninterrupted. As soon as Happosai puts down his bowl of rice though, he looks at Ranma and Akane, a perverse grin crossing his face. Akane raises an eyebrow while Ranma mentally prepares himself.

Ranma : "Come on, hentai! Get what's coming to you!"



Happosai : "Huh? Get what? Who said I wanted to fondle *you* tonight?"  
Everyone else : "...!?!?...."

Ranma is as shocked as the next person, and nearly falls over after hearing this. However, Happosai grins even more perversely as he grabs a cup of water.

Happosai : "I wanted to fondle your *girl* side!"

\*splash\*

Ranma (C) : "EEEEIIAAAHHH!! Get *OFF* me, you wrinkled *\*FREAK\**!"  
Happosai : "Ahh, so soft and warm. Just the way I love it."

Ranma, in front of everyone else, grabs Happosai and pulls him off her chest. Happosai looks sad.

Happosai : "What, you don't like my affection? Boo hoo hoo, I'm so sad!" \*sniff\*  
Ranma (C) : "Affection Akane's mallet! I'm not going to let you.... molest.... me like that again!"

With that, Ranma gives Happosai a good kick into the sky, through the roof. Soun calculates the damage to be minimal, and therefore repairable within the day. Happosai disappears in a star, Ranma-chan dusting her hands.

Ranma (C) : "That takes care of that. I'm going to find some hot water now."

Ranma turns around to leave for the kitchen.

"Iiiii'mmmmm baaaaaack!"

Ranma jerks as she feels two little hands on her buttocks. She turns her head around and spots Happosai, clinging onto her butt.

Happosai : "Nice and firm, just the way it should be."  
Ranma (C) : "IIIEEAAA! You dirty freak! I'm going to KILL you!"  
Happosai : "Catch me if you can! Haa haa!"

Ranma chases Happosai around the house as he runs, hops and skips, laughing and taunting Ranma all the way. Soun starts crying as he tallies up the cost of the repairs again. The chase goes around the room for a while before disappearing down the corridor.

Later that night, Ranma-chan, having been unable to find any hot water (The boiler in the house just got damaged by them, eliminating any chances of having a hot shower, the kettle having been destroyed when Ranma threw it at Happosai), lies on her futon besides the notes her friend sent to her. An arm across her forehead, Ranma thinks about the day's events.

Ranma (C) : <It's been months since I got the curse. How could the others get used to it!? I mean, it isn't them!>

Ranma thinks about when she was halfway through chasing Happosai, P-chan appeared at the doorway and Akane carried him up to her room. Ranma remembers giving the cute, black pig a dangerous glare before carrying on her chase with Happosai. She remembers the smug look on that pig's face.

Ranma (C) : <Even Ryoga seems to have gotten over his pig curse. Am I the only one left?>

She thinks about the time Nodoka discovered her curse.

Ranma (C) : <I did prove myself a man amongst men, didn't I? Even as a girl I acted manly.... Didn't I?>

She thinks about the times she's had to act as one to either fool Nodoka or some other person, like Ryoga.

Ranma (C) : <I hated every minute then. How do Shampoo and Mousse cope with their curses!?!>

She thinks about all the times the two used their cursed forms to their advantage.

Ranma (C) : <Sure, Mousse can fly, Shampoo can scare the hell out of me. But, I mean, isn't it horrible not to be able to go near cold water without fear of change?>

She thinks about the times she went to the beach.

Ranma (C) : <I didn't have any intention of swimming sometimes, but I still went as a girl, didn't I? I even enjoyed myself!>

Ranma shudders at the thought. Finally, she turns to look at the notes she placed besides her futon a few hours ago. She picks up the largest notebook and looks at it. "Sketch Book" it says. On its cover is a drawing of the couple in their uncursed forms, smiling. Besides it is a picture of their cursed form (Reading the previous two stories, you should realize Shiyoru got cursed by Niangnichuan, and Porcelain by Nannichuan.), smiling just as brilliantly. The moonlight shining on it is strong this night, adding a slight quality to the drawing.

Ranma (C) : <What's Porcelain so happy about? She's as cursed as I am.>

Ranma holds the sketchbook to her chest, sighing as she realizes that those signs of femininity are as unavoidable as water. She thinks about tonight's events.

Ranma (C) : <That old pervert Happosai even referred to me as two different people.... me and my girl side. Or should I say me and my male side now....>

Then she realizes she's said a word she's never used before that night.

Ranma (C) : <Molest....?>

However, sleep overtakes her before anything else happens and she falls asleep holding the book in her hand, dreaming.

*A path of light in the starry night. Ranma finds herself walking along the path, her step strangely springy. In her hands is the sketchbook she held before she fell asleep.*

Ranma (C) : <Where am I?>

*She keeps walking, seeing no end to the path. However, she notices there are doors along the path. Each door is equally white as the floor, but a differently coloured handle on each door marks them as unique. As she walks, she comes across the first of the many doors ahead of her. She looks at the handle. It is purple. She reaches a hand out to turn it.*

*The door opens silently as Ranma pushes, and peers inside. She sees a strange scene, strangely familiar in everyday life.*

*She sees before her another Ranma hugging a cat. A purple siamese cat with bells and locks of extra long fur. The scene changes to that of Shampoo in her human form chasing Ranma, and being splashed with water over and over again, changing back and forth from human to cat and back again. However, there is a sense of contentment, one that Ranma hasn't felt in a long time. She closes the door and turns around to see another door.*

Ranma (C) : <Is this a dream?>

*She examines the knob. This one is patterned. She opens the door and finds herself in the sky. Or looking at it. Mousse, as a duck, is quacking happily along as he flaps his wings, enjoying the aerial view despite his short-sightedness. Then, back on the ground, Ranma finds Mousse chasing Shampoo despite her reluctance. The same sense of comfort, of contentment. She closes the door and steps back onto the path, sketchbook still in hand.*

Ranma (C) : <What is this place? Why am I here?>

*Walking down the corridor seeking answers, Ranma-chan opens other doors and finds herself in the dreams of her other cursed friends. In all of them, she finds one thing. Contentment, a sense of Take Life As It Is. She keeps walking. Finally, she sees a door in front of her, marking the end of the path. Looking at the handle, she notices it is red. She looks at herself, and notices her shirt colour is red. So is her hair colour.*

*Ranma (C) : "Is this my dream?"*

*Her voice sounds strange in this place, echoing all over the place. It also sounds unbearably feminine, something that causes Ranma to shudder. She looks at the handle and tentatively reaches out to open the last door. Before her hand reaches it, another door appears. It has a green handle.*

*Ranma (C) : "Who wears green?"*

*For some reason, she feels the urge to look at the sketchbook. Flipping it open, she looks at the first picture on the paper. It is Shiyoru, gi taken off to completely reveal the green turtleneck underneath.*

*Ranma (C) : "Shiyoru?"*

*Both doors open. Ranma jumps back in fright, then looks at both of them. She knows she has to make a decision.*

*Ranma (C) : <Should I see my own dream.... or see the dream of a friend who has the same curse?>*

*The possibilities run through her head. In one side, she'll find out how her friend copes with such a problem. In the other, she'll know what her real self is like with the curse. Both doors are black voids to her now, and she has to walk through those voids to see beyond. She knows there is the likely chance of seeing and feeling the same things in her friend's dream as all the others she's seen so far.*

*Voice : "So, what will it be?"*

*Ranma recognizes the voice. It is her male half. She turns around and sees the male version of herself walk down the same path she took. He reaches her side and gestures to the two doors. Ranma-chan looks and shakes her head.*

*Ranma (C) : "I don't know."*

*The male Ranma slaps his forehead and sighs.*

*Ranma : "You girls are all alike. Always so unsure when it comes to decision making."*

*Ranma (C) : "Hey! Watch your mouth! I'm a guy! I'm you!"*

*Ranma : "Oh, really? Then why do you sound so.... feminine? You're my female side, for sure. Happosai said that much."*

*Ranma (C) : "I don't know! But I do you know you're me! I'm a guy by right!"*

*Ranma : "Hm, really. Then tell me this : What am I thinking of right now?"*

*Ranma-chan considers. She replies quickly.*

*Ranma (C) : "What am I doing here?"*

*The male Ranma sighs again.*

*Ranma : "Wrong, as expected. You see, we're not really the same."*

*Ranma (C) : "We are! I'm always the same in mind and soul, even if not in body!"*

*Ranma : "Really. Your soul is purely male?"*

*Ranma (C) : "Of course! I was raised to be a man amongst men! A man fights for his rights! A man must be strong and not be emotionally weak! He cannot be in front of others or he will be seen as a coward!"*

*The male Ranma laughs sardonically.*

*Ranma : "Haa haa haa! What a joke! A man amongst men! That was your father's horrible misconception! What gave him that idea, I will never know. But I do know this : Your father is DEAD wrong. Think about it. Now, which path do you choose?"*

*Ranma-chan turns her attention back to the doors, then back to her male self.*

*Ranma (C) : "I'm you. I would choose the door of my friend's mind."*

*Ranma : "I chose the door of my own mind. Face it, you're too afraid to find out what's wrong with yourself. You always have been. You always seek reassurance from others to reinforce your weak beliefs. You never once thought about trusting yourself, have you? You've never taken it upon yourself to accept the fact that you...."*

*Ranma-chan fears what she is about to hear. She covers her ears and screams to her male side.*

*Ranma (C) : "NO! Enough! I won't hear this!"*

*But his voice rings out, loud and clear in her ears.*

*Ranma : "But you will. You've always been afraid to accept the fact that if you accepted your curse, you would be degraded in your friend and family's eyes. A pervert, transvestite, all this and more. Isn't it so?"*

*Ranma (C) : "NO! NO! It isn't true! I was raised as a man amongst men! It isn't because I hate my curse....."*

"Ranma? Ranma? Are you alright?"

Ranma (C) : "No... isn't true...."

\*slap\*

"RANMA! Wake up!"

Ranma wakes up suddenly, eyes wide, taking deep breaths. She turns and sees Akane kneeling besides her, a concerned look on her face.

Akane : "Ranma, are you alright? You were screaming something. And you're covered in sweat."

Ranma (C) : ".... I was? What did I scream?"

Akane : "I don't know. It was just a scream."

Ranma blinks a few times to get the last of the sleep out of her eyes, and notices that it's morning. She takes another deep breath and looks around for the sketchbook.

Ranma (C) : "The sketch book! Where's the sketch book!?"

Akane : "Oh, you mean this?"

Akane holds up a book and passes it to Ranma. Ranma quickly flips the pages open and searches for the page she saw in her dream. She doesn't find it. All she finds are black and white pictures, and not even one with Shiyoru without the usual gi. Akane looks annoyed.

Akane : "Ranma, is the only thing you can do when you wake up is look at comics? At least tell me you're all right!"

Ranma puts the book down and blinks at Akane, then nods tiredly. Akane relaxes and stands up.

Akane : "Well then, good to know you're all right. Now, hurry up and get out of bed. Breakfast is waiting."

Ranma nods and gets off her futon, and as Akane notices Ranma's figure in the morning in her singlet and boxers, especially with the sweat-pressed shirt hugging her body, she feels a twinge of jealousy go through her. Ranma's figure is one of an extremely well-proportioned girl, with a full figure not athletic like Akane's and twice as sexy.

Akane lets it go at that, knowing that Ranma doesn't like to be teased about his curse, especially if he slept the whole night in his cursed form.

Akane : "Come on, Kasumi cooked your favorite. Bacon and eggs."  
Ranma (C) : "Wow!"

Ranma moves quickly as she hears her favorite breakfast being served, Akane following the best she can. Leaping down the staircase, Ranma manages to slap her father's furry head before he seizes her share of breakfast. Everybody else in the household is already there, from Happosai to Soun. Kasumi flashes Ranma a smile she sits down.

Kasumi : "Ara, ohayo, Ranma-kun."

But Ranma doesn't hear the greeting. She is staring at her father as she protects her food zealously.

Ranma (C) : "It's not nice to eat your son's breakfast."  
Genma (C) : "This is your punishment for waking up late, son!"  
Ranma (C) : "Put a sock in it, pops. Better yet, put Akane's cooking in it. More effective."

Ranma quickly devours her breakfast along with the rest of the family as soon as Akane finishes grinding Ranma's head with her elbow. Then Kasumi tells Ranma the good news.

Kasumi : "Ranma, we have running hot water again. We got the boiler fixed this morning."  
Ranma (C) : "Thanks, Kasumi. I was getting sick of this."

Ranma tugs at her singlet, emphasizing the point. (*Very well, I might add. -Ed.*)  
But as Ranma stands up to take a hot shower, Kasumi tugs at her wrist. She stops and looks at Kasumi. Everybody else just looks up from their plates.

Ranma (C) : "Yes?"  
Kasumi : "er... Ranma, not to be nosy or anything, but why did you scream? I was so worried."  
Ranma (C) : "Wha....?"  
Soun : "We could hear you scream from downstairs."  
Ranma (C) : "That bad?"  
Genma (C) : "Even I couldn't wake you up for morning training, son."  
Happosai : "Hee hee, what a beautiful feminine scream it was! Reminds me of when I go to school!"

Ranma glares at Happosai evilly, red-hot beams of energy seemingly piercing his wrinkled hide. Nabiki quickly interjects to stop a fight early in the morning.

Nabiki : "Heard your scream from my room, woke me up. And very little things can wake me up like that."  
Voice : "Hell, her scream would wake up the *dead* if there were any around!"

Everyone turns around to face the new voice that unexpectedly rang out amidst their conversation. The voice is unmistakably female, the face equally unmistakable. Ranma's face lights up at the cinnamon-bark brown haired, polished copper eyed girl standing a couple of inches short of two meters.

Ranma (C) : "Hey, Shiyoru! You're early!"

Shiyoru, in her cursed form of a girl, walks up to the front porch and sets her backpack down on the ground. Wearing the usual green (personally tailored) short-sleeved turtleneck sweater and white gi (sleeves cut short), cloth belt and black pants with sneakers (which is not her usual footwear) and a pair of long bracers on each arm, Shiyoru as a girl is still taller than Ranma even if Ranma tiptoed. (Which means she gets more stares, considering that she's got more leg than Ranma.) Happosai grins evilly as he sees her, his normal pervertedness returning.

Happosai : "Welcome back! Hee hee!"

Happosai quickly swallows his last piece of egg before leaping from the table to Shiyoru's chest, clutching tight.

Ranma looks shocked, but Shiyoru simply ignores Happosai, as she combs her slightly long hair, mussed from a night's sleep, in a tent and sleeping bag most likely.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ohayo, mina-san."

Soun, Akane, Kasumi and the rest are all staring at Shiyoru as she apparently ignores Happosai's groping, sweat forming on their brows. They return the greeting a little shakily.

All : "O..ohayo... Shiyoru-kun."

Happosai : "Gooooood morning, Shiyoru-chan!"

Happosai says from his position on her chest, clutching it tightly and groping around. Still Shiyoru ignores the old man as she steps in, holding her backpack in one hand. She sits down at the space which Happosai vacated, as Ranma joins the group. Shiyoru looks at the group and smiles.

Shiyoru (C) : "Why are all of you so quiet this morning? Cat got your tongue?"

Ranma points uncertainly at Happosai, still clinging onto her like a leech.

Ranma (C) : "er... don't you notice something out of place here, Shiyoru?"

She looks at Happosai. She shrugs.

Shiyoru : "At least he likes a good girl. No, it's less trouble to let him stay."

Ranma gasps, as do the rest of the group. Happosai chuckles.

Happosai : "Finally, a smart disciple amongst all the useless ones."

Shiyoru winks at Ranma as Happosai says this, lifting her hand over his head, and everyone else catches the gist. However, before they can implement their grab, slam and pummel routine, Happosai feels something strange. He hops off Shiyoru's chest and points at it.

Happosai : "Something's wrong here!"

Everyone looks.

{Surprise, surprise!}

Happosai is standing on the table where the rest of the occupants of the dojo are having their breakfast. He is still pointing at Shiyoru, their frequent guest (and largest contributor to their repair-cost coffers as well as bills). More precisely, he is pointing at her chest, which is every little bit as ample as Ranma's.

Happosai : "I don't normally feel this on you!"

Soun : "Feel what, master?"

Shiyoru looks disinterested at Happosai, locking fingers together and resting her elbows on the table, her chin on the fingers.

Shiyoru : "Don't normally feel what, ecchi?"

Kasumi : "Oh my, I hope it isn't something bad."

Happosai : "Nothing so light! Shiyoru, are you wearing.... a bra!? A sports one, by the feel. No brand."

Everyone falls over at the statement. Ranma is the first to get up, pointing at Shiyoru and stammering.

Ranma (C) : "...S...Sh...Shiyoru! What are you doing, wearing a b.br....*BRA* of all things!?"

As everyone else gets up from the floor, they all look at her as well, knowing this is not her usual style of dressing.

Like Ranma, Shiyoru would normally only wear one when forced to.... this is something different. Shiyoru looks at everyone around her, a little confused.

Shiyoru (C) : "Is something wrong?"

Everyone is still staring at her, disbelieving. Shiyoru scratches the back of head and nods.

Shiyoru (C) : "All right, I'm wearing a bra. So what?"

Ranma speaks in a most disbelieving voice.

Ranma (C) : "Shiyoru, tell me truthfully. Are you letting Jusenkyo get to your head?"

Shiyoru (C) : "No, why?"

Ranma (C) : "Then why are you wearing a BRA!?"

Shiyoru (C) : "More comfortable. Breasts don't hurt when I run."

Ranma (C) : "You're a GUY for goodness' sakes!"

Shiyoru (C) : "Doesn't mean because I'm one by right means I can't wear one when I'm a girl."

Ranma is too shocked for words. Everyone else is wondering what Shiyoru is thinking. Shiyoru just smiles and tries to lighten the mood.

Shiyoru (C) : "Come on, why the glum faces? The sun's shining, the wind's cool, and the birds are singing! Why spoil such beauty with these black faces? Oh, and as Happosai would say, the flowers are blooming....."

Happosai : "How true!"

Shiyoru grinds Happosai's head with a fist as Happosai attempts to glomp onto her chest again.

Shiyoru (C) : "....And besides, I haven't talked to you guys in a *long* time."

This works, as everyone starts to perk up a little. They begin chatting with Shiyoru as they would normally, asking her about her travels and such, forgetting Happosai's exclamation. The only person to not participate in the conversation is Ranma, who is still too shocked for words at this strange act of her friend. Instead, after about ten minutes of chatter, she gets up and leaves. At first, Shiyoru is too caught up with the questions to notice, but as soon as she does, her cheery face changes into one of concern. She holds up a hand to silence everyone, and looks around.

Shiyoru : "Guys? Where's Ranma?"

Everyone stops talking and looks around for Ranma. They don't see him. Shiyoru stands up, pulling Happosai off her buttocks as she does so, and tosses him westwards, through the same hole Ranma did the previous night, several gigantic Kajishoten Dans (Huge chi fireballs Shiyoru learned from Herb and modified to his own requirements.) trailing, each one burning Happosai and helping him along towards the Western Heavens.

Soun : "Shiyoru's right, where IS Ranma?"

Everyone starts calling out for Ranma, but he/she doesn't appear. Shiyoru looks worried. She looks to the group at the table.

Shiyoru : "All right, I think I'll go look for him. Would you mind helping me take my pack into my usual room please, Akane-chan?"

Akane : "Sure."

Akane picks up Shiyoru's heavy bag with a grunt and carries it to Shiyoru's usual guest room. Everyone else watches as Shiyoru disappears into the house, looking for Ranma. Soun and the rest watch as she leaves.

Soun : "Wait a minute, where's his girlfriend?"

{Shiyoru's recipe : Chicken soup for the soul.}

On the roof of the Dojo, Ranma is lying down besides a kettle. He is staring at the sky as a cool wind blows across the roof, ruffling his clothes and hair.

Ranma : <What is wrong with you, Shiyoru!?!>

Voice : "Hey, Ranma? You alright?"

Ranma bends his head back and sees Shiyoru sitting on the ridge at the apex of the slanted roof, looking at him. Her hair and cloth belt flutter a little in the breeze, her face obscured in a shadow.

Ranma : "Huh? Yeah."

Shiyoru walks over and lies down besides him, hands behind her head, resting.

Shiyoru (C) : "Why'd you walk off so suddenly?"

Ranma : "... You aren't the Shiyoru I know."

Shiyoru (C) : "Why's that? Because I'm wearing a bra?"

Ranma : ".....Yes."

Shiyoru looks at Ranma sternly, then sighs.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, you've got to stop thinking about others in your own terms. I'm not you. I've got the same curse, granted, but I'm not you. I don't think like you. I think of myself as myself, nevermind the sex."

Ranma : "But you once said..."

Shiyoru (C) : "Yes, and that means being myself. I don't care about the curse, and my father supports my idea to just be."

Ranma sighs as he hears this, something he would've tried once.... had it not been for his father's ingrained teachings of being a "man amongst men".

Ranma : "Have you given up hope on finding a cure then?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Sometimes, yes. But.... I don't know why, I'm always finding myself in Jusenkyo.... yet I can't bring myself to jump into Nannichuan. I just don't know why. But I wouldn't call it giving up. More like.... acceptance."

Ranma nearly sits up yelling at Shiyoru's statement to actually NOT jump into Nannichuan to cure himself, but stops himself. Instead, the two keep looking at the sky for a while before Shiyoru continues, knowing what his friend is thinking.

Shiyoru (C) : "Yes, sometimes, I do like being a girl. I'm not a pervert though. Besides, travelling as much as I do, carrying an umbrella just makes things complicated. I'd rather get wet."

Ranma : "Ryoga travels a lot. He uses an umbrella."

Shiyoru (C) : "He's good at fighting with an umbrella. I'm not."

Ranma : "No, granted, but he does do a good job of keeping himself dry even fighting in the rain."

Shiyoru (C) : "Besides, I like the feel of cold water. It's cool, comforting. I don't like avoiding something I like."

Ranma thinks about himself after the curse, avoiding cold water like a cat. Cats being what he fears most. He thinks about the times when the inviting coolness of cold water was like a magnet, yet he could not... would not touch it. Then he thinks about the girl lying down besides him, also by right a boy, also by right bound by a promise. Yet, he seems so much more.... carefree, fearless.

Shiyoru (C) : "I know how you feel when it came to avoiding water. At least for a while."

Ranma : "What made you change.... so much?"

Shiyoru (C) : "When I stopped thinking of water as a medium of change and more of just what it used to be in my eyes. Just water, fun to play in, good to drink, essential to bathe in."

Ranma : "And also easy to get cursed by."



Shiyoru looks irritated at Ranma as she turns her head.

Shiyoru (C) : "There you go again, blabbering about how horrible water is. You're thinking too much about Jusenyko as a bad thing. You gotta change your thinking."

Ranma nods emphatically. He sighs.

Ranma : "No, I won't give up my fight to regain my manhood."

Shiyoru (C) : "Was there even a battle to begin with?"

Ranma thinks. His deep training takes over.

Ranma : "There has always been one."

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, tell me frankly. What do you feel when you hold you hand out like this...."

Ranma watches as Shiyoru sticks her arm into the sky, seemingly reaching out to catch a wandering cloud. She continues.

Shiyoru (C) : "....And clench your fist?"

Ranma imitates Shiyoru, clenching his fist. He tries to concentrate on his feelings then.

Ranma : "I feel like I need to hit something.... anger.... irritation. Frustration sometimes. That's what I feel."

Shiyoru (C) : "Really? Even as a girl or are you talking as a man?"

Ranma : "Yes... mostly as a man. As a girl.... I get the same feelings... only worse."

Shiyoru puts her arm down and Ranma follows, wondering what this is all about.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma.... you want to know what *I* feel when *I* clench my fist?"

Ranma nods. Shiyoru continues.

Shiyoru (C) : "I see a fist. I see *MY* fist. Boy *or* girl, I see a fist that belongs to *me*. Doesn't matter if it's smooth and silky or slightly roughened, it's my hand. I *feel* proud that it's my hand. Ranma, I want you to think this way. Try again and tell me what you feel."

Ranma tries again, this time aiming for a bigger cloud than the last one. He clenches his fist and feels the same negative feelings as before, the only times he ever clenched his fist being when he wanted to fight. But he forces them down, following Shiyoru's advice. He concentrates on his own hand, and before his very eyes, he sees it changing, skin smoothening, shrinking into his girl form's. He stares, and flexes what appears to be his female hand. He feels it. It feels like his female hand, yet the feel is unfamiliar to his male body. Then he blinks and the female hand is replaced by the male one once more. He blinks a few more times in disbelief.

Shiyoru (C) : "See something different, Ranma?"

Ranma : "I.... do... I see my hand, only it's not my hand. It's.... my female side. *This is my* hand. That other one... is not mine. It's my cursed form."

Shiyoru sighs sadly, sounding very feminine much to Ranma's disgust.

Shiyoru (C) : "You see, Ranma? Your mind a powerful tool. The problem is, if someone taints it, it stays tainted until you realize what is wrong and clean it. Think about it. It sure helped me."

Ranma : <Yes.... but in what way?>

Shiyoru sits up, and stretches, her bosom stretching the fabric of her sweater and gi. Ranma sees this and blushes a little, realizing he can see quite a bit of detail. Shiyoru looks at Ranma's flushed face and other not-too-obvious signs.

Shiyoru (C) : "Come on, if I make you *that* uncomfortable, I'll get changed. Meet me at the dojo?"

Ranma nods, and Shiyoru smiles sweetly, then jumps off the top of the roof. Ranma watches as she walks into the house to get changed.

Ranma : <Why am I unable to think straight nowadays?>

He leaps down to head towards the dojo.

In her room, Shiyoru nods in appreciation of Akane's help as she walks out Shiyoru's temporary quarters, sweat on her brow.

Shiyoru (C) : "Thanks, Akane. Appreciate it."

Akane : "My pleasure. Oh, by the way, where's Porcelain?"

Shiyoru (C) : "She caught a cold. She's resting at my ex-master's hut in China."

Akane : "Oh, the one overlooking Jusenkyo?"

Shiyoru (C) : "That one."

Akane nods, and leaves. Shiyoru closes the door behind Akane and looks at herself.

Shiyoru (C) : "Indeed, what is so bad about the curse, Ranma? It's more like a good thing."

Somewhere in China, in some dark, cavernous chamber, a glowing black and white orb glows slightly brighter.

Essence : "*Interesting, Shiyoru is indeed a prime example.*"

Back in Shiyoru's room, Shiyoru has stripped down to her pants, knowing she just needs to remove the bra and is a splash away from changing back into a guy. She looks around and finds what she wants. A full-body mirror. She drags it in front of her futon and looks into it.

Shiyoru (C) : "I don't see what Ranma has to be upset about."

Looking at herself, she puts a hand over her ribs where she was cut once due to pure carelessness on her part when she was attacked by muggers before the curse. A long, thin white line runs from the base of her right breast to the side of the ribs, ending just above the waist. She sighs. Then pulls the slightly elastic bra over her head, exposing her chest. She admires herself in the mirror a while longer, then pulls out a thermos and douses herself.

Shiyoru : "Ready or not, Ranma, here I come."

==-==-==

Later that morning, a sweaty Shiyoru and Ranma come out of the dojo laughing. They are joking about the moves they pulled and the stunts traded.

Ranma : "I thought for a moment you slipped!"

Shiyoru : "And you actually *fell* for it!"

Ranma : "Ah, but I managed to avoid it at the last moment!"

Shiyoru : "Granted, but...."

In the living room, Soun and Genma watch as the two walk out of the dojo down the corridor towards them. Akane is sipping some tea while poring over her school notes, reading up the next week's chemistry test. She spots Ranma and Shiyoru, and waves to them. They spot her, and walk over to her, sitting down besides her.

Shiyoru : "Yeah, Akane-chan?"

Akane : "Shiyoru, you know those notes you sent to Ranma?"

Shiyoru : "Oh yeah, those. Why?"

Akane : "Mind tutoring Ranma with them? He's been failing again."

Shiyoru gives Ranma a stern look. Ranma grins sheepishly and scratches his head.

Shiyoru : "Really, Ranma! I gave you a perfectly nice school diary to keep track of things! What happened to it?"  
Ranma : "Ah... I kind of lost it."

Shiyoru slaps his forehead and looks up towards heaven, seeking an answer. Getting none, he just looks back to Ranma.

Shiyoru : "Why not get Akane to tutor you?"  
Ranma/Akane : "Because that....."

Shiyoru laughs as the two look at each other after starting with the same words and knowing what they'll say after that. They cross arms and look away from each other.

Ranma : "Tomboy."  
Akane : "Pervert."  
Ranma : "Uncute."  
Akane : "Jerk."  
Shiyoru : "Hey, guys? Alright, alright. Cut it out. No need for such a convincing \*show\*!" \*grin\*

Shiyoru can't help but grin like a maniac at their funny show, even though he knows their wedding was ruined but they started getting along better. The two turn back to look at him. Akane and Shiyoru look at Ranma. He looks back at them and sighs, nodding with resignation written all over his face.

Ranma : "Oh, all right. I'll take tuition from you two if you really want to."

Akane and Shiyoru do a high five. Ranma looks at Akane's notes and remembers there's a chemistry test on Monday.

Ranma : "Sheesh! I forgot about the test!"

Shiyoru looks at Ranma incredulously. Kasumi comes over and serves Shiyoru and Ranma a cup of tea each.

Shiyoru : "Arigato, Kasumi-chan. See, Ranma? You don't keep track of your things, now you're forgetting things!  
Lesson no. 1...."

Ranma : "Yeah, yeah, always keep track of yourself."

Shiyoru : "So?"

Ranma : "Alright, I get your point. I'll get another diary."

Shiyoru smiles and nods in approval. Then Kasumi returns with Ranma's and Shiyoru's notes, one stack noticeably thinner than the other.

Kasumi : "Thought you two might need this."

Ranma & Shiyoru : "Thanks, Kasumi."

Akane looks at the notes Ranma actually took down during lessons. Outside of being messy, there are a few doodles on each sheet, and the information isn't very precise. Shiyoru notes this as well.

Shiyoru : "Tsk tsk, Ranma. Your notes are *messy*!"

Ranma : "You sound like Hinako."

Shiyoru : "Then we think alike when it comes to your studies. Come on, let's start."

With some complaints from Ranma, the three get into a sort of study group. P-Chan comes over to join Akane in their studies somewhere along the way, although Shiyoru gives Ranma and P-Chan a glare telling them to mind their own businesses and not bother the other party. By the time it is lunch, Ranma realizes he's learned things he never even knew existed. The feeling is kind of satisfying, if you get what I mean.

Ranma : "Wow, I never knew such things existed."

Shiyoru : "Now you do. Don't forget them."

Ranma : "Hey, I'm Saotome Ranma, 2nd Generation of the Saotome Anything-goes-martial-arts school! I *\*never\** forget!"

Shiyoru : "Alright, we covered this in chapter 12. What're the name of the chemical compounds you get when you get when you mix Copper oxide and Sulphuric acid together?"

Ranma : "Er.... Copper acid and Sulphuric oxide?"

Shiyoru sighs and shakes his head. Akane just giggles. Ranma turns red at the cheeks. (*Blushing would be more precise? Nah, not manly. -Ed.*)

Shiyoru : "Copper Sulphate and water! CuSO<sub>4</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O! Sheesh, and you say you never forget!"

Kasumi : "Maybe some lunch would help Ranma-kun let out stress and concentrate better on his lessons?"

Kasumi says this as she appears from the kitchen with a plate of something steaming and great-smelling. The three teenagers quickly clear their stuff from the table and Kasumi sets down the plate on the table. She smiles at the three.

Kasumi : "Thank you. Oh, Akane, would you mind helping me get the rice cooker from the kitchen please?"

Akane : "Sure thing, sis."

Lunch goes off without a hitch.

Sometime later that afternoon, the study group has finished its tuition, a very much enlightened Ranma reciting certain random chemical formulas and describing what equipment to use for what experiments. Shiyoru and Akane are both nodding as he rattles off the correct formulas and sigh when he makes a *\*very\** stupid mistake. But all in all, there has only been one *\*very\** stupid mistake amongst the correct answers. Somehow, Ranma can't get the Copper Sulphate and Water part.

Shiyoru : "Alright, that's all for today. I'm pooped!"

Ranma : "Me too."

Akane : "Me three."

The three look at each other, minds blank.

Ranma : "Now what do we do?"

Akane takes a sniff in the air.

Akane : "What's that smell?"

Ranma and Shiyoru sniff. They sniff at their clothes.

Ranma & Shiyoru : "Us."

They get up and leave for the bathroom.

*\*riiiiing\* \*riiiiing\**

The phone rings the second the two are out of earshot. Akane picks up the phone. She talks to the person on the other side for a while, then nods and puts the phone down.

Soun, playing a game of Go with Genma asks without looking up.

Soun : "Who was that?"

Akane : "Oh, just a friend. She asked me if me and anybody else wanted to go out with them shopping today."

Soun : "Oh, that's nice."

In the bathroom, Ranma and Shiyoru are sitting in the same hot tub, towels on their heads.

They are just watching the steam rising from the tub, wondering what to say to each other. Ranma's never really taken a bath with Shiyoru before in the same tub, so as he does so, he notices something running down Shiyoru's

body. He points to it.

Ranma : "Was that the knife injury you got before you got cursed?"

Shiyoru unconsciously touches the scar from his chest to the ribs. He nods

Shiyoru : "Got careless then."

Ranma : "You got the curse that way, didn't you?"

Shiyoru : "Yes. But it wasn't fair, Mousse sent 1049 projectiles at me for goodness' sakes!"

Ranma : "Hm..."

Shiyoru : "Can we talk about something else?"

The two think. Ranma looks at the water he's sitting in. He dips a finger in, swirling it.

Ranma : "Not as good as a hot spring, but it'll do."

Shiyoru : "You're lucky. I had to bathe in hot springs half the time I was out travelling."

Ranma : "What's so bad about that?"

Shiyoru : "Considering you're either in the snow wet, or the fact that it rains the second you get out of the bath, coupled with other factors, you're lucky you don't have to endure the elements in your bathroom."

Ranma : "Not very good places to take baths in, eh?"

Shiyoru : "You tell me. Besides, hot springs lose their charm after a while."

Just then, Ranma remembers their talk on the roof.

Ranma : "Shiyoru, you remember this morning?"

Shiyoru : "Yeah? What about it?"

Ranma : "You said... you liked being a girl?"

Shiyoru : "Not exactly like, but more of a carefree attitude to it."

Ranma : "Why?"

Shiyoru : "Can't beat 'em, join 'em. You won't believe the weather in some places. The second you step out of a hot bath, the air freezes it. Besides, it's not like anybody makes fun of me. I ignore those who do."

Ranma : "Don't they?"

Ranma thinks about all the times HE went to school as a girl, and people started commenting.

Ranma : "You've got all the luck, you know that, Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru : "Why's that?"

Ranma : "Nobody makes fun of you when you go to school as a girl, even in a dress!"

Shiyoru : "That's because I never complain about being a boy or a girl in school. I act normally either way, so I'm sure people won't find anything strange about me either form."

Shiyoru sees where this is headed.

Shiyoru : "Oh.... I know. You want to know how to not be made fun of as a girl in school?"

Ranma nods, holding the towel on his head.

Shiyoru : "Well, if you use my philosophy, they won't. Take it as it is, just be yourself.... literally."

Ranma : <Being a girl when you're a girl, a guy when you're a guy?> "Thanks, I'll remember it."

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

Voice : "Ranma? Shiyoru?"

Both : "Yeah?"

Voice : "My friend just called and asked if you two wanted to come with us shopping."

Both : "Shopping?"

Shiyoru looks at Ranma, wondering how Akane's friend would've known about him being here. Akane continues.

Voice : "Yeah. She said meet her and the others at three later at the ice cream parlour. Ranma, please don't ruin my day, alright?"

Ranma : "Sure thing, Akane-chan." <mmmm.... Ice cream!>

Outside, Akane blushes at the honorific. Then she shouts into the bathroom.

Akane : "Be ready in twenty minutes!"

Voices : "All right, all right, we know!"

Back in the bathtub, Shiyoru is getting out of the tub.

Shiyoru : "Hey, Ranma. Which form should I go in?"

Ranma : "A guy."

Shiyoru nods. Then suddenly remembers something.

Shiyoru : "Oh damn, I forgot! All my guy clothes have been soiled! I wonder how the soil got into the bag though.... it was supposed to be in the tent, not out in the rain that night."

Shiyoru shrugs. Getting out of the tub, he grabs the shower head and turns it on to 'cold '. Ranma watches as he changes, Shiyoru's back to him, secretly envious that Shiyoru has one and a half times as much leg as he does in girl form. But he quickly forces the thought out of his head.

Shiyoru (C) : "What are you staring at?"

Ranma realizes that even though he forced the thought out of his mind, he's been staring at Shiyoru's legs. He turns a furious red and splutters.

Ranma : "O..a...oh, er...ah... sorry!"

He quickly turns away, face as red as a cooked lobster. (*Uncooked lobsters aren't very red, ne? -Ed.*)

Shiyoru giggles, and walks over to squat behind Ranma, elbows resting on his shoulders.

Shiyoru (C) : "No need to say sorry, it's all right! Besides, I know you've seen enough of yourself not to be a BIG pervert, ne?"

Ranma nods slowly, face turning even redder feeling Shiyoru's chest poke at his back. He shifts uncomfortably in the tub before the feeling suddenly disappears, and as he turns around, Shiyoru is already wrapping a towel around herself.

Shiyoru (C) : "One more thing. Remind me to ask Kasumi to wash my clothes later, alright? Thanks."

Walking out the doorway with only a towel around herself, Shiyoru heads for her room. Ranma looks at the clothing rack where they keep their spare clothes, wondering why Shiyoru didn't get her own from the rack.

Ranma : <I forgot. Shiyoru isn't a permanent resident here. He doesn't HAVE any spare clothes on the rack.>

Ranma himself gets out of the bath and dries off, then dresses, wondering why he feels so obligated to follow Akane today. Heck, how did she know he wanted to go!?

In her room, Shiyoru shuts the door behind her and starts rummaging through her backpack. She pulls out some of the items blocking her way, taking inventory as she goes.

Shiyoru (C) : "Statue of Mario©.... towels..... soap..... ah, underwear, need these..... jar of formaldehyde with dead frog in it..... ah hah, clothes."

Stuffing the unnecessary things in her backpack to one corner of the room, Shiyoru takes what she needs out and

neatly rearranges the rest of her clothes back into her pack. Then she takes out plastic bags that have the word "wash" written on them, looking at the literally soiled clothes inside.

Shiyoru (C) : <Still don't understand how these could get dirty.>

She quickly dresses, looking at the small pile of (all sports) bras on the floor. She picks the plain white sports one and puts it on, stuffing the rest of them into the middle of her backpack where Happosai can't get them and would be a fool to try to. She pulls on a pair of panties while she's at it and looks at her "wardrobe", a small selection of clothes on the futon.

Shiyoru (C) : <Ah, anyone'll do.>

She picks out a loose, long sleeved collarless shirt and a pair of black jeans, with matching belt. Looking at her worn sneakers, Shiyoru takes out the other pair of brand new sneakers and holds on to those, putting on her socks. She looks in another portion of her backpack and finds a few trinkets. A pair of clip-on earrings, a silver necklace, some make up and perfume. She puts those on, and notices the improvement. She smiles at herself.

Shiyoru : <Wonder what Ranma'll say?>

Putting everything else back in its place, Shiyoru tucks in her shirt, opens the door and steps out, nearly bumping into Ranma. Ranma stares. And stares. AND stares. Shiyoru is beginning to get a little annoyed, even though she enjoys the attention.

Shiyoru (C) : "Now what?"

Ranma : ".....Nice clothes."

Shiyoru (C) : "Thank you. Am I bothering you again?"

Ranma : "Er.... perfume and make up?"

Shiyoru (C) : "What, I can't look and smell good when I'm a girl?"

Ranma : "No, but.... Oh, forget it. You wanted me to remind you about your clothes?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Oh, thanks! Have them here."

Shiyoru holds one hand up and shows Ranma the plastic bag. Ranma notes that Shiyoru wasn't kidding when she said they were soiled. He can see a blade of grass in the plastic bag, as well as an earthworm crawling on what appears to be underwear. They keep walking down the corridor to the living room where Akane is dressed and waiting. She looks up, and sees the two friends waiting. Shiyoru is passing the plastic bag to Kasumi, who mutters an "oh my" to herself as she looks at the mess inside the bag.

Akane : "Ne, let's go."

Ranma is still wondering why he feels that he has to go out with Akane today, and passes it off as boredom. Soun bids them a safe journey as they leave.

Outside the gates of the dojo, Akane leads the way to the ice cream parlour, first meeting place of Shampoo and Ranma. (In the anime anyway.) They walk there, since the distance isn't very long. As they walk, Shiyoru comes up to Akane's side and taps her shoulder. She turns to look at the girl who is taller than her by an entire head. And about as beautiful, made even more so now, Akane notices with more than a healthy dose of jealousy.

Akane : "Yes, Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Akane, is it me or does Ranma and your family seem a little unnerved by the fact that I actually wore a bra to your house?"

Akane thinks. She realizes she was as surprised as the next person when Happosai made the announcement. She nods.

Akane : "Er.... gomen, but we were all a little unnerved I guess."

Shiyoru : "No need to apologise, Akane. But let me think this straight. You all thought of me as Ranma, the same man amongst men mentality, right?"

Akane thinks about it, and realizes Shiyoru has a point. She looks surprised at this.

Akane : "Why.... yes! We were!"

Shiyoru : "I knew it. Why's that?"

Akane : "Guess we've been listening to Ranma complain about his curse too much."

Shiyoru : "Tell me something truthfully, Akane. Do you mind Ranma's curse?"

Akane gives this some thought as they near the parlour. She arrives at a decision.

Akane : "Not really."

Shiyoru : "Does your family?"

Akane : "Not really, as far as I can tell."

Shiyoru : "Would you like to help me on this? I want Ranma to accept his curse, if nothing else, as part of life. I'm beginning to get sick of him commenting on me all the time. Besides, it'll help break down his obnoxious attitude, if my guess is correct."

Akane ponders this. She nods in agreement.

Akane : "Sometimes I wish I could do that myself... oh, I meant get Ranma to accept his curse, not that!"

Shiyoru : "We'll talk later. There's the parlour."

In front of them, indicated by a plastic sundae cup, is the ice cream parlour. Ranma, walking behind the two girls, sees it and runs straight towards the shop, thoughts on ice cream and a huge monster-sized banana split with extra fudge and toppings. Shiyoru looks at Ranma as he taps his foot impatiently waiting for them and stifles a laugh.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma loves ice cream that much?"

Akane : "Unfortunately, he loves anything that much. Ice cream even more."

Does he? Of course. The moment the two reach the entrance, Ranma rushes in and looks for an empty seat, wallet out and counting his ice-cream budget. Akane sees that her friend isn't there yet, and that there's ten minutes until three. She finds an empty seat right besides the entrance and sits. Shiyoru sits besides her, Ranma opposite her. When the waitress arrives with some cups of ice water (free, of course), Ranma places an order for the largest ice cream he can afford. Akane and Shiyoru both order a standard sundae. The moment the waitress leaves, Ranma douses himself with some of the cold water.

Ranma (C) : "No sense in fattening my male side."

Shiyoru looks at Ranma in disbelief, scratching her neck. The extra long sleeve tickles the base of her neck as the widened end hangs loose.

Shiyoru (C) : <Doesn't he know that whatever happens to one side is reflected on the other? Another obstacle to clear.>

Their orders arrive, although the poor waitress looks around in vain for the pigtailed boy who ordered the monster of a banana split with extra everything. Ranma-chan nods at her.

Ranma (C) : "He went to the toilet for a while."

The waitress puts their orders down and leaves them a bill which can be added to if further orders are made. Ranma immediately sets to work on her ice cream as Shiyoru watches, poking at her own ice cream, sleeves folded up to prevent staining.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, careful. You might choke."

Akane taps Shiyoru on the shoulder.

Akane : (Whispering into Shiyoru's ear) "You really think so? Have you ever seen her choke?"



Shiyoru thinks.

Shiyoru (C) & Akane : "Naah."

As soon as Ranma finishes her ice cream, she calls for another, which Shiyoru pays for. Just as Akane's friend arrives, Ranma has finished her third ice cream, Shiyoru her second, and Akane her first and only one. Akane's friend, Yoi, the one in the locker room earlier in the story (and in another story) walks over and sits down besides Ranma, whose mouth is surrounded by ice cream. Shiyoru sighs.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, I think you should watch your eating habits in front of others."

Ranma looks up, and Shiyoru reaches over with a serviette to wipe her mouth. Ranma takes the serviette herself and gently pushes Shiyoru's hand away.

Ranma (C) : "Thanks, but I can wipe my own mouth."

Shiyoru shrugs. Ranma licks the last of the ice cream off the plate, then calls for a cup of hot water and wipes her own mouth, using the condensation on the plate to assist in cleaning the ice cream off. The waitress arrives with the request and looks around for the guy who ordered his ice cream and had it devoured by this red-head. But she thinks to herself that they're paying customers, so it doesn't matter. Ranma douses herself as soon as the waitress turns around, and Akane looks to Yoi.

Akane : "So, where are we going today?"

Yoi : "We'll be going to meet some other friends, then it's off to Takashimaya. Heard there's an anime convention there. We're looking for some Sailormoon stuff."

Ranma : (Monotone) "Whoppee."

Akane and Shiyoru give Ranma a dirty glare, which he obviously doesn't notice. Yoi ignores the comment and stands.

Yoi : "Come on. Let's go."

They get up, and walk over to the cashier to pay for everything. Once they're done, they leave. Outside the shop, Akane nearly kicks over a small, black object.

Akane : "P-chan! How'd you get here!?"

P-Chan : "Pwork! Quee quee!"

Ranma : "Hi, pork-boy."

Akane : "Ranma! Don't insult P-chan!"

With that, Akane turns around and follows Yoi, P-chan pressed firmly against her chest. Ranma snorts, then follows, Shiyoru besides him. She notices a very dark face she normally associates with Ryoga.

Shiyoru (C) : "Why the glum face, Ranma? I always thought glumness was for Ryoga?"

Ranma turns his head and looks at Shiyoru.

Ranma : "Yeah, well....."

Ranma smiles a little. The smile is infectious.

Ranma : "I guess it's all right to tell you. I still can't believe in the month you've been gone, you've changed so much. I still remember the time you were almost like me. You even ate like me. Now you've cut down. You hated your curse, just like me. Hell, you're even wearing *MAKEUP* of all things! What happened?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Didn't I tell you already? Oh, no, that was why I wore a bra.... You really want to know?"

Ranma nods. Shiyoru scratches her head, making sure her angle-cut hair is neat.

Shiyoru (C) : "Porcelain."

Ranma : "Huh? I don't get it."

Shiyoru (C) : "Porcelain kind of got sick of my disgusting habits such as cramming my face and being so cynical over my curse. She also got sick of me embarrassing her in front of others when we changed roles, due to the weather or otherwise."

Ranma : "And?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Well.... she kind of told me off, got angry and upset. I guess I allowed myself to change for her sake. She noticed my efforts... helped me. Not like I objected. I learned that denying what you quite obviously had was a big detriment to others.... and besides, since I've already changed, why not do some personal grooming while I'm at it?"

Ranma : "And?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Here I am, the slightly more feminine as a girl but just as I am otherwise Shiyoru. I'm still here."

Ranma looks at Shiyoru and into her eyes, as carefree as the day they first met, even more so now that the worst of her pains has been solved and wonders if anything about her has truly changed.

Nothing.

The eyes reveal nothing about a Shiyoru who has an ounce of hurt in her heart. There is only peace and happiness.

Ranma : <But that's not exactly the man's way to accept things, is it? Did you lose your fight to get cured?>

They reach the bus stop, where some of Akane's classmates cum friends are waiting. They wave and shout.

Akane and the group reach the bus stop to wait for the bus to arrive. While they do so, Akane introduces Shiyoru to some of her other friends who haven't met her before.

Akane : "Girls, meet Shiyoru. Shiyoru, this is Atsuka and Minako."

Akane watches as Shiyoru shakes their hands and smiles pleasantly.

Shiyoru (C) : "Hi, guys."

Atsuka & Minako : "Hi, Shiyoru."

Akane : "Oh, do you all know Shiyoru's like Ranma? Same curse."

They nearly faint, fingers frozen into the oyakusoku pozu (index finger, thumb and pinky extended, middle and ring finger tucked in) when they hear this. Shiyoru looks at them embarrassedly, blushing and scratching her neck.

Shiyoru (C) : "What did I do this time?"

Akane looks at Shiyoru. She notes the faint smell of perfume and the slight makeup, remembering her jealousy of her good looks made better by the enhancements. She remembers what Ranma is like as a girl and wonders what SHE would be like wearing make up and perfume.

Akane : "Nothing. They're just too used to Ranma's attitude to the curse to see you act like this, wearing all these. They're his classmates... they came to Tokyo a day after your last visit."

Shiyoru (C) : "Really? Am I acting?"

Shiyoru looks at them questioningly, Ranma staring. Just then, the feeder bus comes up, an advertisement of Takashimaya painted on its body.

Akane : "Bus is here. Let's go."

They board the bus, which is somewhat crowded since everyone's going to the anime convention. They manage to find empty seats (which some "courteous" guys made) and sit down, Akane and Yoi in one, Minako and Atsuka in another. Shiyoru takes a seat besides Ranma, looking out the window. He turns and looks at Shiyoru as the bus starts up again. She looks at Ranma as well.

Ranma : "Shiyoru, I just thought it over."

Shiyoru (C) : "Thought what over?"  
Ranma : "My curse."  
Shiyoru (C) : "Uh huh?"  
Ranma : "You know, I think as long as....."  
Voices : "Hey, Ranma! Great to see you man!"

Ranma and Shiyoru turn around to the source of the voice and spot Hiroshi and Daisuke sitting behind them, both grinning like idiots.

Shiyoru (C) & Ranma : "Hi guys."

Daisuke and Hiroshi both look at Shiyoru. They both raise eyebrows at Ranma, who blanches.

Daisuke : "Another fiancée, Ranma?"  
Hiroshi : "Really, you should at least find time to spare us one. We never have any luck in getting any."  
Shiyoru (C) : \*ahem\*.....  
Daisuke & Hiroshi : "Nani o, Ranma no iinazuke?" (What is it, Ranma's fiancée?)  
Shiyoru (C) : "Guys, cut it out. It's me."

They look at Shiyoru unknowingly. They scratch heads.

Daisuke : "Me who?"  
Hiroshi : "We don't remember a girl knowing us and Ranma so familiarly except....."  
Daisuke & Hiroshi : "Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru nods. Daisuke and Hiroshi nearly fall off their seat, as shocked as Akane's friends. Hiroshi puts a hand on his forehead and shakes it, looking skywards.

Hiroshi : "Oh Lord help us, Shiyoru's gone girl full-time."

Shiyoru knocks his head with a tongfer, then puts it back into Hammerspace. Hiroshi and Daisuke look at Shiyoru, still not believing this is their most recent friend after a month of absence.  
(A Tongfer is a kind of baton with a perpendicular handle at one end.)

Daisuke : "Well, one thing I can say about you is, Shiyoru, you've got one helluva make over."  
Hiroshi : "Yeah, real cute stuff. Not like Ranma over here, so droll and dull and boring without even a little bit of humour in him."  
Ranma : "Hey, I've got humour!"

Daisuke, Hiroshi and Shiyoru look at each other.

All three : "Since when did we hear you laugh at something outside of martial arts and such related things?"

Ranma ponders this.

Ranma : "er... none. Point taken."  
Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, you really have got to get another life. There's more to fighting in this world."  
Daisuke : "Yeah, listen to your friend here, Ranma. She *IS* so much more sexier."

Shiyoru gives him a tongfer to the head as well. Daisuke grins sheepishly.

Hiroshi : "Yeah. At least she's learned to live with herself."

Ranma gives them an estranged look. Then sharp-witted Daisuke changes the subject before anything bad happens, as he knows will whenever they pursue Ranma's curse for too long.

Daisuke : "So, going to Takashimaya for the convention?"  
Ranma : "Yeah, it's Akane's day out. We're just along for the ride."

Hiroshi : "Any plans to get some manga stuff there?"  
Shiyoru (C) : "Not for me. No space in my pack."  
Ranma : "Maybe... maybe not. I'm broke."  
Shiyoru (C) : "How does 'my treat' sound to you, Ranma?"

Ranma looks at Shiyoru, then shrugs.

Ranma : "It's your money."  
Shiyoru (C) : "Alright, then I'll treat Dai and Hiro here since you don't sound interested."

Daisuke and Hiroshi immediately perk up, knowing how much money Shiyoru can spare. Ranma looks at them disinterestedly.

Ranma : "Go ahead."

Ranma says this in such a defeated voice that Shiyoru flinches. She wonders what's making Ranma so easily dejected today. Daisuke and Hiroshi also notice this and quickly shut up, leaning back into their seats for the rest of the trip.

Shiyoru (C) : <I promise I'll get you over that curse if it takes me a month, Ranma! No friend of mine is going to end up depressed because of some lousy curse!>

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A few hours later, it is nearly dinnertime when Akane, Daisuke, Hiroshi and the rest all leave Takashimaya with a few purchases, mostly their anime and manga interests, although a few clothes and other items have also found their way into Shiyoru's, Akane's, Daisuke's, Hiroshi's, etc... hands.

Akane : "Hey, guys, why not come over to our place for dinner tonight?"

Hiroshi looks unsure. Daisuke grins.

Daisuke : "Sure! Why not? Beats the rat poison I cook whenever nobody's home!"

Ranma grins noticeably, although he quickly stifles it before Akane notices.

Hiroshi : "Er... I'm not so sure. My sister's going to be mad if nobody comes home for dinner...."

Daisuke slaps Hiroshi's back. He nearly falls over from the force.

Daisuke : "Then give her a call and tell her you're not eating at home!"

Hiroshi nods, then walks over to the nearest phone and drops a coin in. Akane is surprised at his immediate response to Daisuke's suggestion. He returns, minutes later, all smiles.

Hiroshi : "My sis said ok, but be home before ten."

Daisuke : "Sheesh, ten only? I'm normally expected home at midnight."

Akane : "Ok, can we go now? Yoi? Minako? Atsuka? We're going home now, all right with you all?"

They nod. Yoi steps forwards.

Yoi : "Shiyoru? Thanks for the treats. We appreciated it."

Shiyoru does a curtsey (!). Ranma pales. Akane looks on in interest. Daisuke and Hiroshi just stare.

Shiyoru (C) : "My pleasure."

They part ways with Akane's group leaving for the (hopefully) not too crowded bus stop, Daisuke and Hiroshi

looking at each other's purchases. Shiyoru just has a small bag of essentials like shampoo, some dried food, a small case of makeup (for Porcelain), extra bars of soap, medicine, and some extra clothes. Taking the bus to the Dojo, Daisuke and Hiroshi compare stuff. Ranma has his own items, but they're mostly comics. The only other thing he bought was an extra pair of shoes to replace his worn ones.

Daisuke : "I got this Bandai action figure! Detailed to the last exhaust vent, it's got movable fingers and a fully posable body!"

Hiroshi : "Pheh, that's it? Mine's remote controlled. It'll do anything I command it to within its 4,000 word vocabulary, from cooking to singing."

While the two compare stuff, Shiyoru is sitting with Akane in another seat, watching Ranma as he stares out a window.

Shiyoru (C) : "Akane, I'm worried about Ranma."

Akane : "Me too."

Shiyoru (C) : "He seems so sad.... like something is bothering him. He hardly looks like this."

Akane : "I noticed. Do you think....?"

Shiyoru (C) : "It *has* to be me. I know I'm vastly different from the last time I visited...."

Akane : "I think you'd make quite a good girl."

Shiyoru (C) : "Thanks, but no thanks."

Akane : "Oh, yes! This afternoon, you said you wanted to help Ranma cope with his curse?"

Shiyoru (C) : "It sounds farfetched, but I think I've diagnosed his problem."

Akane : "Oh?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Yes. We'll need lots of help though."

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At the Saotome's (newly) rebuilt house, Nodoka is busy preparing dinner for herself when the phone rings. She wipes her hands on her apron and picks it up.

Nodoka : "Yes? This is Mrs. Saotome speaking."

Voice : "Saotome-san? Would you mind coming over to the Dojo for a while? We need your help...."

Nodoka : "Is it about my son? Is something wrong? Is he acting like...."

Voice : "Please, just come over and we'll talk."

Nodoka agrees, and puts down the phone. She looks at dinner, barely started. She decides that she can have leftovers for breakfast and stuffs everything back into the fridge before going to get changed.

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At the Dojo, everyone is tucking into dinner cooked by Kasumi. While Akane eats, she observes Ranma. Shiyoru does the same thing. Nobody else seems to notice though, that Ranma's appetite is not normal today. He slowly picks at his rice, and chews on his vegetables slowly. Finishing his first bowl of rice, Ranma puts his bowl down and announces :

Ranma : "I'm full."

Nabiki, Kasumi, Soun and Genma stare at him. Hiroshi and Daisuke look at each other.

Kasumi : "Oh my, Ranma. Is something wrong? Is my cooking bad?"

Ranma : "No it's not, Kasumi...."

Nabiki : <Hmm... Ranma not feeling well? Wonder what caused this. Profits to be made to sell this info!>

Soun just keeps quiet, while Genma takes the opportunity to eat Ranma's share of food as well. Ranma gets up and walks upstairs, slowly. Akane looks worriedly at Shiyoru, who returns the look. They finish their food quickly and get up as well.

Akane & Shiyoru (C) : "We're done."

They leave as well. Soun looks at Genma, who looks at the leftover food, grinning from ear to ear. Hiroshi and Daisuke begin to sweat.

Genma : "Har har, I can eat till my heart's content tonight!"

Nabiki finishes next, seconds after Akane and Shiyoru leave. Daisuke and Hiroshi begin to get VERY worried.

Nabiki : "I'm done too."

She goes upstairs as well. Soun looks worriedly at Kasumi, who looks as worried as Soun.

Kasumi : "Oh my, did I cook too much tonight?"

Soun quietly eats dinner with Kasumi, Genma (Who is more of guzzling dinner than eating it.), and their two guests.

Woman's Voice : "Excuse me? Mr. Tendou?"

Soun looks up, rice grains flying from his mouth. Genma looks up, sweating as he is reaching out for a piece of grilled chicken. Hiroshi looks at the gate, wondering what is going on. Daisuke has a piece of meat sticking out of his mouth as he looks up.

Woman's Voice : "Can I come in, Mr. Tendou?"

Soun gets up and walks out the living room over to the main gates, where someone is waiting. Genma is looking at him, sweating. Kasumi is still eating, oblivious to the voice.

Soun opens the gates.

Soun : "Ah, Mrs. Saotome. Irrashai. What brings you here this time of night?"

Nodoka : "Someone called me asking for help?"

Soun thinks hard.

Soun : "I don't remember calling.... neither did Saotome-kun, or any of my daughters...."

Nodoka : "Really? The voice was distinctly female...."

Shiyoru (C) : "Hey? She's here! Hi, Aunty Saotome!"

Nodoka looks up at the source of the voice, as does Soun. She sees the girl she's only seen one other time during her visits. One she feels guilty over causing the amnesia of once.

Nodoka : "Shiyona?"

Hiroshi and Daisuke raise and eyebrow at the same time, never having heard the name "Shiyona" before.

Shiyoru starts waving from the window in Akane's room. Nodoka waves back. Soun wonders what is going on between Nodoka and Shiyoru. Shiyoru starts yelling out the window again.

Shiyoru (C) : "It's me! Could you come up here, Aunty? Please?"

Nodoka : "Coming, darling, coming."

Nodoka makes her way past Soun towards the house, Genma surrepetitiously avoiding her and her cloth bundle as she passes by. Soun closes the gates and walks over to Genma.

Soun : "What's going on, Saotome-kun?"

Genma : "Don't know, Tendou-kun."

As Nodoka walks upstairs, she hears the door being opened, and finds Shiyoru(na to her) waiting at the top of the staircase.

As Nodoka reaches the top of the staircase, she looks at the slightly taller girl in front of her. Shiyoru has her hands in front of her, smiling as she greets Nodoka.

Shiyoru (C) : "Hi, Aunty Nodoka!"

Nodoka : "Hello, Shiyona darling. Good to see you again. What's wrong? Why'd you call me?"

Shiyoru gestures into Akane's room, indicating they should go in. Nodoka looks unsure, but goes in as a show of trust. Inside, the room is dark, but as Shiyoru closes the door behind her, the lights come on.

Nodoka sees Akane sitting on the floor, sheets of paper spread out before her. Akane looks up and smiles at Nodoka.

Akane : "Hello, Aunty."

Nodoka : "Hello, Akane. For goodness' sakes, what is all *this*?"

Akane : "Please, won't you sit first? We need to talk."

Nodoka : "All right."

{Please try to understand.....}

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma? You there?"

No response. Shiyoru tries again.

\*knock\* \*knock\*

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma?"

There is no response. Shiyoru wonders and considers walking into the room without permission. As she's about to, a voice calls out from behind the door.

Ranma : "Come in, Shiyoru."

Shiyoru turns the knob and opens the door slowly, peering in. The room is bright, and she can see Ranma on his futon sketching on the sketch book Shiyoru sent to him to help in his arts class. She walks in and shuts the door behind her. She squats in front of Ranma, looking at his drawings. He looks up.

Shiyoru (C) : "Nice picture. Yourself, I presume?"

Ranma has been sketching on an empty page, a picture of himself as a male. Besides him is an incomplete picture, a female body wearing chinese clothes and with a pigtail, but without a face. Ranma looks at his picture again.

Ranma : "Yeah."

Shiyoru (C) : "Why not finish it? I can wait."

Ranma : "Nah."

Shiyoru (C) : "Why's that?"

Ranma : "It's complete."

Shiyoru (C) : "It is?" <A faceless onna-Ranma. Is this what he's feeling? A loss of identity as a girl?>

Shiyoru walks to Ranma's side and lies stomach down on the floor like he is, and looks at the picture.

Shiyoru (C) : "Such a waste though, what a nice body without a face to go to it."

Ranma looks at his friend. She notices and looks back.

Shiyoru (C) : "What's the matter, Ranma?"

Ranma : "Sometimes I wonder if I can tell you."

Shiyoru (C) : "Why's that?"

Ranma : "You aren't like me anymore... you wouldn't understand."

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, I was like you. I should know."

Ranma looks at her skeptically, wondering if he should believe her or not. Shiyoru is now resting her head on her arms, on the floor. He looks at her chest, pressing against the floor.

Ranma : "Doesn't that.... feel uncomfortable?"

Shiyoru (C) : "It's alright after a while."

Ranma : "A while? You've done this before then."

Shiyoru (C) : "Sure, why not? I can't stay as a guy all the time."

Shiyoru looks at Ranma, who is at a loss of what to say. She lifts her upper body up and grabs the sketchbook. She starts flipping pages. Ranma watches attentively. She stops at a certain page. Ranma sees a beautiful picture of a waterfall as the main theme, rocks scattered around. Trees all around the artist's viewpoint, and details many would miss unless they looked carefully. A squirrel gobbling down a nut, a deer in the shadows.

Ranma : "Beautiful picture."

Shiyoru (C) : "Porcelain drew it. Look here."

Shiyoru uses a delicate finger and points to a small rock, nearly out of sight. Ranma looks, and sees a familiar sweater, gi and pants.

Ranma : "You were taking a bath there?"

Shiyoru (C) : "When I was still concerned over my curse in others' eyes, yes. Look here."

Ranma follows the finger to the waterfall itself, seemingly transparent with Porcelain's expert hand. He sees a blurred figure behind it, distinctly female. Shiyoru chooses her words carefully.

Shiyoru (C) : "That was.... still is me."

Ranma stares at the picture. He can barely make out the shadings which mark the eyes, mouth and nose on the figure. It seems to be smiling.

Shiyoru (C) : "I was looking at myself then. It was after that accident."

Ranma : "Yes....?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Guess what I was thinking."

Ranma thinks. He stares at the picture long and hard. Without knowing it, he thinks of a strangely appropriate answer.

Ranma : "You.... forgave yourself? What for?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Exactly. After that accident, I started thinking in another light. Here's why."

Shiyoru starts flipping pages, another one. She comes to a thick page, and tries to pull it apart. They split into two pages. On one page, there is a familiar picture. Ranma gasps and points to it.

Ranma : "I saw that in my dream!"

Shiyoru (C) : "Dream? This picture?"

Shiyoru looks at the picture, one of herself in ordinary garb, except that she had her gi slung over one shoulder instead of wearing it. She is sitting on a rock in the picture, one hand holding the gi, the other supporting her chin, one leg folded up to chest height.

Shiyoru (C) : "This was after that waterfall scene. I was waiting for the water to boil. I remember having doubts about the curse."

Ranma : "What doubts?"

Shiyoru (C) : "That it was a bad thing."



Ranma : "Why's that?"

Shiyoru (C) : "You remember how I acted when I had amnesia?"

Ranma : "Yes. A petite girl, if I'm not wrong."

Ranma shudders a little at himself possibly having to act like that again. Shiyoru notes this.

Shiyoru (C) : "You know what? After I regained my memory, I realized that the more I tried to deny MY curse, the worse it got. I was thinking about that on this rock. I was thinking so hard I never noticed Porcelain until she showed me the drawing."

Ranma : "How did it get worse?"

Shiyoru (C) : "As a girl, I would keep denying being one, making me look like some sort of pervert in others' eyes. Worse still, it reflected badly on Porcelain because the people would wonder why she would travel with such a weirdo. As I continued denial, I also found out this only made some people more persistent in making me more feminine. Others just pitied me when I couldn't show them my true form. I ended up being left alone. Porcelain was nice, but I need other people's company, just like you do, ne Ranma? Worse, I felt doubtful of myself everytime I said I wasn't a girl, that I was a guy."

Ranma : "Truly? Being alone sounds a little extreme, being doubtful sounds worse."

Shiyoru (C) : "But there you have it. Oh, Ranma.... what about you?"

Ranma : "Me? No, I don't think I've had such experiences."

Shiyoru (C) : "No? What about Kuno?"

Ranma thinks about the times he keeps trying to convince Kuno he is a guy, and Kuno just keeps claiming that the vile demon Ranma has put another curse, worse than the previous one, on his fair and beautiful osage no onna. He begins to see what Shiyoru is pointing at.

Ranma : "You do have a point there."

Shiyoru flips to yet another page, this one near the first few pages.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma, I felt like you once did right now."

Ranma : "How's that? Another picture?"

Shiyoru points to a picture on the second page of the book. Ranma looks at it and notices exactly the same style of picture he drew a few minutes ago. A male Shiyoru, complete. A female Shiyoru, faceless.

Ranma : "Exactly the same....."

Shiyoru (C) : "Tell me frankly, Ranma. Do you sometimes feel that you're not sure just what and who you are?"

Ranma thinks. He nods.

Ranma : "Yes, I do."

Shiyoru (C) : "Alright, let's work on this problem from the start."

Ranma : "Huh?"

Shiyoru (C) : "If I know how to read your expressions, I'd say that what I kept trying to explain to you today isn't going to be enough."

Ranma : "How's that?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Well.... alright. I'll go straight to the root. Ranma, tell me what is it about the curse that bothers you so?"

Ranma : "That's easy. It's not manly."

Shiyoru (C) : "Tell me then, do you THINK you think differently as a girl?"

Ranma : "Yes."

Shiyoru (C) : "What do you think of this aspect?"

Ranma : "My thoughts are not the man's way of solving it...."

Shiyoru pays attention to Ranma's hesitation at the last sentence. She puts the sketchbook away and rolls onto her back, staring at the ceiling. Ranma does the same.

Shiyoru (C) : "Really. Are you absolutely sure?"

Ranma : "Yes."

Shiyoru (C) : "Tell me then, what is abnormal about your female side's way of thinking?"

Ranma : ".....er.....ah.....it isn't manly! I already said that!"

Shiyoru (C) : "How?"

Ranma : "Why do you keep asking me this?"

Shiyoru (C) : "It's because I want you to think properly for once, instead of falling back on your forced way of thinking! Think as yourself, not in the so called man-amongst-men way!"

Shiyoru adds force behind this sentence, emphasizing the point. Ranma is surprised at his friend's forcefulness.

Ranma : "..... what do you mean....?"

Shiyoru (C) : "For once, stop thinking of everything in terms of manliness. Just think of it *\*normally\**, alright?"

Ranma : ".... I'll try."

Outside, Nodoka and Akane are listening at the door to the going ons inside. Nodoka looks worried and whispers to Akane.

Nodoka : "Akane, are you sure this is going to work? What if my son suddenly....."

Akane : "Don't worry, Mrs. Saotome. Shiyona knows what she's doing. Ranma won't change for the worse, if what we planned goes all right."

Nodoka : "I didn't expect this from a girl you know, Akane-chan. For someone who's a girl through and through, she seems awfully tomboyish if she's giving Ranma lessons."

Akane : "Look, I know this may affect Ranma a little, but if he's going to marry me, he'd better learn to stop being such a snob."

Nodoka : "What did you say? What do you mean?"

Akane : "What I mean is this. We studied Ranma's behaviour, and the way Genma seems to teach him. We arrived at this conclusion. It's because of your husband's hard-core, ingrained teachings of the typical man-amongst-men that Ranma treats me like dirt sometimes."

Nodoka : "Please explain, Akane-chan."

Akane pulls away from the door and Nodoka does the same. Akane prepares the explanation she's about to give.

Akane : "Do you have any idea what Genma's idea of a man-amongst-men is?"

Nodoka : "Not to act like a girl, to be strong in trying times. That is what he told me."

Akane : "No wonder you let them go. You want to know the real story? Here's what it is. Genma's idea of being strong is simply another name for sexism and stubbornness. From what we observed, when we start to fight, it's because Ranma keeps insisting he is right simply because he is 'the man' that we go on and on fighting. He simply doesn't back away even if he is plainly in the wrong. He believes that conflict is the only way to resolve things, he doesn't even spare a thought for diplomacy. He hides himself behind a shield of confidence, afraid that if he admits his wrong, he'll be seen as weak.

Want to know more? His idea of not acting like a girl is simply to *\*HATE\** everything that is even slightly "soft". He keeps denying his curse, he finds the idea of even being one revolting. He expects everyone to think like him, to keep denying themselves until they are what they were before. He even believes anyone who doesn't mind their curse is a total nut."

Akane looks at Nodoka, hoping for a response. What she gets is better than expected. As they say, sometimes too much of a good thing is bad for you.

Downstairs, Genma is still eating the leftovers that Kasumi and Soun couldn't finish when he feels an angry chi presence behind him. He turns around.

Nodoka : "Genma Saotome....."

Genma's face contorts into a grimace as Nodoka bends over and *lifts* her husband by the collar with *one* hand, his feet dangling a few feet above the ground.

Nodoka : "Genma, is what Akane said true?"

Genma : "Erk! Whark... what did she... say?"

Nodoka : "That you taught our son the wrong ways of being a man."  
Genma : "Since when!?"  
Nodoka : "Since the day we left."  
Genma : "What makes you think so!?"  
Nodoka : "Teaching Ranma things that made him what he is today."  
Genma : "Aren't you proud of him? I thought you were!? You yourself said...."  
Nodoka : "Yes, but I only saw his filial side. From what Akane described to me....."

Nodoka shakes Genma once. Akane, standing behind Nodoka, is scared by her unusual strength.

Nodoka : "It's because you taught Ranma *too well* that he can't get along with Akane. Worse, I know that while you brought him out on a martial arts training trip, fighting isn't the only answer to everything! You, of all people, should've known that a long time ago!"

Genma : "But.... but.... but....."

Nodoka : "But what!?"

Genma : "I was afraid that if we fell even a little short of our goal to be....."

Nodoka : "That's the worst part of all. You're afraid. You're afraid that you'd fail. Now look at what our son has become! An obnoxious slob!"

Akane begins to grow worried as the argument (rather one-sided) continues, increasingly louder.

Hiroshi and Daisuke stand up after seeing a few minutes of this, bid Akane a quick farewell and make themselves scarce.

==-==-==

Ranma is looking at his fist, clenched. He is smiling.

Ranma : "You know, it isn't so bad after all. You're right, even as a girl I'm still myself...."

"..... *but what!?!..... afraid... a little short of our goal..... worst part of all..... afraid that you'd fail..... become!....*"

Ranma sits up, as does Shiyoru, her necklace tinkling. Both wear shocked expressions on their face.

Ranma : "What in the world.....!?!??"

Shiyoru (C) : <Oh NO! Not NOW!! Not when things were going so well!>

"..... *I'd kill you now if..... but I did deliver..... I am ashamed of you..... try to understand.....*"

Ranma gets up and runs down the corridor, Shiyoru trailing.

==-==-==

The arguing downstairs gets worse as Nodoka's temper flares up to new levels. Genma, now terrified beyond words, simply lets Nodoka scream at him for failing her. Akane begins to fear for Ranma and Genma's lives.

Nodoka : "I am ashamed of you, Genma! I'm ashamed to wear the mantle of the surname Saotome with you as my husband! How could you raise my son to HATE girls!?"

Genma : "Please try to understand dear, I tried my best.... I...."

Nodoka : "Since the day we met, I *KNEW* you were a lazy slob! Your best wasn't good enough! You just told him something and told him that it couldn't be changed, that it was a proven fact. You never let him explore the aspects of those words. You never let him develop by himself as the man he would be by himself. All you did was rush as fast as possible to accomplish your promise so you could rest. *You ruined his life!*"

Ranma : "Mom!"

Nodoka stops shouting in Genma's face as she hears Ranma's voice. Turning to look, she sees Ranma standing at the base of the stairs, staring, Shiyoru behind him, a worried look on her face. Immediately, Genma is forgotten and is dropped to the floor like a rag doll. Ranma's eyes follow his father before returning to his mother.

Ranma : "Okasan! What is going on!?"

Nodoka looks at her son, tears welling up in her eyes. She runs over and hugs her son, crying. Ranma strokes her head, confused.

Nodoka : "Oh, Ranma! I was a fool! I shouldn't have done it!"

Ranma : "Mom!? What is it? What are you talking about?"

Nodoka keeps crying as Shiyoru walks over to Akane's side.

Shiyoru (C) : (Whispering to Akane) "Akane, what did you say?"

Akane looks guilty.

Akane : "Guess I got a little carried away and got angry when I started mentioning Ranma's faults."

Shiyoru (C) : "Damn it, I was already getting through to him! What happens *now*!?"

Back at Ranma's side, Genma is watching as Nodoka looks at her son.

Nodoka : "I shouldn't have let Genma bring you out on that trip."

Ranma : "What do you mean, mom?"

Nodoka : "Look at yourself. You are practically a girl hater! To think you did all those things just so that I wouldn't get worried...."

Ranma : "...what?"

Nodoka looks up at her son, eyes still wet.

Nodoka : "Why, peep at Akane undressed, steal girls' clothes and all those other things of course. Why else would you do all those things if you hated girls so much?"

Ranma : "Mom, what are you saying? Since when did I hate girls?"

Nodoka : "Now, son. I know that ever since your curse, you've hated girls since you hated yourself for being at least half a girl. Akane said so... I think."

Ranma gives Akane a withering glare. Beads of sweat form on Akane's brow. Shiyoru slowly backs off, and ends up standing a fair distance away.

Ranma : "Akane, what did you say?"

Akane : "Sorry, I got carried away..."

Nodoka : "Akane-chan said that since you hated your curse and didn't want to be seen as even a little effemine, you hated everything to do with girls, especially near you. Oh, I'm so sorry."

Nodoka goes back to burying her face in Ranma's arm and crying, while Akane facefaults at Nodoka's misconception.

Akane : "I...didn't.... mean.... that....."

But Nodoka doesn't hear. Instead, she suddenly lets go of Ranma and stands tall and firm, facing her son. Akane and the rest all know what is going to happen.

Nodoka : "Ranma, my son, listen well. Tomorrow, I shall begin your training."

Ranma : "Training?"

Akane/Shiyoru/Genma : <Training?>

Nodoka : "Yes. To get you to start liking girls again."

Ranma : ".....wha?"

Nodoka : "I know your curse has had a profound impact on your outlook of girls, so I will make sure you begin to like them again, if only for Akane's sake."

Ranma gives Akane a "see me later in my room or else" look, and Akane nods. Genma just crawls away somewhere to hide under a rock. Shiyoru blinks a few times.

Shiyoru (C) : "Er... aunty Saotome?"

Nodoka : "Yes, child?"

Shiyoru (C) : "What exactly are you going to do?"

Nodoka : "Why, let Ranma see what being a girl is like so he can understand their thinking and not be such an obnoxious smear in the Saotome name when concerned with them."

Shiyoru (C), Ranma & Akane : "....."

Their faces a blank, Ranma, Akane and Shiyoru just look blankly at Nodoka's serious, determined, convinced and set face. Massive drops of *hugesweat* (taking up the surface area of one side of the entire head) form on the backs of their heads.

Shiyoru(C) & Akane : <It's my fault.>

Nodoka : "Tomorrow.... tomorrow your training starts, my son."

Ranma : <Great. JUUUUST great.>

=====

In Ranma's room, Akane and Shiyoru are sitting with Ranma on the floor. Genma is not in the room, having hidden under a rock as mentioned before. Akane has hung her head in shame, while Shiyoru just looks troubled.

Akane : "Gomen, Ranma. I didn't know Nodoka would take it that badly."

Shiyoru (C) : "It was all my fault, Ranma. I didn't know Nodoka would react like that."

Akane : "I was the one who talked too much...."

Ranma : "Enough, both of you!"

Ranma forcefully, but quietly bellows to the two girls assembled. They shut up. Ranma looks at each of them sternly. Then his face breaks down and he sighs sadly.

Ranma : "Well, I had it coming all along anyway. If I hadn't been such an a\$\$hole over this curse matter, none of this would've happened. Anyway, with what Shiyoru helped me in, I think I can cope pretty well."

Shiyoru (C) : "I didn't do much... all I did was make you think...."

Ranma : "Yes, make me think like myself within my limits and not within the set rules of some idiot's conception of a man amongst men. Don't look so sad, guys. Cheer up! You've always wanted to see me become a not-so-obnoxious guy, right?"

They look up.

Ranma : "Besides, I think I know what Shiyoru was finally trying to tell me. That and with what you just told me, Akane, I think..... maybe, just maybe, I can change for the better."

=====

Later that night, while Shiyoru is sleeping in her room, a shadowy figure tiptoes over to her room.

\*bip\* \*shrrrip\*

Voice : "Shiyoru? Are you awake?"

Shiyoru continues sleeping. The person tries shaking her.

Voice : "Shiyoru, please wake up?"

Shiyoru opens her eyes. Using a skill taught to her by Herb, she focuses her chi to see in the darkness the face of Ranma. She gets up, irritatedly, rubbing her eyes.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma! What's the matter with you!? It's one in the morning!"

Ranma looks sheepish under her stare. He looks unsure as well, under her chi-vision.

Ranma : "Gomen nasai, Shiyoru. But I just needed to talk to you."

Shiyoru turns on the futon and gestures to the empty space on her futon, her legs in front of her.

Shiyoru (C) : "At least sit here."

Ranma does so. In the faint moonlight, Ranma can see what Shiyoru is wearing. A huge shirt that reaches all the way down to her knees. He notes that her legs are *\*very\** smooth and *\*very\** well shaped.

Ranma : "Nice P.Js."

Shiyoru (C) : "Thanks. My guy clothes are still drying, for your info. Anyway, you said you wanted to talk....?"

Ranma : "Yeah.... I guess so."

Shiyoru (C) : "I'm listening."

Ranma : "Can I trust you with a secret, Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Have I ever let you down?"

Ranma : "Alright. Please don't be shocked by this, alright?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Depends on what you're about to say."

Ranma : "I'm looking forwards to today....."

{G.T. equals to Girl Training}

Shiyoru nearly dies when her heart skips three beats and nearly jumps out of her throat when she hears this. She grabs Ranma by the collar and stares in his face.

Shiyoru (C) : "Did I just hear what you said?"

Ranma nods.

Shiyoru (C) : "Was I *\*that\** good at convincing you?"

Ranma shakes his head. Shiyoru lets go.

Ranma : "No, don't get the wrong idea. Yes, part of this has to do with you, but it's really no big deal."

Shiyoru (C) : "What do you mean, 'no big deal'?"

Ranma : "Well.... after what you told me last night, I thought that I would want to try and see what you meant.

Here's my chance to do so without being ridiculed at. Alright, so I still don't like my curse, and no, I'm not a pervert, but at least I'm not going to let one little obstacle stop my life."

Shiyoru (C) : "I see. But you're not thinking about....."

Ranma : "It's me, ain't it? Just like you are you?"

Shiyoru (C) : <Least he's learning.> "Well then, wish you luck."

Ranma : "What do you mean, 'luck'? You told me yourself that you tried the same thing."

Shiyoru (C) : "I believe you're right, but considering so many more people here recognize you...."

Ranma : "A real man can take the abuse like a gentleman and not fight back if possible, right?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Did you learn that or did Genma teach you?"

Ranma : "Oyaji? No way! That was ONE thing I learned myself."

Shiyoru (C) : "Good to hear that. Well, I'll be here if you need me during your..... training."

Ranma : "Yeah, whatever. I just hope it isn't too humiliating."

Shiyoru (C) : "Don't worry, I know just how you feel."

=====

Four hours later, Nodoka comes into Ranma's room as he snores loudly, bucket in hand.

Nodoka : "Forgive me, Ranma, but this is for Akane's sake and our family name."

\*slosh\*

Ranma (C) : "YEEEEEEAH! COOOOoooooollllldDDDDD!!!!"

Ranma-chan screams as she jumps out of bed, shivering. Nodoka wonders if the ice water she used was a little extreme, especially since there are still unmelted ice cubes on the floor. After Ranma stops shivering, she rubs her eyes and looks at the clock.

Ranma (C) : "Mom, it's five in the morning!"

Nodoka : "I know, son, but if we're going to get you into shape as a real man then we'd better start now. I'll keep training you until you finally understand what a girl thinks like and understand them, so you'll be able to be a man *and* a gentleman at the same time. Now come on, let's start with our first lesson."

Ranma (C) : "What!? Now!?"

Nodoka : "Yes, and don't complain. It's not ladylike."

Ranma nods grudgingly, and follows her mother out the doorway. Still an hour away from the time she normally wakes up to train, she yawns mightily as she walks down the staircase. At the bottom of the staircase though, Nodoka gets a surprise. Kasumi and Shiyoru are standing there, waiting for her.

Kasumi & Shiyoru (C) : "Ohayo, Saotome-san."

Nodoka : "Ohayo, dears. What are you two doing up so early in the morning? I know Kasumi wakes up around this time, but what about you, Shiyona?"

Shiyoru wonders if she should reveal her curse to Nodoka so she won't keep calling her Shiyona. She decides that can wait.

Shiyoru (C) : "Well, I *was* trying to help change Ranma's ways (of thinking), and I did succeed.... partially. I thought maybe this would be a good chance to help him out further?"

Nodoka : "Thank you, darling, but that won't be necessary this morning. Maybe later, after Ranma has cooked breakfast for all of you."

Ranma (C) : "WHAT!?"

Shiyoru and Kasumi look at each other and giggle, both at the thought of Ranma cooking their breakfast and her shocked response which is written clearly on her face. Kasumi bows to Ranma.

Kasumi : "Doomo Arigato, Ranma-kun."

Ranma (C) : "Ge....ah....oh....mm.... erk...."

As Ranma splutters, trying to find something to say, Shiyoru looks at Nodoka.

Shiyoru (C) : "Anything else I can do, aunty Nodoka?"

Nodoka : "Not now.... oh nevermind what I said earlier. Come help us in the kitchen dear."

Shiyoru (C) : "Hai!"

Kasumi watches as a half-shocked Ranma, a female Shiyoru and a determined Nodoka walk into the kitchen, still smiling at what an interesting day it's going to be.

Kasumi : "Oh my, I'd better keep the clothes.... that looks like rain."

Humming, Kasumi goes outside to collect the dried clothes before the impending rain ruins them.

In the kitchen, Nodoka is wearing an apron over her traditional kimono, while handing one to Shiyoru (still in her big shirt) and Ranma (who is shaking off the last effects of the shock).

Nodoka : "Now, son, I'll teach you to appreciate the troubles Kasumi and Akane go through cooking something for you."

Ranma (C) : "Akane's cooking is inedible, you know that!"

Nodoka : "Yes, but she can learn, can't she?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, been *trying* to for the last few months."

Nodoka : "Ranma! This is why you need training! You cannot stop insulting your own iinazuke even though she's trying her best! I'm ashamed of that!"

Hearing this from her mother, Ranma hangs her head in shame. Shiyoru wonders if this is going to be more effective than anything she's ever devised.

Nodoka, seeing her son repentant, smiles and puts a hand on her shoulder.

Nodoka : "Now, dear. You'll be a perfect gentleman yet. Come on, let's start. Shiyona darling, please help me get the sugar from that cupboard please...."

As Nodoka instructs Ranma how to not *just* to cook food, but breakfast in itself, Kasumi is busy collecting the clothes on the clothesline, humming a happy tune to herself. As she does so, she kicks over a *tiny* pebble and nearly trips all of a sudden as an object pops out from under it. She looks down at the cowering figure.

Kasumi : "Ara, ohayo Saotome-san."

Genma : "O..o..ha...yo...Ka...s...su...mi...ch...chan...."

An hour later that Sunday morning, Soun's nose twitches as smells of food waft into his nose. Then his finely honed senses also smells the ink on the morning's newspaper. He gets up, hair perfectly kept despite its length.

Soun : \*yaaaaaaaaawn\* \*smack\* \*smack\* "Time to see what Kasumi's cooked this morning... and collect on my bets."

Soun gets up and walks to the altar in memory of his late wife in a corner of his room to do his morning ritual before leaving, three joss sticks burning.

(Some Asian cultures like the Chinese regard burning three joss sticks as a sign of respect to the dead. Joss sticks are "food for ghosts", supposedly keeping them fed, happy and respected. Joss sticks are generally brown in colour at the top, with either a red or a green wooden handle. Red signifies joss sticks for the ghosts, green for the Gods.... at least for the Chinese. I'm not sure about the Japanese.)

Outside, Soun spots Kasumi and Genma sitting at the table sipping a cup of tea, and looks towards the kitchen.

Soun : "Nan da yo, Kasumi-chan? If you're here, don't tell me....."

Kasumi looks up and smiles at her father.

Kasumi : "Ohayo gozaimasu, Oto-san. Yes, Ranma is doing the cooking this morning."

Soun's eyes bug out, his hair standing up. Genma, back facing Soun, turns around with tears running down his cheeks. Soun stares at Genma.

Soun : "...ara?" (Oh, ara more or less means Huh? or Oh! in Japanese.)

Genma : "My \*SON\* is being taught how to be a \*DAUGHTER\*, Tendou-kun!"

Soun : "I sort of figured that out myself, Saotome-kun. The thing is, what's for breakfast?"

Ranma yells out from the kitchen.

Ranma (C) : "Wait and see!"

With that, Soun watches as the morning's newspaper is thrown over the walls of the Tendou Dojo to land perfectly at the front porch, in front of where Soun normally sits. He smiles.

Soun : "At least the paper boy earns his keep well."

Upstairs, Akane is still sleeping blissfully, P-chan cradled in her arms, snoring lightly.

\*snrrrp\* \*quwekwekwekwek\* \*snrrrrrp\* \*quwekwekwekwek\*



As the smell from the kitchen rises into the air and up into Akane's bedroom, P-chan's nostrils twitch. Then his ears wiggle, tickling Akane's nose.

\*aahh\* \*aaaahh\* \*achee!\*

Akane wakes up with a sneeze, covering P-chan in her mucus and waking him up too. She sits up and rubs her eyes sleepily, looking around. Then she suddenly spots P-chan, sopping wet, and quickly apologizes to him.

Akane : "Oh my! I'm sorry, P-chan! I didn't mean to sneeze on you!"

She picks P-chan up and looks at his wet head, trying to use tissues to clean his head. P-chan shakes his head as if trying to say it's all right. She smiles and giggles, then rubs his nostrils against her nose, causing P-chan to turn a hue of red under the black fur.

Akane : "If you say so, P-chan. Come on, let's go downstairs."

Akane walks out the room with P-chan following, meeting her older sister in the corridor.

Akane : "Nabiki? What's Kasumi cooking today?"

As they walk, Nabiki takes a sniff.

Nabiki : "Don't know sis, but it smells real good."

As they reach the staircase, Kasumi appears in front of them, dust pan and broom in hand, ready to clean up both Akane and Nabiki's rooms. They look at her.

Akane : "One-chan? If you're here, who....."

Stopping short in her sentence, Akane remembers what Nodoka said the last night.

Akane : "Ranma's cooking!?"

Kasumi nods and smiles. Nabiki shrugs nonchalantly.

Nabiki : "As long as it's breakfast, I'm eating."

As Nabiki walks downstairs, she wonders if she can get Ranma to cook some extra lunches on school days to sell to the other guys, Kuno-baby included. Akane is still standing there, long after Kasumi has disappeared into her room. P-chan sits there, looking at her. Akane shakes her head, breaking her stupor.

Akane : <Don't just stand there! Go downstairs and see how's it coming along!>

She runs downstairs, forgetting P-chan. P-chan runs down the stairs as well, but instead of following Akane into the kitchen, he heads straight for the bathroom. (Isn't it strange, that Ryoga can find his way around the Tendou Dojo so well, yet can't find his way out of the Neko Hanten?)

In the kitchen, Ranma is busy toasting bread in front of her mother, who is nodding in approval.

Nodoka : "You're getting the hang of it, son. But you need to flip the bread a little more quickly so the bread will be evenly toasted inside and prevent burning."

Akane : "Ranma!? Wha.....!?!?"

Akane screeches to a halt as she runs inside the kitchen, her sentence stopping just as suddenly when she sees Ranma toasting bread over an open stove fire using just a pair of wooden chopsticks to do so. Her hair frazzles again as she watches Ranma nod and flip the toasted slice onto a plate, and skillfully flips another untoasted slice off a plate using just the chopsticks alone. She keeps watching as the bread, spinning in the air, lands on the same

two chopsticks inches over the fire. Nodoka turns around after hearing Akane's voice.

Nodoka : "Ah, you're here at last, Akane-chan. Ranma here was cooking breakfast for everyone, and I wanted you to be the first to try his cooking."

Akane : "Ara.... aha....ah.... er....."

Akane is beyond words as she watches Ranma finish toasting the last slice of bread. Shiyoru is busy squeezing some oranges in a corner, using one hand for each orange, squeezing each one to a dry husk, the orange liquid dripping into a large jug. She is humming a tune, totally oblivious to Akane's entrance. Akane looks at her, then back at Ranma, who is wiping her hands on her apron and turning around.

Ranma (C) : "Oh, er... ohayo Akane."

Akane : "O...ha...yo....."

Shiyoru stops squeezing oranges as she hears Akane's voice and turns around as well, apron turning orange as she wipes her own hands on it.

Shiyoru (C) : "Hi, Akane. Come see how Ranma's doing?"

Akane : "Uh....huh....."

Shiyoru notes that painfully obvious expression of utter shock on Akane's face. Akane's face blanches, the colour draining from it.

Akane : "I... think... I need and... go sit down now...."

Akane walks out the room slowly as a concerned Nodoka, Ranma and Shiyoru watch.

Nodoka : "What's wrong with Akane-chan?"

-----

Outside, Kasumi is busy chatting with Ryoga over his latest travels while Soun reads the papers, Nabiki watches the morning financial report on TV and Genma looks sad. Kasumi is the first to see Akane walk out the kitchen, face pale.

Kasumi : "Akane-chan! Is something the matter? You don't look well....."

Ryoga turns to look at Akane.

Ryoga : "Akane-san!"

He quickly gets up and runs over to support Akane before she can fall. Soun, Genma and Nabiki all turn to look as Ryoga helps Akane over to the table. Akane is shivering in addition to her deathly pale face. Ryoga recognizes these as the first signs of shock, and quickly lays her on the floor, using a cushion to support her head. Kasumi comes over and looks at Akane, hand over her mouth in a silent "oh my". Soun also walks over to see how his daughter is faring, and nearly cries when he sees her.

Soun : "Akane-chan! What's the matter!?"

Ryoga watches in concern as Akane's lips start to tremble. His panicked mind forgets what he should do in these situations, but he quickly walks over to lift Akane's legs up and massage her feet, hoping that will do something for her. It does do a little to stop her from fainting, and some colour returns to Akane's cheeks as she calms down with the soothing foot massage Ryoga is applying. Slowly, she recovers from her shock. Soun starts crying again, only in relief that his daughter is alright. Akane sits up and takes a few deep breaths to make sure she's still alive and to calm herself down, then nods as Ryoga puts her legs down.

Ryoga : "Akane-san! Are you all right?"

Akane : "Yes, I am, thank you Ryoga.... say, where'd you go recently? I've not seen you in weeks."

Ryoga : "Oh, here and there. But the important thing now is that you're all right, Akane!"

Akane rubs her head and nods, then turns around to the table. Everyone gathers around the table as well. Ryoga is blinking at Akane, hoping she's truly all right when a voice calls out sweetly.

Voice : "Breakfast's ready!"

Following that voice is Ranma walking out the kitchen, a tray with several cups and a jug of orange juice balanced on her head, a plate of toast in one hand, two bottles of spread (One strawberry jam, one orange marmalade) in the other hand, a tray of pancakes dripping maple syrup balanced on one arm, and a tray of plates full of fried bacon and eggs in the other. (Remember book 6, where Ranma was balancing several bowls of ramen? Looks a little like this scene.)

Trailing behind her are Nodoka and Shiyoru, both grinning at each other. Akane and the family watches as Ranma sets down the toast first, then the jam and marmalade. Expertly flipping the trays of pancakes and bacon & eggs, Ranma catches them in the air and puts them on the table as well, cups and jug of orange juice following last. Distributing the plates of bacons & eggs to everyone, followed by a glass of orange juice, Ranma keeps the two trays and returns to the kitchen to put them back. Ryoga can see why Akane was so shocked when she walked into the kitchen. He himself feels slightly faint, although he quickly shakes the feeling off to look at the spread before him. A plate of bacon and eggs, still steaming hot, a glass of orange juice besides it, a plate of toast and pancakes in the middle of the table, complete with butter and maple syrup, as well as two bottles strawberry jam and orange marmalade. The only thing missing now are the forks, knives and spoons. As if in response to Ryoga's thoughts, Ranma yells from the kitchen.

Ranma (C) : "Heads up!"

Shiyoru turns around to catch the forks, knives and spoons as they fly out the kitchen, hands invisible as one after another, the utensils disappear mid-flight only to reappear in her hands after she stops. Shiyoru distributes the utensils to everyone at the table before she, Nodoka and Ranma sit down to enjoy a hearty western breakfast. However, the three at the table notice something as they are about to dig in.

Nodoka : "Why the shocked faces, everyone? Ranma spent the morning cooking these you know."

Ranma (C) : "Yes, please eat!"

Everyone breaks out of their stupor and starts digging in vigorously, even Akane, even Ryoga. Later, when the last slice of toast has been offered to and eaten by Ryoga, Nodoka nods to everyone at the table.

Nodoka : "How was Ranma's cooking?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, how was my cooking?"

Nodoka : "Akane?"

Akane : "Huh? Me?"

Akane looks surprised as everyone starts looking at her, even Ryoga. She loosens the collar of her pyjamas and swallows, a bead of bigsweat running down the back of her head. Ranma starts messing with the knot on her apron.

Akane : "I.... think.... it's.... er...."

Ranma pays lots of attention to Akane. She notices this and blushes.

Akane : "Edible."

Ranma (C) : "What!? That's it!? I spent the....."

Ranma begins to complain, but Nodoka puts a warning hand on her "son's" shoulder.

Nodoka : "Now, now, Ranma. Akane also spends the entire morning cooking too, you know. Maybe we can work harder on it next time, hm? This is nothing to get angry over. Don't worry, next time we'll make the food even better!"

Ranma sighs, then nods. Ryoga grins.

Ryoga : "Well then, Ranma, looks like you're being the girl you should be, eh?"

Ranma (C) : "Shut up, Pig-breath."

Nodoka gives Ranma a stern stare, then looks at Kasumi.

Nodoka : "My son here will do the household chores today, Kasumi. You deserve the rest."

Kasumi : "Ah.... arigato, Saotome-san."

Ranma is about to complain again, but quickly shuts up when Shiyoru pokes her ribs.

-=-=-=-=-

Later that afternoon, Shiyoru (male now) is sitting in a tree in his usual outfit, chewing on an apple. The tree is in the Tendou Dojo's front lawn, grown and cared for by Kasumi. Shiyoru is sitting idly in the area where the main trunk of the tree splits into several main branches, swinging a leg lazily.

Shiyoru : "Wonder what Nodoka's going to make him do later?"

It was after Ranma began her chores that Shiyoru found time to sneak a thermos over herself and hide up this tree, his favorite in the dojo. Finishing with the apple, Shiyoru ties its core to the bird-feeder he hung up here himself, and helps himself to another.

Shiyoru : \*chomp\* "Amazingsh howh Kashumi finsch timesch toh shtend thesche." (Amazing how Kasumi finds time to tend these.)

Shiyoru thinks about Nodoka's methods of helping Ranma and his own, and begins comparing them. Then he thinks about last night's events.

Shiyoru : "Hope Ranma doesn't crack. Then again, he's a real tough nut."

Shiyoru's mind wanders to Porcelain, somewhere in China....

Porcelain is in Shiyoru's third master's hut, recovering from a cold. She begins to feel better after a few days of rest, but as she is about to get out of bed and tell the master she's better, she sneezes.

Porcelain : \*achoo!\* \*sniff\* "Oh, a few more days...."

Back at the Dojo in Japan, many miles away, Shiyoru is thinking about how Porcelain got her curse in the first place.

Shiyoru : <Ah.... China is such a cruel place sometimes.> (Please do ***NOT*** take offense if you're from China!)

Shiyoru remembers when Porcelain told him about the time when she was born in China. Her family, being just a poor farming family in the countryside, didn't want girls in the family since they were not considered breadwinners. Instead, only males were wanted because they could find jobs in the mainland easily, and therefore were a larger source of income than any girl would be. (Sad, but true. But they have no choice.)

*Porcelain and Shiyoru are in a sturdy tent, the weather outside raining cats and dogs. Shiyoru, having been caught in the rain.... well, you know. Porcelain is talking to Shiyoru about personal matters, as a form of bonding (Remember, these two are boyfriend/girlfriend. They met in the first story of the series.) and spiritual release.*

*Porcelain : "Sadly, when they found out I was a girl, they were so upset."*

*Shiyoru (C) : "What happened then? Did they dump you in the ditch like what some others do, like I hear?"*

*Porcelain : "Not really..... I didn't get ditched.. The Jusenkyo Guide was travelling then through the countryside to get some essential supplies..... my family saw him."*

*Shiyoru (C) : "Then?"*

Porcelain : *"They all know about the secrets of Jusenkyo, and when the guide was returning, my father followed him secretly all the way, me in his arms as a baby."*

Shiyoru (C) : *"Oh dear."*

Porcelain : *"That..... that..... ooh, I can't think of a word foul enough for him!"*

*Porcelain grits her teeth as she says this, fists clenching at the same time. Then she calms down and continues.*

Porcelain : *"He located the Nannichuan when the guide left again to attend a relative's wedding and snuck into his house to look at the map of Jusenkyo! He just threw me in with a rope around my waist and pulled me out like fish bait!"*

Shiyoru (C) : *"I'm sorry." <I mean it. I wish I could've stopped that.>*

Shiyoru : *<The way some people treat their children!>*

Then Shiyoru realises what a redundant sentence this is in the Tendou residence. He looks down into the front lawn, where Nodoka is instructing Ranma how to hang up the clothes, something guys normally don't do. Shiyoru grins.

Shiyoru : *"Can't help it though, sometimes. You can't beat them, won't join them, then get used to them at least."*

Shiyoru knows the thick foliage of the tree he's sitting in not only provides shade from the midday sun, it's also the nesting/roosting site of dozens of birds (who never seem to drop their droppings on him for some reason), and as a result is a natural symphony orchestra. It also provides an excellent spying place where you can see them but they can't see you. Right now, Ranma is busy hanging up some of Shiyoru's (Shiyona to Nodoka, because she still doesn't know of Shiyoru's curse) female clothes. Shiyoru thinks about the day he wore girl's clothes willingly.

*Shiyoru and Porcelain are standing in a patch of forest, their tent nearby. Porcelain is helping Shiyoru decide what looks best on her (currently half-naked) body. On a boulder scrubbed clean nearby are a small pile of female clothes. Shiyoru is shivering as a cold wind blows.*

Shiyoru (C) : *"Porcelain, it's getting cold here. I want to be in town before nightfall, and in good health."*

Porcelain : *"Hold on, Yoru-kun. I'm still thinking. Hm... maybe a simple necklace....a tube? Nah, not decent for you... ah, maybe a long sleeved shirt. Pants to go with that, or maybe a short skirt."*

Shiyoru (C) : *"I'd like the pants if you don't mind. I'm freezing out here!"*

Porcelain : *"All right."*

*Shiyoru gets dressed, still staring at the bra she so willingly wore that day.*

Shiyoru (C) : *<I still can't believe myself.>*

In the tree, Shiyoru is nearly laughing his head off thinking of that time, but remembers to keep it soft so Nodoka won't hear a strange laugh and come after him with a blade. Then he thinks about the time he had to help Porcelain....

Akane : *"Shiyo...na? Shiyona?"*

Shiyoru's thoughts are broken when Akane starts calling his female alias. He nearly falls out of the tree, but stops himself just in time. He looks down and sees Akane, holding P-Chan, calling him, looking around. He closes his eyes and concentrates...

Akane : *"Shiyona?"*

Shiyoru : *"Yeah, Akane?"*

Akane jumps at the sudden voice and turns around to see the air behind her waver like as if hot air was rising off the ground beneath it. Then the wavering darkens and before long, Shiyoru appears. Akane sighs as Shiyoru gives her an idiotic grin.

Shiyoru : *"What's wrong now?"*

Akane : "Stop sneaking up on me like that! I could've gotten a heart attack!"  
Shiyoru : "I was not sneaking! I just made myself invisible and teleported behind you!"

Akane gives him an angry glare. Shiyoru's smile melts.

Akane : "Whatever it is, stop it. Oh, forget that. Nodoka wants us at the Dojo hall now."  
Shiyoru : "Whatever for?"  
Akane : "Just you wait and see. I promise a good show."

Shiyoru nods, and Akane waits while he picks up a garden hose and turns the tap on.  
As always, the change is quick and subtle. But as always, to Shiyoru's keenly trained senses, he can feel the changes as clearly as daylight reveals the floor. A tightening of the gi and sweater he wears, a slight airiness at the groin, hard arms softening, fingers smoothening and lengthening, hips fattening and reshaping. Something that while Shiyoru is used to always never fails to unnerve him, something that he has grown to live with.  
A wet onna-Shiyoru and Akane run towards the dojo hall.

-==-==-

In the hall, Nodoka is waiting for the two girls as Ranma fidgets besides her uncomfortably.

Ranma (C) : "Mom, I know you're doing this for my own good and Akane's good, but do I *HAVE* to learn how to *WALK* like a girl!?!?"  
Nodoka : "Yes, son. This has to be thorough enough so that you understand girls in general through and through, and therefore am able to relate to their problems, especially Akane."  
Ranma (C) : <No escape here.>  
Nodoka : "Ah, here they are now."

Akane and Shiyoru come running through the dojo's main door, and screech to a stop, leaving burn trails behind them.

Shiyoru (C) : "Yes, aunty Saotome? You called?"

Nodoka : "Shiyona, since you're Ranma's good friend, would you mind showing him how to walk like a girl?"

Shiyoru's jaw drops, her pupils and iris dilate to pinpricks. A bead of hugesweat forms on her head as she hears the request.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ahhh....."

Well, if there's one thing Shiyoru isn't able to impart yet, it's how to walk like a girl. Oh, sure, Porcelain managed to teach him, but he still gets embarrassed trying to teach others.  
(Alright, so guys and girls generally walk alike, but Nodoka has the so-called "perfect" way of walking in mind, to make sure the girl gets the most attention from the guys.)

Shiyoru (C) : <How am I going to get out of THIS one!?!> "Why not ask Akane? She's his iinazuke after all."  
Ranma (C) : "That tomboy? Can she walk like a girl?"

Shiyoru, Akane and Nodoka give Ranma withering glares, which she cringes under. A second after Ranma gets the Mallet on the head.....

\*blam\*

Everyone : "Huh?"  
Shampoo : "Nihao, Ranma!"

Shampoo comes walking through the wall of the Dojo hall, delivery box in hand. Akane sighs and wonders if Shampoo has ever heard of something called "opening the door". Shiyoru's mind immediately springs upon the answer. Shampoo walks up to Ranma and hugs her, not caring whether Ranma is a girl or not. Nodoka stares

daggers at Shampoo, whereas Akane takes a mallet out. (Some things never change, do they?)

Shampoo : "Ranma go on date with Shampoo today?"

Ranma (C) : "Guh! Shampoo! Get off me! I'm not dating you today, or any other day for that matter!"

But Shampoo seems undeterred. She goes on.

Shampoo : "Shampoo got cure for Ranma curse...."

Ranma (C) : "Use it on yourself, and tell me about it! Your cures are all ridiculously short-lived!"

Ranma thinks about the instant nannichuan powder she used once, then from then on, all the weird cures that Shampoo offered him and she so stupidly accepted. Well, no more. Shampoo looks hurt.

Shampoo : "This one for guys only."

Ranma (C) : "If this one turns my hair purple or gives me breasts as a guy, no thank you very much! Try it on a guinea-pig first!"

P-Chan growls at Ranma, and Akane has to hold him back to stop him from leaping.

Nodoka decides she's watched enough of this, and quickly steps in to help pull Shampoo off Ranma. Shampoo looks at Nodoka.

Shampoo : "Nihao, Saotome Nodoka."

Nodoka : "Nihao too, Shampoo. Please, you're disturbing Ranma's training."

Shampoo : "Training?"

Nodoka : "To be a girl."

Shampoo : "Aiyah! Why teach Ranma be girl!? Want Ranma be pervert?!"

Nodoka : "Because only then will he understand how a girl thinks, then he can treat Akane well because he'll understand her. It'll also teach him humility. Such are traits of a gentleman."

Shampoo : "Aiyah, just give Ranma to Shampoo and everything solved!"

Nodoka : "No. Ranma is Akane's iinazuke. You can be a friend, yes, but not his fiancee."

Shampoo considers asking Ranma out on another date at another time, preferably when his mother isn't around. She knows that Ranma will defend his mother if she attacked her anyway, so she picks up her delivery box and is about to leave via another wall when Shiyoru runs up to her and speaks in Mandarin, her voice smooth with the more familiar language.

(The main dialect of Chinese which most Chinese use. For their conversation, I shall omit the four pronunciation indicators to save time.)

Shiyoru (C) : "Shan Pu, wo you hua yao gen ni suo." (Shampoo, I need to talk to you.)

Ranma, Akane and Nodoka look at Shampoo and Shiyoru, wondering what is going on. Shampoo replies, her voice a musical lilting when speaking in fluent Mandarin. It sounds much better than her Japanese.

Shampoo : "You suo mo hao suo de ne?" (What is there to talk about?)

Shiyoru (C) : "Bai tuo ni jui sao jiao Luan Ma zhe mo xiang ge nu ren zou bu ba. Wo he Xiao Qian jiao bu liao ta, yi jin gou nan guo le."

(Please, at least teach Ranma to walk like a girl, ok? Me and Akane can't teach him to do so, which is bad enough.)

Shampoo : "Wei suo mo? You Xiao Qian zai wo cai guan bu liao na mo duo."

(Why? If Akane's involved, I couldn't care less.)

Shiyoru (C) : "Bai tuo ni lah. Zui sao wei Luan Ma zuo xiang ba. Ta ke neng bao da ni ne, sui zhi dao?"

(Please, Shampoo. At least think about Ranma. Who knows, he may repay you one day!)

Shampoo considers helping Ranma, if only for his own sake. She does love him after all. Nodoka, Ranma and Akane are all staring at them, wondering what is being said. However, Shiyoru's mind works faster than hers in one aspect. Shampoo is about to mouth her "repayment" when Shiyoru speaks.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ke shi you ge tiao jian." (But there are some conditions.)

Shampoo : "Suo mo tiao jian?" (What conditions?)

Shiyoru (C) : "Ni bu neng jiao ta li kai Xiao Qian, bu neng jiao ta jia gei ni. Ni zi neng jiao ta gen ni yue hui na zhong dong xi."

(You can't tell him to leave Akane, can't marry him. You can only ask him out on dates and such.)

Finally, she nods.

Shampoo : "Hao ba, bang jiu bang, ke shi yao ta bao da wo ah! Yao suo hua suan hua de ah!"

(All right, I'll help. But he'd better repay me somehow. You can't go back on your word!)

Shiyoru (C) : "Wo xian zai gao shu ta." (I'll tell him now.)

Shampoo nods again, and Shiyoru runs over to the three.

Akane : "What'd you two say?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, what DID you two say?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Well, I asked her to teach you how to walk like a girl." \*grin\*

Akane : "Amazing. What'd you say to do that?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Ranma owes a favor to Shampoo."

Akane & Ranma (C) : "WHAT!?"

Shiyoru just smiles and shrugs. She whispers into Akane and Ranma's ears.

Shiyoru (C) : "I couldn't teach Ranma how to walk like a girl for the world. Don't worry, I told her she could only ask you on a date and such related stuff. No leaving of Akane, etc."

Both of them look at Shiyoru like they want to Mallet her, but Shampoo walks up to Nodoka and tells her.

Shampoo : "Alright, Shampoo help train Ranma ai ren, walk like \*real\* girl."

Ranma (C) : "Can I at least eat the chow mien (this is the proper *hanyu pinyin* spelling actually) Shampoo most likely brought for me?"

But as if Ranma expected a "yes" for an answer, she reaches over for the box just in front of her and is smacked on her hand by Nodoka.

Nodoka : "You will not eat that, son. Not now. Girls don't eat like pigs."

Ranma has that look of surrender on her face, as if of all the things she had to endure, she had to endure *\*this\**!

Shiyoru and Akane take a seat at the side of the dojo as Shampoo and Nodoka set to helping Ranma out.

Shiyoru whispers into Akane's ear.

Shiyoru (C) : "Akane, I think this is a little too much, don't you?"

Akane : "I don't know, I'm having too much fun watching."

Shiyoru raises an eyebrow. Akane grins as she sees this.

Akane : "Yeah, it's a little extreme But what the heck, it's great to watch!"

Shiyoru has to agree on this though, and the two break out the popcorn as they watch.

Shampoo : "Ranma walk, must move hips."

Ranma (C) : "How'd I do that?"

Shampoo : "Ranma no pay attention to Shampoo when Shampoo walk?" (\*Hint, hint\*)

Ranma (C) : "Er... no."

Shampoo : "Ranma walk like this."

Shampoo gives Ranma a demonstration, which Shiyoru notes IS Shampoo's usual way of walking. Akane looks at Shampoo and wonders why it looks so strange. Ranma's face flushes red.



Ranma (C) : "Like that!?"  
Shampoo : "Yes."  
Nodoka : "Go ahead, son. Give it a try."  
Ranma (C) : \*gulp\*

Recalling how Shampoo did it, Ranma tries. Shiyoru and Akane fall backwards laughing as they see just how clumsy and exaggerated her gait is, while P-Chan rolls around on the floor, squeaking in laughter. Shampoo slaps her forehead and shakes her head, grimacing. Nodoka just covers her mouth and stifles a giggle.

Shampoo : "Aiyah! Not like that! Ranma walk too much!"  
Ranma (C) : "Sorry, Shampoo. It IS my first time."  
Shampoo : "BU yao zhou de NA mo kua zhang ma! Yao bai bai, zhen nan kan! Yao wen ding yi dian!"

Shampoo scolds Ranma in Chinese, as Shiyoru yells out the translation for her benefit.

Shiyoru (C) : "Don't walk so exaggeratedly! Hips swinging from side to side is really *crude*! You must be a little more subtle!"

Akane is still laughing, slapping her thighs as Ranma tries again, blushing beet red. Shiyoru takes a few deep, calming breaths as she observes Ranma this time. Shampoo claps her hands together as Ranma tries the second time, glad that at least Ranma knows when she's *\*wrong\**. Shiyoru nods at Ranma as she looks at her.

Shiyoru (C) : "Getting better! MUCH better than just now!"  
Ranma (C) : "Thanks a lot!" (Sarcastically, of course.)

For the next twenty minutes, Ranma is coached in the subtleties of walking elegantly as Shiyoru and Akane watch.

And learn.

Shampoo : "Ranma no swing arms back and forth like pendulum. Must make arms swing only until buttocks, then same distance in front."

Ranma (C) : "I'll try."

Shiyoru, having watched Star Wars© before, yells out a world famous quote in her best Yoda impersonation.

Shiyoru (C) : "There is no try!"

Everyone except Ranma grin at this joke, and the lesson continues.

-=-=-=-=-

Twenty minutes later.....

Nodoka : "There, I think you've got it right at last."  
Shampoo : "Now Ranma owe Shampoo date."

Nodoka shrugs, admiring Shampoo's skills in coaching Ranma well enough to allow them one *\*little\** date. As Shiyoru and Akane join them again, Shiyoru gives Ranma an apologetic look.

Shiyoru (C) : "Gomen, Ranma."  
Nodoka : "Well, Shiyona, what do you think we can do now that Ranma's managed to practice a little social skill?"

Shiyoru looks at the clock. It's nearly lunch.

Shiyoru (C) : "Does Shampoo mind dating Ranma now?"  
Ranma (C) : <What!?!>  
Shiyoru (C) : "If she doesn't, does she mind letting us come along?"  
Ranma (C) : <Whew.>

Everyone looks at Shampoo, who knows just how horribly wrong a date with Ranma can go if nobody else goes. She nods.

Shampoo : "Shampoo no mind."

Shiyoru (C) : "Well then, what about getting changed now and going out for lunch? We won't bother Ranma, of course. We'll just observe hi...her... and see what else needs to be worked on. What do you say, aunty?"

Nodoka, while at a very mature age and determined to improve Ranma's behaviour and attitude, simply grins in agreement at Shiyoru's suggestion... and intentional slip of tongue.

Nodoka : "Why not? And....."

Nodoka gives Ranma a mischevious look. Ranma takes it as a bad sign.

Nodoka : "I can teach her the finer points of making up, dressing up and of course..... social behaviour."

Ranma blanches. Shiyoru gives her a big grin.

Shiyoru (C) : "Come on, Ranma. It's not like you'll lose your identity when you wear makeup. You're not covering your face up when you use it. You're just.... enhancing it."

Ranma (C) : <Easy for you to say.>

Nodoka : "Come on, young lady. Let's go."

Ranma (C) : "Alright, mom." <Lady!? Me!?!>

Shiyoru looks at Akane as they leave, Shampoo with them.

Shiyoru (C) : "Noticed something strange about Ranma?"

Shampoo & Akane : "What?"

Shiyoru (C) : "She smiled."

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In Nodoka's (temporary) room, Ranma is standing by the door, twiddling her fingers. Nodoka is rumaging through the bags she had Soun bring over for her, looking for something.

Nodoka : "Now where could it be? I left it somewhere in here..... ah hah."

Nodoka pulls out a small, black case which Ranma has seen before in the possession of Akane and Shiyoru.

Makeup.

Nodoka : "Now, as a girl, you'll need to put this on when you go out. It makes you look nice and pretty."

Ranma (C) : "Do I have to?"

Nodoka looks at Ranma's face. Reluctance and unhappiness written all over it, Ranma is cringing at the small case of powder and pencil.

Nodoka : <Poor son. But he will learn to appreciate Akane and the others' efforts to look pretty, he has to. That slob of a husband has molded my son into the wrong figure of a man, and by the Gods, I will do my best to change that!>

Nodoka opens the case with a click. Ranma's ears scream in protest.

Nodoka : "Come sit here, Ranma."

Ranma quietly obeys. She sits in front of a dressing-room mirror, Nodoka behind her.

Nodoka : "Well, this was that makeup set I never got to give to Ranko, but you will do, right?"

Nodoka tries to brighten the mood up with that joke, but Ranma only scowls. Nodoka looks at Ranma in the mirror.

Nodoka : "You won't look pretty if you don't stop frowning."

Ranma seems to ignore that. Nodoka sighs.

Nodoka : "Son, I know you don't like this at all. I don't like this either, but if you're going to learn to live with your curse and Akane, you'd better do this for your own sake. Anyway, I know you pride yourself on your \*good\* looks."

Ranma's face smoothens a little. Nodoka nods.

Nodoka : "Good girl."

She opens the case and takes out an eye-liner pencil, moving in front of Ranma to apply some. She cringes away from the pencil, as if afraid to touch it. It is Nodoka's turn to scowl now.

Nodoka : "Ranma, be a man and be still! You don't have to like it, but just bear with it, alright?"

Ranma considers this. She nods. Nodoka smiles again, the scowl forgotten.

Nodoka : "That's my Ranma. After this, we'll see what you can wear....."

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Minutes later, Shiyona comes downstairs, dressed and ready. Shampoo is being entertained by Kasumi, who was taking the chance of rest to do a little reading and personal grooming. Shiyoru walks over to the table and sits at an empty side. She is wearing a collared elbow length shirt with chocker, knee length skirt and pantyhose.

Shiyoru (C) : "Shampoo, I hope you really don't mind us coming along."

Shampoo : "Is alright, Shiyoru. That makeup?"

Shiyoru touches her face, and nods. Shampoo looks at it for a while.

Shampoo : "Is nice, no?"

Shiyoru blushes a deep red at the unexpected praise.

Shiyoru : "Thanks, Shampoo."

Just then, Akane comes running downstairs, herself dressed and ready to go.

Akane : "Ranma's coming! Ranma's coming!"

Shampoo's face lights up and she stands, looking out for Ranma. She's expecting the female Ranma at any rate, Kasumi having told her what to expect. Soun and Genma are playing another game of Shogi, Genma having calmed down somewhat, and stop to look up at the arriving Ranma.

Kasumi : "Oh my, Ranma. You are pretty today."

-==--==-

Nabiki is in her room at that moment, snapping photos using cameras hidden all over the house via remote control.

Nabiki : "Kuno-baby'll pay triple for these, and so will the others I bet."

Nabiki allows herself an inward smile as she watches the events on a close circuit television, the camera having been well hidden.

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Back downstairs, Shiyoru is whistling in admiration while Shampoo looks at her ai ren up and down. (Ai ren means loved one.)

Shampoo : "Shampoo no know Ranma be so pretty."

Shiyoru (C) : "You can say that again, Shampoo."

Shampoo : "Why Shampoo can say that again?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Forget it."

Akane is looking at Ranma up and down as well, her only consolation is that Ranma isn't a real girl (mentally only), or else there would've been no fight as to who was the more kawai-i one.

Dressed in a blue collared long sleeved shirt with the front tails tied together at chest level, a red sports bra underneath, and fitting blue jeans, Nodoka has made sure Ranma's assets are shown off as much as possible without compromising decency. (*And that is some abdomen, I'll bet. -Ed.*)

Added to that, she's given Ranma some of her own somewhat expensive perfume to wear, as well as redoing her hair so that now a large portion of the hair on her head is pulled back to form a ponytail somewhere above the place where her hair stops growing, the rest of the hair in the front styled such that it hangs over and in front of her face in a fringe.

Shiyoru (C) : "Looking good there, Ranma."

Nodoka : "See, Ranma? Even your friend there says it's nice. Now cheer up, it isn't going to do you any good to keep looking at the floor like that. Nobody can see how pretty you are."

Ranma's eyes look up towards Shiyoru, who knows she's looking at her. Shiyoru nods.

Ranma lifts her head to let everyone look at her face.

Long, thick eyelashes, rich lips and accentuated cheekbones as well as a small amount of eye shadow make everyone's heart skip a beat. Genma nearly starts crying.

Genma : "My son is gone! I have a daughter!"

Shiyoru summons a pair of tongfers and walks over to bat Genma's head with them.

Shiyoru (C) : "Your son's still here, only better looking, you idiot."

Nodoka gives Genma an angry glare, blaming him for sculpting Ranma into Genma's own preconceived (and badly mistaken) image of a man. She gives him that "if-you-hadn't-done-this-it-wouldn't-have-happened" look. Genma considers hiding under one of the shogi pieces. Soun puts a hand in his face.

Soun : "Don't even think about hiding under the pieces, Genma. It's your fault anyway."

Then Soun starts crying, wiping his tears off with his sleeve.

Soun : "Boohoohoo! Why did you make Ranma end up like this? Now I have to put up with this girl-heir until your wife's done with him!"

Shiyoru looks at Nodoka, who gives her the go signal. She bats Soun on the head with her tongfers as well.

Shiyoru (C) : "Shut up, you two. Leave Ranma to us, and we promise he'll be a real man before long."

With that, they leave the Dojo on "Shampoo's" date.

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Somewhere in China, Happosai is cursing Shiyoru as he climbs out of the sea and onto a rock.

Happosai : "You useless disciple! You treat me so well, only to turn on me at the last moment!? You shall regret the day you tricked Master Happosai! I shall get even, I swear it!"

With that, Happosai falls face first onto the rocky beach, out cold.

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Somewhere back in Japan, Shiyoru suddenly feels cold as a "lightning bolt" strikes her through the head. She shivers uncomfortably, but nobody notices.

Shiyoru (C) : <Probably some sort of draft.>

They are walking down a street in Tokyo, amidst a crowd of busy Sunday Shoppers. True to their word, Nodoka, Akane and Shiyoru are keeping their distance as Shampoo and Ranma go on their "date".

Shampoo : "Shampoo so happy, finally get proper date with Ranma!"

Ranma (C) : <Only because Shiyoru made it so. Ah well, he was trying.>

However, Shampoo knows that while she does get to go out on the date, there were even more factors added into it. On the way towards the commercial center of Tokyo (Ginza), Nodoka was telling the two girls....

*Nodoka : "Now, you two. This is simply an outing, nothing more. Ranma, I will be watching you, and if there is aspect of yourself I find dissatisfactory, I shall train you in those areas, understand?"*

*Ranma (C) : "Yes, mom."*

*Nodoka : <Kami knows just how many other things about a girl Ranma is ignorant about.> "Good. Now don't disappoint me."*

*Ranma (C) : "I won't." <You know I won't.>*

*Nodoka : <What an irony I'm doing. I'm sculpting Ranma into a man by teaching him to be a girl!>*

So as Ranma walks with Shampoo, looking into shops selling dresses, frilly lingerie, men's clothes and designer brands, Nodoka notes each and every action her son/daughter makes, from the way she walks to the way she expresses herself visually, as well as the way other men pay attention to her. So far, she's satisfied.

Akane : "So how's Ranma doing?"

Nodoka : "Very well, actually."

Shiyoru (C) : "Really? Wow."

The two turn into an accessories shop for the modern teenage girl. Nodoka, Shiyoru and Akane all follow them in, acting as if they were another group of shoppers going about their own business. The place is tastefully decorated, and doesn't just sell jewellery. It also sells hairclips, affordable and good cosmetics (something you almost never find nowadays), and for those who are on a small budget or fear theft, cosmetic jewellery. Shiyoru and Akane are told by Nodoka to walk around and enjoy themselves while she keeps an eye on the two until they leave the shop.

Akane and Shiyoru are walking down an aisle in the shop, looking at a selection of chain bracelets. Shiyoru lifts one off the hook and examines it with a critical eye.

Shiyoru (C) : "This one's flawed. The chain link is warped and will break easily."

Akane comes over and looks at the chain bracelet. The chain links, being only a millimeter or so in thickness, are impossible to discern to her eye.

Akane : "How can you tell?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Chi enhanced sight."

Akane : "Herb taught you that?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Nope, taught myself that."

Akane : "Draining?"

Shiyoru (C) : "Not in short bursts, no."

Shiyoru takes out another bracelet and puts the flawed one back. This one she examines and nods in approval.

Shiyoru (C) : "This one's value for money. It won't break easily. And it fits my wrist just right too."

Shiyoru emphasizes that by wrapping the bracelet around her wrist. A perfect fit.

Shiyoru (C) : "You want one, Akane? Girl like you shouldn't be without a good choice of jewellery."

Akane : "Ah..... thanks, but....."

Shiyoru (C) : "What?"

Akane : "Well... these things are expensive."

Shiyoru (C) : "Not like they're made of silver or gold. This is an accessories shop, Akane, not a jewellery shop. The really expensive ones are over there."

Shiyoru points to the corner of the shop where there are two security guards armed with MP-40s and batons standing guard over the shop's gold and silver jewellery segment. Shiyoru looks at the price tags for the bracelet she's holding and covers her mouth with her fingers in surprise as Akane turns to look.

Shiyoru (C) : "Ooh, 3500 yen, you're right. It is a little steep. Then again, it is made of titanium. Come on, Akane. 3500 isn't that much a dent in my parent's bank account. Really."

Akane : "Oh, all right. Since you said so."

Shiyoru helps Akane pick out a bracelet as Nodoka continue observing Ranma, noting down any flaws in her son's female behaviour.

Nodoka : <I hope my son knows just how hard it is being a girl now.>

{I.C stands for Identity Crisis}

Back in China, Haposai has regained consciousness and is trudging down a dirt path into a village by the seaside. Stepping into the village proper, he sees a middle aged person dressed in a plain white t-shirt, shorts and a straw hat carrying a briefcase, calling out :

Salesman : "Magic magic, magic items for sale! Come come come and see my magic items for sale!"

Haposai gives the man a disdainful look, as if he were just another fake magic dealer. However, the salesman heads straight for Haposai the moment Haposai scowls, and looks at him.

Salesman : "Doubt my magic items, do you, Haposai?"

Haposai : "How did you know my name!? Have we met?"

The salesman laughs. He shakes his head.

Salesman : "No, we've not. But I can tell your identity because of the hat I'm wearing. It's magic, just like everything else on me."

Haposai : "Really. Tell me what I want now then."

The salesman looks at Haposai, rubbing his chin.

Salesman : "Hm... ah hah, what you're looking for is an I.C."

Haposai : "I see? What in the world are you talking about, young man!?"

Salesman : "No, not I see as in I see him, but I.C as in Identity Card."

Haposai : "Why would I want one!? I'm master Haposai, world renowned master of the Saotome school of Anything-Goes martial Arts! I need no identity card to prove who I am!"

Salesman : "True, but the person you want to take revenge on does. My I.Cs are guaranteed to work, or double your money back."

Happosai looks interested at the Salesman's correct guess at his need for revenge. He nods at the salesman.

Happosai : "Go on, then. Show me."

The salesman nods, and snaps his fingers. A table and two chairs of varying height appear, and as the salesman sits, he gestures to the taller seat.

Salesman : "Please, do take a seat."

Happosai sits, already amazed. The salesman sets the briefcase on the table and opens it. Then he sticks his hand straight into the briefcase, his arm following. Soon, his entire right arm is inside the briefcase when it should've been sticking straight out the other side as he rummages around for something. Happosai stares in amazement. Finally, the salesman looks satisfied as his hand closes around something. He pulls his entire right arm out of the suitcase and shuts it. Putting his briefcase back onto the floor, the salesman sets the card down on the table. Happosai looks at it. It is about the size of a typical Identity Card, but the details are blank. And outside of the usual name, sex, date of birth, nationality, Identity number and photo, it also includes likes and dislikes, friends (you can choose your friends but not your relatives [or family members], as the saying goes), and much more.

Happosai : "How does it work?"

Salesman : "Easy. Just say the name of the person you want revenge on first."

Happosai : "Shiyoru, Wong Shiyoru."

Instantly, on the card, Shiyoru's photo and personal particulars appear. The photo is of his male form, the sex mentioned with the letter "M/F" on it. Date of birth, place of birth, and everything else are also mentioned on it. Happosai nods in admiration.

Happosai : "Now what?"

Salesman : "I won't teach you anything else unless you pay me first."

Happosai : "How much?"

Salesman : "50,000 yen. I know you only have yen on you."

Happosai : "WHAT!?"

Salesman : "Well then, I guess I'll be taking the card back...."

The salesman is about to reach out and take the card back when Happosai's hand, full of cash, stops him.

Happosai : "All right, here's the cash. Now teach me!"

The salesman nods, and snaps his fingers. The money disappears into thin air as Happosai watches.

Salesman : "Now, you see this part here? The sex?"

Happosai : "Yes?"

The salesman flips the card over, and on the other side is even more information on Shiyoru, Jusenyko curse mentioned amongst them.

Salesman : "Hm... this one was a boy before he got cursed by... niangnichuan?"

Happosai : "Yes, and what a fabulous figure too!"

Salesman : "Hm.... alright, you see the bold lettering on the M?"

Happosai : "Yes."

Salesman : "This is the way his thinking is most of the time. Just think the area specifying the sex to select either pure male, pure female, cursed but with male thinking, or cursed with female thinking."

Happosai : "Really? Interesting."

Salesman : "There's more. Look at this place here."

Happosai : "Ah, the friends?"

Salesman : "Yes, special thing about my card, no? You can erase their names or change them as you wish, simply make sure the people whose names you mention exist. Just put a finger on the rectangular box and think of names."

Happosai : "Anything else?"

Salesman : "Several. First, the changes are instantaneous. Also, you can change the person you want to "alter", although the previous one afflicted will be returned to normal if you do so. The magic in the card responds to touch and thought. If you set the sex to purely male or female, the Niang/Nannichuan curse will either be permanent or rendered dormant indefinitely at the next change, although the card is unable to remove or change any other Jusenkya curse. And the final warning : If you lose the card, the person who finds it can either break it to end the curse you placed on whoever it is you cursed, or use it against you. Hold on tight."

Happosai : "I'll remember that."

Salesman : "Oh, and one more thing. The magic in the card is chaotic at best. Sometimes it'll affect only certain people's way of thinking, sometimes all of them. Anyway, good luck, old one."

And with that, the Salesman and the furniture disappears in a cloud of green smoke, dropping Happosai painfully to the floor. He looks up and around, then at his card and grins maliciously.

Happosai : "You're mine now, Shiyoru! Haa haa haa haa!"

Happosai laughs evilly, dark chi emanating from him.

=====

In Japan, Shiyoru's body is racked with convulsions as dozens of "bolts" run through her. Akane notices this and looks concerned.

Akane : "Shiyoru! Is something wrong!? Are you alright!?"

Shiyoru wraps her arms around herself to stop her shivering, then nods.

Shiyoru (C) : "I'm alright, Akane.... but for some reason I feel something is terribly wrong."

Looking at her concerned face, Shiyoru laughs and lets go of herself.

Shiyoru (C) : "Come on, Akane. I'm fine, honest! Come on, let's pay for these."

Akane : "All right."

And a good thing too. The moment they make their purchases, Ranma and Shampoo leave the shop, Nodoka following. They quickly put on their bracelets and run out to follow Nodoka. Nodoka is scribbling on a notepad the things that Ranma has to learn about female social etiquette.

Seeing the two girls following behind her, admiring their new bracelets, Nodoka calls them to her side.

Akane : "Yes, aunty?"

Nodoka : "Oh please, Akane-chan, call me Nodoka. You too, Shiyona dear."

Shiyoru nods, wondering if she should've just stuck with her original name. Nodoka holds out the notebook to the two of them, and they look.

Nodoka : "Do you think Ranma needs to improve on these?"

Akane and Shiyoru stare. On the notebook is written :

- Needs more subtle hand movements.
- Hands need to move more gracefully.
- Needs to rest hands in front of body instead of behind, or on hips.
- Needs more joyous expressions.
- Has to work on voice, sounds like a grinding stone or a train whistle at any given time.
- Has to learn to bend over properly.
- Has to learn to appreciate teddy bears.

Nodoka has noted a list of these and much more which would eat up another 200KB of .doc format if I continued.



Shiyoru and Akane quickly read the first page of notes and stare at each other, eyes bulging out.

Shiyoru (C) : "Akane...."

Akane : "Shiyo..na...."

Shiyoru (C) & Akane : "Er... Nodoka-san.... aren't these a *little* extreme?"

Nodoka : "Of course not! If Ranma has to appreciate the little things about a girl as much as you two appreciate the little things a boy has to do, he will learn these or die trying."

They stare at each other again, a "lightning bolt" running through their heads and raising hair due to static.

Akane : <Ranma's in it this time.>

Shiyoru (C) : <I should've left Nodoka outta this.>

Later, much later, the group of four girls are returning to the dojo, Shampoo having gone back to the Nekohanten after the date, happy and content. By this time, Nodoka is carrying four completely filled notebooks worth of flaws in Ranma's behaviour that even Akane couldn't spot. As they ride the (fairly empty) subway train back to the area nearest to the Tendou Dojo, Akane pores over one of these books, sweat forming on her head but never dripping. Shiyoru is reading another one, not only blinking in disbelief but also forming two beads of hugesweat on the back and left side of her head.

Ranma gets the feeling that if the training is going to last much longer, Nodoka'll have the chance to teach her how to deal with periods.

==--==--

Back in China, Happosai is trekking through the Bayankala mountains (near the Xinghai province), Mt. Phoenix clearly visible in the distance. He is cackling all the way and laughing at his good fortune (which is about to get better, if he has his way) while holding the card in his hands, looking at the changeable aspects of Shiyoru's life.

Happosai : <Naah, no changing of friends here. I wouldn't be able to fondle her anymore if I did.... no name changing either. No fun. Likes and dislikes? Later... Name?>

Happosai looks at the name, which reads :

Name :

(Wong) Shiyoru / Shiyona.

Happosai : <Nah, no fun. What would I like the most.....?>

Happosai mules over the problem when he suddenly thinks of the one thing he wasn't thinking of at that moment which he normally is thinking of all the time. He grins in his usual perverted way as the thought crosses his mind.

Happosai : <Ah hah! SEX!>

Happosai stops for a while under the shade of a plateau, staring at the specified sex of Shiyoru. He looks at the card and thinks of the change, and the words indicating Shiyoru's sex shimmer and change, showing what he wants.

"F"

He grins and cackles.

Happosai : "Hee hee! What a fun time I'll have with you, Shiyoru-chan!"

Unbeknownst to him, up on the plateau is a small, wooden hut. And outside that hut looking down the side of the ledge is a certain ponytailed figure, eyes gleaming but not because of the sun.

Porcelain : <Happosai-hentai? What's he doing here? What's that strange card.... and why does it have Yoru-kun's name on it?>

Porcelain breaks off the chi-enhanced sight skill before she weakens to the point of falling over the ledge and runs inside the hut, grabbing her backpack and yelling.

Porcelain : "See you later, old master! Yoru-kun's in trouble!"

-----

Back in Japan, Shiyoru is about to take a bath when a strange feeling washes over her. A sort of tingling sensation runs up and down her body as if static mixed with a hint of ticklishness just passed through her. She shivers a while, then shakes it off.

Shiyoru (C) : "Just a side effect of too much out-of-practice chi-usage today.... I think."

Shiyoru strips naked and walks into the bathroom.

Outside, Ranma is busy sweeping the floor as Nodoka begins erasing some of the pencil-written criticisms off her notebooks, narrowing down the list of dissatisfactions to a more reasonable dozen, the general categories of the points about onna-Ranma Nodoka finds dissatisfactory. (Onna = female/girl/woman)  
Nodoka calls out for her son/daughter, who walks up to Nodoka and sits besides her.

Nodoka : "Ah yes, now we can begin with your advanced training. It's nearly dinner, but I think we'll have enough time to cover advanced social etiquette."

Ranma (C) : "All right, mom."

Nodoka : "That's my girl. But first, take a bath."

Ranma (C) : "Ok."

Ranma gets up and walks towards the bathroom, glad to be able to revert to a man, even if for only a tiny period before resuming his training.

Ranma (C) : <And what strange and embarrassing training it is.>

Ranma opens the door to the changing room, then closes it behind her as she strips and tosses her clothes into the waiting hamper. She notes Shiyoru's clothes.

In the bathroom, Shiyoru has doused herself with some cold water and is scrubbing her face clean with a towel. Ranma walks in minutes later, similar thoughts on her mind. She sits down besides Shiyoru and splashes water on her face and commences scrubbing.

Shiyoru (C) : "Hi, Ranma. How's training?"

Ranma (C) : "Fine.... so far."

Shiyoru (C) : "Glad to hear it."

By now, the makeup has been scrubbed clean off Shiyoru's pretty face and she is currently lathering herself. Ranma watches, then decides to warm up first. She turns on the hot-water tap and waits while the tub fills up, rather quickly. Then she steps in and feels the change back to a man, revelling in the joy of being flat-chested again once more. Sitting in the tub to his neck, Ranma sighs in contentment.

Ranma : "It just feels so good."

Shiyoru (C) : "Yeah. Know what you mean."

Ranma nods, turns and smiles at Shiyoru. She suddenly begins to feel very warm, not just in the face but where it shouldn't be. Ranma doesn't notice. Shiyoru slaps herself mentally.

Shiyoru (C) : <What are you *\*THINKING\**, hentai!>

A few minutes later, as Shiyoru washes the last of the suds off her body, Nodoka calls Ranma's name.

Nodoka : "Ranma, Ranma dear? It's time to continue your training."

Ranma shrugs in the water.

Ranma : "So hard to enjoy more than a few minutes of manhood, hm? See you later."

Ranma stands up straight in front of Shiyoru and gets the shower head, splashing himself with cold water before drying off and leaving. Shiyoru feels *\*hot\** all of a sudden as she sees him stand.

Outside, Nodoka nods to Ranma as she comes and sits down besides her mother.

Nodoka : "Now then, I'll be teaching you the more subtle gestures and expressions of a girl... it's part of your social etiquette training."

Ranma (C) : "Yes, mom."

***\*SHRIEK\****

From out of nowhere, a scream echos throughout the entire neighbourhood. People are looking out their windows and such, wondering where *that* came from.

Ranma (C) : "It came from the bathroom! Shiyona! Mom, wait here!"

Ranma immediately turns and heads for the bathroom, Nodoka confused as to what just happened. Her brain begins to sort out what happened as Ranma speeds towards the bathroom. Ranma meets Akane, Kasumi and Soun outside the bathroom, attracted by the shriek to the bathroom.

With a sudden chill, Ranma remembers when she herself called out like that.

Ranma (C) : <It can't be chiisuiton! Herb swore never to use it on anyone again! Can't be Cologne! Haven't seen her in days! Not Shampoo for sure, she was with me...>

Ranma slides the door to the changing room open, then towards the bathroom door and opens it. Inside, Ranma stares at the scene before her. The scene is chillingly familiar, only this time in the bathtub full of hot, steaming water is onna-Shiyoru, half-submerged in the water and staring at her hands and the water. She turns around and looks at Ranma, eyes wide.

A coppery smell comes from the water, which is red in colour.

Ranma's face turns pure white as all blood drains from her face, realizing what might have just happened. Akane joins Ranma at her side, staring at the scene before her, knowing from experience what this is.

Akane : "Shiyoru's.... had a period?"

==--==

An hour later, Shiyoru wakes up on a futon, cool towel on her head. Her eyes open suddenly, shocking Ranma and Nodoka as they look at her with concern. Kasumi looks at Shiyoru and takes the towel off her head, soaking it again in a basin of cold water.

Kasumi : "You're awake, Shiyoru-kun."

Nodoka looks at her in concern, Ranma and Akane equally concerned. Ranma is male again after Nodoka called off the training for today, and is glad to be wearing his old clothes again, with his pigtail back.

Nodoka : "How are you feeling, Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru (C) : "... huh?"

Nodoka : "Ranma told me everything."

Nodoka sighs.

Nodoka : "Why can't you people just tell me anything outright? I feel cheated after being lied to so many times. Shiyoru, I know you are a good friend of Ranma's, and you're used to your curse, but what compelled you to hide from me like Ranma?"

Akane answers this for Shiyoru.

Akane : "Well..... we were afraid that if you thought Shiyoru was your son....."

Nodoka : "I see. Well now, what happened to you, Shiyoru?"

Shiyoru blinks, not knowing what happened an hour ago, but feeling relieved that she can be a guy again in Nodoka's presence. She shakes her head.

Shiyoru (C) : "I don't know.... I just remember getting into the tub.... a warm feeling *down there*, then.... this."

Nodoka looks at the others gathered in the room. Shiyoru notes that it's her room. They look back at Nodoka.

Nodoka : "Oh dear.... how do I put this?"

Ranma : "You had a period, Shiyoru."

Hearing this, Shiyoru's head feels like it was slammed by one of Akane's mallets. She suddenly feels dizzy again and nearly faints on the spot, had not Ranma caught her head.

Shiyoru (C) : "What.... was that?"

Ranma : "I know it's shocking... I'm as surprised.... you had a period."

Shiyoru blinks. Normally, this is an impossibility since the menstrual cycle for their cursed forms is reset everytime they change, and neither Ranma nor Shiyoru have stayed as a girl for more than two weeks. Also given that Shiyoru only changed that afternoon, this makes things even more perplexing. Shiyoru barely hears what Ranma is saying as she thinks about this.

Ranma : "...and furthermore, you didn't change back into your uncursed form."

Shiyoru (C) : "Wha....?"

Ranma : "Yeah, you heard what I said."

Ranma says this with more than a twinge of sadness and sympathy, easily detected in his voice. Shiyoru's mind is still working out what he said and connecting it with what happened earlier on.

-==-==-

On a private jet flying over Japan, a man is dialling into his handphone.

\*riing\* \*riing\* \*click\*

Voice : "Hello?"

Father : "Hi, sweetheart, it's me."

Voice : "Oh, hi darling."

Father : "Tell me, has our *daughter* Shiyona called you recently?"

Voice : "No, but considering where she normally goes on her trips, I won't expect one for another week."

Father : "Alright, thanks darling. Love you." \*smack\*

Voice : "Love you too, you big teddy bear."

\*click\*

Looking at his wallet, Shiyoru's father wonders what the photo of some guy he doesn't recognize is doing in his wallet.

At home, Shiyoru's mother is packing up her *daughter's* room, wondering just why her *daughter* would like such boyish things, like that poster of Porcelain (as a girl) hung over the bed or plastic DIY model of a robot instead of

posters of male celebrity (Pop singers, TV actors or otherwise) stars and soft toys despite her martial arts ways.

-=-=-=-=-

In the Dojo, Shiyoru is still coming to grips with herself, wondering what happened that would effect this... permanency of change. Nodoka looks worriedly at her son's friend, utterly distressed.

Shiyoru is pacing up and down the dojo hall, while Akane, Ranma, P-chan and Nodoka look at her, heads moving from side to side as they follow her.

It is raining outside, and raining heavily. The wind is heard howling and the thunder vibrates the floorboards under their feet, and the pattering on the roof of the dojo is almost deafening, defeating any chance of Dr. Tofu coming over to help diagnose her possible problem.

Nodoka : "Oh my goodness.... I know when Ranma told me about the times he got stuck as a girl, it was because of some strange water or skill. What would've done this to you?"

Shiyoru (C) : "I DON'T KNOW!"

Nodoka : "Would it be alright if I kept calling you Shiyona, dear? I'm too used to it."

Shiyoru (C) : "Please, go ahead. All of you can call me that. Sounds better...."

Shiyoru seems to parrot Nodoka's thought for a while, then keeps walking up and down the hallway. Akane looks at Ranma, who returns the look.

Akane & Ranma : <Since when did Shiyoru *want* to be called Shiyona?>

Just then, Kasumi calls out, using the two words Ranma most covets.

Kasumi : "Dinner's ready!"

Nodoka looks at Shiyoru...na.... worriedly as she keeps pacing back and forth, eyes trained on the floor. Ranma is already long gone, smoke the only thing he leaves behind. Nodoka stands up and taps Shiyona on the shoulder as she passes her.

Nodoka : "Shiyoru...na dear, I think we can solve this problem after dinner. It wouldn't do to starve yourself to death over this, would it?"

Akane walks over and joins Nodoka, concern written on her face in permanent marker ink since the bathroom incident. Shiyona forces a smile and nods.

Shiyona : "I think so."

At the table, Genma and Ranma are already competing with each other for the food on the table, Genma having forgotten his fear in lieu of his growling stomach. And, as a panda, that stomach growls *\*very\** loudly. As Nodoka, Akane and Shiyona make their way to the dinner table, Kasumi smiles.

Kasumi : "Glad you could make it. Here's your share."

Kasumi takes out three bowls of rice already topped with the food she's cooked for the night's dinner from under the table. Soun watches as Ranma stuffs his face, glad that at least Nodoka hasn't changed his appetite yet. Dinner is halfway through when something unexpected happens.

Voice : "YORU-KUN!!!!!"

The familiar voice rings out through the rain, and Shiyona immediately drops her chopsticks, staring into the inky blackness. Soon enough, a silver-haired, pony-tailed man comes running through the rain, backpack on, and positively dripping wet. Nodoka looks at the person and nods.

Nodoka : "Hello, Porcelain."

Porcelain (a.k.a Glass) drops his pack onto the front porch and stands there, dripping.

Porcelain (C) : "Hi, Sao.... hold on a minute, did you call me 'Porcelain' ?"

Nodoka nods. Ranma explains.

Ranma : "We told her everything."

Porcelain nods, then Kasumi appears besides her all of a sudden, towel in hand. Glass nods and dries himself off. (I shall be using Glass for Porcelain's cursed form, like Shiyona for Shiyoru, for the duration of the next chapter.)

Glass : "Thanks, Kasumi."

Kasumi : "Why don't you join us for dinner, Porcelain? There's still some food, I hope."

Kasumi looks at the two gluttons at the table sternly, and Ranma slaps Genma's paws with his chopsticks to stop him from gobbling up everything on the table. Ranma grins inwardly at the skill Nodoka taught him to keep unwanted hands away from either the food or his female body.

Glass nods, and walks over to sit near Shiyoru, although he doesn't touch the rice Kasumi offers him. Genma tries to take it, but both Ranma AND Nodoka slap his paw at the same spot with their chopsticks, causing a nasty welt.

Glass : "Yoru-kun, I think something bad is about to happen."

Shiyona : "It already did...."

Glass : "Oh no... what happened?"

Shiyona : "I... I can't.... can't....."

Shiyona tries to complete her sentence, but is overcome with emotion and starts to cry uncontrollably. Only Genma is completely unaffected by this outburst of emotion, instead tending to his painful welt. Glass and Nodoka try to comfort her.

Glass : "There now, Yoru-chan, don't cry! You're a man for goodness' sakes! What happened?"

But Ranma leans over and whispers into his ear after hearing this.

Ranma : "Shiyoru can't change back into a guy. We don't know why."

Glass's eyes widen as she hears this. He turns to Ranma, sitting just to her upper right hand corner at the table, and says very slowly.

Glass : "W....h....a.....t....?"

Ranma : "We don't know... but Shiyoru can't change back into a guy. She....he... even had a period for heaven's sake!"

NOW Glass begins to understand what that card Haposai was holding meant. The name, the sex, personal information, everything. Looking back at his "girlfriend", Glass clenches a fist, emitting a low, guttural, feral growl. He speaks between clenched teeth very slowly, each letter of each word dripping with deadly venom.

Glass : "Haposai. Hentai. shall. *PAY*."

A flash of lightning, the brightest and obviously the most impressive one to date, crashes down behind him and destroys the stone path from the main gates to the front porch, the shockwave and thunder vibrating glass and wooden boards alike. Soun starts crying as he tallies up the costs of repairing the damage.

Later that night, Glass is sitting in their temporary quarters besides a red-eyed Shioyna. His backpack is on the floor, contents strewn across the floor to dry. Glass is trying to find ways to comfort Shiyona, who is sitting with her knees tucked up to her face, head resting on them, sobbing. He slowly strokes her hair and speaks soothing words into her ears.

Glass : "Look, I'm sorry. But I know this has something to do with Haposai-hentai. We can find a cure."

Shiyona looks up, her crying temporarily halted. Glass notes the look of confusion on her face.

Shiyona : "What could he do to me? He... doesn't look like the sort who would do bad things to people."

Glass : <What in the world makes you think *\*THAT\**, of all things!>

-----

In the cargo compartment of a luxury liner, Happosai is cackling as he looks at his I.C's Likes and Dislikes section. His name has been erased off the dislikes and put onto the likes section. He laughs in his usual perverted way.

Happosai : "Ahh hee hee hee, now the real fun begins!"

-----

By now, it is bedtime for the residents of the Tendou dojo. Everyone, even Shiyona, is asleep. Everyone except Glass. Although Ranma, sleeping as he is, has uneasy dreams about his friend and is tossing and turning in his futon, as is Akane.

Glass is lying besides Shiyona, who is sucking on her thumb, a muscled arm across his forehead. His hair glitters in the faint moonlight as the stormclouds clear and let the moon out, its silver beams streaking across Nerima this calm night.

Glass : <When Happosai returns, I'll rip his head off his scrawny neck and use it as a football if he refuses to cure Yoru-chan. Or if he runs, I swear I'll chase him around the world if needed... Happosai-hentai, you're dead meat.>

Glass looks at the silver moon, his hair as silver as it. The light of the moon holds a certain mystical quality to it as Glass watches, the beams shining on Shiyona's blanketed form, shining on her face as she sleeps. Glass observes her features in the moonlight, which only serves to accentuate them.

Glass : <So beautiful... so cute.... what am I thinking? Shiyoru is a guy!>

Glass has the strange feeling in the back of his mind, a kind of buzzing, as if something was trying to fight its way out of his head. But with a few quick mental exercises, the buzzing fades, then dies off. Glass's face softens as he remembers that this is the first time Shiyoru has broken down in months, from the time he got cursed till now.

Glass : <Please, Shiyoru. Don't give up hope yet! You aren't that weak, are you?>

Just then, Shiyona stirs. Glass looks. He sees Shiyona's eyes slowly flicker open in the bright moonlight, then look straight at him. They are filled with strong affection. Shiyona speaks in a very soft, and very feminine voice. Glass looks surprised, but since Shiyona is directly opposite his face, the emotion is withheld as quickly as it appears.

Shiyona : "Glass-kun?"

Glass : "Yes, Yoru-chan?" <What are you saying, Shiyoru!? You've not called me kun before!>

Shiyona : "I'm scared."

Glass : "What of, Yoru-chan?"

Shiyona : "My change."

Glass : "Yes.... scary, isn't it, not being able to return to your original form...?"

Shiyona : "No.... I'm afraid of changing *back*."

Glass : <*WHAT!*?> "What are you *SAYING*, Yoru-kun!"

Shiyona : "I...I'm afraid of changing back into a boy."

Glass remembers the *\*only\** other time Shiyoru acted this way. It was when he got run over by a bus full force as a girl and losing all her memories when he...she... later woke up in a hospital as a girl. Never in the other five visits after that did this kind of thing happen again. Never in the total of four months travelling with him/her did it happen. Only now, near the end of the year, and the fourth visit to the Tendous' did it happen. WHY?

Glass : <Whatever it is you did, Happosai-hentai, you shall *\*DIE\** if Yoru-kun isn't restored, and soon.>

But instead of saying anything to Shiyoru/na, Glass just reaches over and gives Shiyona a kiss on the forehead, holding her in his arms and rocking her slowly back to sleep.

Glass : "I know you are, Yoru-chan... I know you are."

A tear rolls down Shiyona's cheek as she closes her eyes again.

-----

Just then, the (empty, fortunately.) luxury liner has docked to pick up passengers, and a small, perverted shadow hops out the cargo bay in the general direction of Nerima as it does so.

-----

{Happosai returns. Help wanted.}

Next morning, Glass is the first in the room to wake up. He realizes he's still holding Shiyona in his arms, although she's still fast asleep. In the faint light of dawn, Glass can see his "girlfriend's" features even more clearly. Without the magic of the moonlight, Shiyona is just as cute and adorable in her girl form, made more so with the thumb in her mouth.... again. Glass's first thought for the day :

Glass : <I have GOT to tell Shiyoru to stop sucking his thumb as a girl!>

But watching the face of his steady (a.k.a boy/girlfriend), Glass can't help but smile. The long lashed, blissful, thumb-in-mouth look is more than he can bear.

Glass : <You have to admit, she looks darn cute though.>

Then, slowly unwrapping his hands from around Shiyona, Glass gets up and stretches, yawning at the same time. He looks at the clock on the wall and notes that it's five in the morning.

Glass : \*yawn\* <Time to make breakfast for the guys. Gotta earn my keep.>

Glass opens the door quietly, and sneaks out, closing the door just as quietly behind him. Walking downstairs, he is surprised to see Nodoka and Ranma already hard at work in the kitchen making breakfast. He also spots Kasumi in the back yard doing the excess laundry that the washing machine can't handle, and that there is nothing for him to do. Except....

Picking up the earpiece from the phone's hook, Glass dials a number in. A very sleepy voice answers.

Voice : "Hello? This is Furinkan High. How can I help you?"

Glass : "Listen, Mei Qi. You know who I am, and who I'm with, don't you?"

Voice : "Oh, hi Porcelain. Back so soon? I suppose you'll want to announce your return to the class?"

Glass : "Listen, I've got a problem. I can't make it today, but Shiyoru will. Don't be shocked when you see her."

Voice : "Why's that?"

Glass : "Happosai-hentai just did something bad to her, now she can't change back. I'm going to find him and make him cure Shiyoru, alright?"

Voice : "Wouldn't it be more prudent simply to wait for Happosai to come raid the girls' locker room in school?"

That's Mei Qi, Glass's elder cousin from China who came over to Japan to work, for you. Always finding a way to get you to school and solve your problems at the same time. Well, not that Porcelain or Shiyoru need schooling anymore. They do their own studies when travelling, take private exams, and score well, effectively graduating past High school. Yet they still attend school whenever they're in Nerima, just to make sure they keep in contact with friends and spend some of their time learning things that aren't covered in the countries they visit.

Hearing this, Glass grins. He nods, but remembers to speak into the voice-pickup.

Glass : "You're right. I think I will."



Voice : "Wish you the best, cousin."

Glass : "Same here, biao jie." (Biao jie literally means Female Cousin.)

\*click\*

Glass walks into the kitchen, and starts looking for a kettle of hot water. He sees Ranma-chan cooking another kind of breakfast under Nodoka's stern supervision, and decides not to bother them. Instead, he simply takes the kettle of water so conveniently boiling over a stove and douses himself with it before putting it back onto the stove. Flicking her wet ponytail out behind her, Porcelain notices something else about Ranma. Her jaw drops straight to the floor.

Porcelain : <A school DRESS!? Did Happ.... oh yeah, Nodoka's training.>

Porcelain grins as she remembers Nodoka telling her about Ranma's training before they retired for the night, with a complaining Ranma behind her. She also remembers the exact same idiotic grin she flashed Ranma before going to her room, Ranma scowling before being told by Nodoka that it wasn't ladylike. Glass was laughing all the way upstairs.

Porcelain : <Well, there's nothing for me to do now.>

Just then, Akane walks downstairs, yawning. Porcelain walks out the kitchen and meets her at the bottom of the staircase. She notices Akane is in her jogging gear.

Porcelain : "Ohayo, Akane."

Akane : \*Yawn\* "Morning, Porcelain. What's the time?"

Porcelain : "6:00 in the morning."

Akane : "hmmmm.... just right my jog."

Porcelain : "Mind if I join you?"

Akane : "Go ahead. I'll wait.."

Porcelain quickly runs back to the room and gets changed, and seeing Shiyoru(na) hasn't woken up yet, gives her a quick peck on the cheek and runs downstairs to meet Akane.

Akane : "Let's go."

They jog. Kasumi bids them a safe journey as she collects the previous day's washing. Jogging out the gates, Akane and Porcelain discuss their plans for the day.

Akane : "Notice how strange it is today?"

Porcelain : "Why's that?"

Akane : "Both Ranma and Shiyoru are now more or less girls, one way or the other."

Porcelain : "Yeah, but Shiyoru-kun's case is different."

Akane : "I know... if only we could find out what happened."

Porcelain : "Something strange happened last night."

Akane : "What?"

Porcelain : "Yoru-kun told me he...she... was afraid of changing back into a boy."

Akane : "WHAT!?"

Porcelain : "It gets worse. S...he also referred to me as 'kun'! S...he's never done that before, not even to tease me!"

Akane : "This is bad."

Porcelain : "I'm sure Happosai has something to do with this. He was holding some card with Yoru-kun's name on it. I saw him in China. Teleported straight to Nerima with the usual long-distance inaccuracy of the skill."

They are jogging back to the Dojo after having completed the first half of the circuit, past a public bathhouse where men and women alike are walking into it for a morning bath before work. Suddenly, screams erupt from inside. Female screams. A familiar and hated voice comes from the same general area.

Voice : "Haa haa haa, hello my beauties! Missed me?"

Women : "Eaaaaahhhh!"

Voice : "Haa haa haa! I'm going to enjoy myself later too.... when Shiyoru-chan's glad to see me back!"

Porcelain and Akane come to a dead stop immediately. Sounds of tubs being thrown and the old man's laughter come through the window of the bathhouse. Porcelain's eyes glow red for a second as she has only one thing in mind for Happosai. (Or Happosai-hentai, as she prefers to call him.)

Death.

Both Porcelain and Akane nod, and run into the bathhouse, coins flying the confused cashier's way. Inside, the scene is indeed chaos as Happosai hops amongst the crowd of (formerly) bathing girls, fondling here, feeling there. The girls do their best to keep him away, to no avail.

Porcelain : "HAPPOSAT-HENTAI!"

As Happosai is flying straight towards a particularly frightened woman, Porcelain yells out his nickname. He stops in mid air and lands on his feet, turning around. He spots Porcelain and grins happily.

Happosai : "Well well well, if it isn't Porcelain, Shiyoru-chan's.... friend."

Porcelain : "Whatever it is you did to Yoru-kun, change him back NOW!"

Happosai : "Haa haa haa! No way! I'll enjoy groping Shiyoru-chan.... after this!"

Porcelain clenches her fists. Akane gets ready to fight if needed. All the terrified women are now sneaking out as Happosai's attention is diverted, getting their clothes and leaving post haste. Happosai looks around and begins to cry.

Happosai : "Boo hoo hoo! My pretties! Where are my pretties!? Oooh! You two let them out of my loving grasp?!"

Happosai looks at them, tears in his eyes. He leaps straight for Akane, tears streaming.

Happosai : "Let your dear old grandpa cry in your chest for a while, Akane! I'm so sad!"

Akane : "No way!"

Akane is about to give Happosai a straight kick into the sky when a silver streak stops her. When Akane stops shielding her face from the streak, she sees Porcelain in front of her, on fire. No, not on fire, but with the Combat Manifest Chi, a permanent combat aura. Porcelain's one burns bright silver. Akane notes the empty bucket in..... his hand.

Glass : "Get through me first, Happosai-hentai."

Happosai, halfway in mid-flight and too surprised to do anything about it, slams right into Glass' barrel chest. He slides off it, squishing onto the floor before getting up.

Happosai : "Well, if you're so determined to help Shiyoru-chan, get me first! hee hee, way hay!"

Happosai hops over the wall, laughing. Akane watches as Glass gives chase, seemingly running up the wall.

Glass : "COME BACK HERE!"

Akane, alone now, stares in front of her, at the empty baths. She sighs and shrugs, looking back at the place both men disappeared over, and to the empty baths again.

Akane : "Now what?"

-=-=-=-=-

As Happosai jumps over the wall, he remembers to move further up before landing or fall into the pool just below. Glass doesn't know that and watches as the water rushes up to meet him.

\*slosh\*

Porcelain emerges from the water, her chi fires still burning bright, and gives chase to Happosai again, spitting curses (and water) at him.

Porcelain : "KISAMA HAPPOSAI! Come here and fight!"

Happosai : "Who hoo! Only if you can catch me!"

Porcelain chases Happosai out the room, much to the disappointment of the bathing men.

Outside, Happosai passes Akane as she walks out the women's side of the bathhouse, Porcelain trailing. She runs out after them and spots them heading straight towards the dojo. Akane is glad she didn't consider that bath as her sweat pours freely down her cheeks as she strains to catch up with the two.

In the Dojo, it is already 6:25 AM, and both Genma and Soun are playing Shogi, Genma unable to practice martial arts with his son today, who will be taught how to treat obnoxious boys in school as well as brushing up on his social etiquette.

"Haa haa haa! What a haul, what \*A\* haul!"

Soun : "Saotome-kun, is that our master?"

Genma (C) : "I don't think so. Let's go on playing."

Soun : "Right."

\*bonk\*

Happosai : "Hello, you two disciples! Missed me?"

Happosai is standing on Soun's head, shogi pieces scattered by the sudden drop of Soun's head. Happosai is holding a bag filled with his little "treasures" on the way back to the dojo. Soon after, Porcelain (still with her chi aura) bursts through the door, leaving splinters in her wake as she chases the old man out the compound again. Akane comes running in a moment later, panting for breath and sweating freely.

Akane : \*huff\* "That was.... \*huff\* some jog!" \*wheeze\*

Soun pulls his face out of the shogi board and looks at Akane, who is walking towards the house. She looks concerned, but knows there is little she can do for Porcelain. Akane just walks past the two fathers to take a bath and plan her next moves to help Shiyoru as Ranma walks out the kitchen. Akane stares at her. She asks disbelievingly.

Akane : "A dress?"

Ranma (C) : "Nice?"

Akane : "Yeah, very. The old man's back."

Ranma (C) : "Really?"

Akane : "He is the cause of and cure of Shiyoru's condition. We gotta found out how."

Ranma (C) : "Later. That old man's easy to fool. Out think him, not out fight him."

Minutes later, Porcelain, dirtied and panting, walks back into the dojo, a dejected look on her face. Akane looks concerned and runs into the lawn to help steady Porcelain.

Akane : "What happened, Porcelain!?"

Porcelain : "That baka dropped me into a hole at the construction site. By the time I clawed my way out, he was gone."

Akane : "Cheer up, Porcelain. You can't get him alone. We'll help."

Porcelain smiles at Akane and nods. Akane helps Porcelain to the bathroom to clean up as Ranma returns to the kitchen, finishing up breakfast.

-=-=-=-

En route to school, all four girls are walking on the sidewalk side by side, each wearing the school uniform of Furinkan high. (and also a half dozen or so schools around Japan, actually.)

Ranma (C) : "I still don't understand why I have to wear this stupid *dress, bras and panties!*"

Akane : "Because your training has to be thorough."

Ranma (C) : "I don't understand why I have to wear MAKEUP to school! I don't see Akane wearing any!"

Porcelain : "Well, I guess that's because you look lovely in makeup, Ranma."

Ranma (C) : "No I don't!"

Shiyona : "Denial is a sign which actually tells us just how much you DO like it, Ranma-kun."

Well, while Shiyoru is now basically a full-fledged girl, she still remembers everything unlike the last time. She's still helping Ranma out with his training, she's still giving advice and support, although no more than Akane is, and still acts quite normally, although she has more than a healthy helping of feminine responses to certain situations.

The only thing now is, she's a real she. And with that comes a slight sense of loss to her. And to the others, her somewhat unnerving new way of her addressing people. But for now, all four of them have put Happosai aside and are trying to deal with Ranma.

Ranma (C) : "Bah, does that mean Akane doesn't look good even if she puts on makeup?"

Akane : "Ranma...."

Akane and Ranma exchange glares. Porcelain puts a hand between their lines of sight to break the lightning being traded between the two. Static runs through her hand and she gives the two a stern look.

Porcelain : "Ranma, that's not nice of you. You *are* being taught to appreciate what girls do to appear like in front of guys. Besides, it's only the tiniest bit. Akane wears some on occasion."

Akane : "Yes I do."

Ranma (C) : "Never noticed."

Akane : "....."

Shiyona quickly grabs Akane's mallet before it can come flying over to Ranma's head and crushes it into sawdust, surprising all present.

Shiyona : "Really, you two! You're engaged, for goodness' sakes! Can you two get along nicely.... please?"

Shiyona winks at the two of them innocently. Ranma and Akane nod, a grin spreading over their faces as the Shiyoru they know is there in that body.... most of him/her anyway.

They reach school with time to spare (it's quite a trend nowadays. You should too.) and walk straight in. As expected, Kuno is standing there, waiting. He has a rose in his mouth and takes it out to speak to the arrivals as they walk through the gate.

Kuno : "Ah, the beautacious Pigtailed goddess, coupled with the fair maiden Akane as well as the strong willed, pure soul of Porcelain and the innocent beauty of my lovely Lady of Fire.... all so unfortunate as to fall under the spell of that dishonorable villian Saotome Ranma, who has ensnared your free-wills....."

\*squish\* \*squish\* \*squish\*

Akane, Porcelain & Ranma (C) : "Can it, Kuno."

Shiyona decides not to squish poor Kuno's face like the other three in front of her. No, she waits until Kuno is looking at them, dazed, before a tongfer adds the final mark to his face. As he reels back, incoherent now, Shiyona 'O's her mouth and puts the tongfers back into Hammerspace, a look of concern on her face.

Shiyona : "I hope I didn't hit him too hard."

They all look at Kuno, who has walked into a tree and is now lying out cold beneath it, and either smile, grin or giggle.

All : "Naah."

-----

In class, Ranma can't help but notice. Notice that everyone has noticed her and are mumbling amongst themselves. But, as Nodoka taught her, she simply ignores the gossip going around and keeps on writing down what the teacher says, using the new notebook Shiyoru got for her with a stern warning. It is the maths lesson right now, and Miss Kitano is explaining the mathematical formulas of Tangents and Angles.

Kitano : "Now, the Tangent is not just a symbol used for calculating angles and lengths in triangles, but also a straight line running across one, and only one, point on the circle...."

Ranma dilligently scribbles this down, as do the others who are either smart enough to take down notes or simply don't care about what Ranma looks like right now.

\*poc\*

A small paper ball hits Ranma in the head, almost getting caught in the ponytail that replaced the pigtail. Nodoka had Ranma redo her hair in the same way the previous day by herself, making sure she got the height of the ponytail and the amount of fringe right. Ranma ignores it.

\*pic\* \*poc\* \*pic\* \*poc\*

Ranma wants to get up and scream at the offender to stop it, but stops herself at the last moment. She turns around to see who it is who is tossing the paper wads, only to find one hitting her nose. She looks and sees Hiroshi looking apologetic and raising a hand to his head in a sort of "apologetic salute". He tosses a large paper ball, which she quickly grabs and reads under the desk. One useful trait of a skirt.

*"Lookin' good there, eh, beautiful? Nice dress. You coming in one everyday from now on? Oh, and nice makeup. Glad to see you're doing something useful about that curse. =O)"*

Ranma tosses Hiroshi a glare and quickly returns to her notes. Hiroshi shrugs to Daisuke and they continue their usually unnoticed message-talk. However, this time they're not as lucky. As Daisuke reaches under the table to take the paper from Hiroshi, Kitano spots them.

Kitano : "Hiroshi, Daisuke, outside. Sharing of notes is not allowed in class."

They start mumbling and walk out, giving Ranma a cheery look as they pass by her. She blushes for some reason.

-----

Soon, it is P.T. , the time most dreaded by girls around Furinkan, for it is the time of the lecherous of lecherous, perverted of perverted, hentai of hentai (*We get the idea, go on. -Ed.*)(Oh, all right.) old man, Happosai to make his appearance.

It is also the most anticipated time for a certain raven-haired, ponytailed girl. Using enhanced chi speed, she is the first to get dressed in the locker.

Looking around, she sees Akane explaining to the other girls what Ranma and Shiyoru are doing in the locker, and they all nod. Ranma is turning a furious hue of red as they start complimenting her.

Hanai : "Nice bra, Ranma. Your mom buy it for you?"

Yoi : "You did your own hair?"

Minako : "Don't worry, Ranma. We're behind you all the way."

Ranma (C) : "Thanks....."

Shiyona looks at Ranma's face and nearly laughs out loud. Instead, she settles for a very long giggle. Akane and

Porcelain grin at each other as well, knowing what kind of embarrassment Ranma has got to feel being treated like a real girl. Shiyona is still giggling, through a grin now, as one of Ranma's classmates come up to her, a latecomer and therefore not informed of the situation at hand.

Mizuko: "Hi... do you have any spare pads?"

Shiyona : \*giggle\* "What?"

Mizuko : "Pads, you know, when you have a period."

Shiyona suddenly stops giggling and looks at Mizuko with a serious face before turning back to her (temporary) locker.

Shiyona : "No."

Mizuko shrugs and walks off to ask someone else. Everyone else in the locker suddenly loses their mirth and look at Shiyona, pulling on her red shorts. Akane looks worried.

Akane : <Aw, NO! Not NOW!>

Strange though, why the I.C gave Shiyoru(na) an instant complete menstrual cycle the moment the magic took hold. Maybe it wanted a fresh start?

Back in the locker room, all the girls have finished changing and are leaving the lockers, all of them apparently glad that Happosai hasn't come. All except Akane, Ranma and Porcelain. For once in their lives, they want the old man to appear. As Porcelain walks, reluctantly, out of the room, she is gritting her teeth. Between the sounds of stone grinding, Akane talks to Porcelain.

Porcelain : "That damned pervert hasn't come yet!"

Akane : "Maybe he's avoiding you."

Porcelain : "He should. If I get my hands on him for...."

Akane : "Later. We'll look for him later. And this time, we'll get some help."

Ranma (C) : "Look where that got me last time."

Akane : "Ranma! Shiyoru was only trying to help!"

They walk to the baseball field in school, their coach waiting. Same coach Isha, waiting for the same students with the same impatience.

Coach : "Alright, class! Hurry up and gather!"

They do so, and the baseball game begins.

-----

After school, everyone is rushing home. Well.... not everyone. One small group is making its way towards Neko Hanten, the Cat Cafe. Since the time Mizuko mentioned.... you know what.... Shiyona has been unusually quiet, in class and now. The only thing she is doing is staring at the floor as she follows the group. Everyone notices, yet try not to make contact with her yet. Their only objective now is to enlist the help of as many dependable people as possible. So far, Ukyo has agreed to help track down the old freak and bring him in if possible. They see the cafe in the distance, the Dojo a short way down. Ranma nods to Akane and they walk in. Shampoo is busy putting down plates of ramen and beef noodles when the door opens and the bell above it rings. She speaks without turning.

Shampoo : "Welcome to Neko Hanten."

And when she does, seconds later, she is overjoyed to see Ranma.... her joy melting into something reminiscent of surprise when she sees the dress Ranma is in.

Shampoo : "Aiyah! Why Ranma dress like that! Shampoo thought training only one day!"

Ranma (C) : \*sigh\* "Shampoo, don't you ever bother to listen? Oh, forget that. Listen, we need some help."

Cologne comes hopping up to Ranma and the group when she hears what is going on. She scrutinizes Ranma closely, Ranma scowling at her.

Cologne : "Well, Muko-dono, looks like your mother's doing a good job of training you. Maybe now you'll understand Shampoo's efforts to win your heart and marry her."

Ranma and Akane give Cologne a cold glare, icicles forming in the air.

Ranma (C) : "Can it, old ghoul. We need help for our friend."

Cologne : "Really. Well then, take a seat and we'll see what we can do."

They manage to enlist Shampoo's help to find the old hentai, Mousse coming along. Ranma wonders why the sudden generosity.

-----

On the way home, Porcelain is talking to Ranma while Akane chats up Shiyona(ru), hoping to raise her spirits.

Porcelain : "Ranma?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, Porcelain?"

Porcelain : "Do you think Happosai will cure whatever it is he's done to Yoru-kun?"

Ranma (C) : "I don't think so. Shiyoru's always had a bone to pick with that old man."

Porcelain : "Yeah, everybody does."

Ranma (C) : "You've not seen them the first time they met. Everyone could feel their animosity as hot chi, even non-martial artists."

Porcelain : "That bad, huh?"

Ranma (C) : "Added to the fact that Happosai probably wants to.... touch.... Shiyoru....."

Porcelain : "Yeah.... you know, ever since Yoru-kun couldn't change...."

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, I know. I noticed too. Shiyoru's definitely not himself."

Porcelain : "Has to be that old man. Question is, what did he do!?"

Ranma (C) : "If we knew that, we'd already be finding the cure."

-----

In a dark room in the Tendou Dojo, Happosai is looking at his card. He is grinning.

Happosai : "What to change, what to change?"

-----

Upon reaching home, Shiyona goes straight to the bathroom, still not saying a word. Not even Akane could get her to say a word. The best response she got was either a nod or a shake. Nodoka is standing there, waiting for Ranma.

Nodoka : "Welcome back, daughter."

Ranma (C) : "....."

Nodoka smiles.

Nodoka : "Just kidding. Welcome back, son. Ready to continue?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, I guess so."

Nodoka looks at Akane, having asked her before to keep an eye on Ranma and comment on whether Ranma had performed satisfactorily or not. Akane nods. Nodoka smiles, then notices everyone there looking a little bit sad.

Nodoka : "I'm sorry about what Happosai did to Shiyona dear, but there's nothing we can do now. Besides, she seems to be doing well."

-----

In the bathroom, Shiyona is in a bathtub full of steaming hot water, crying. Crying and crying hard.

-----

{Troubles.}

\*knock\* \*knock\* \*knock\*

Porcelain : "Shiyoru? Yoru-chan? You there?"

Porcelain is knocking on the door of the bathroom, Kasumi and Akane standing besides her. For the past half hour or so, Shiyona hasn't come out of the bathroom, and this worries them.

\*knock\* \*knock\*

Porcelan : "Please, you're making us worried."

The door suddenly opens as Shiyona, dressed in some fresh clothes walks out. Everyone can see the telltale signs of crying on her face, and this only makes them more worried, not less.

Shiyona just looks at them, then leaves. Porcelain runs out to follow as Akane and Kasumi leave in another direction to do their own things, silently wishing her the best.

Upstairs, Shiyona opens the door to her room and steps into the dark room.

Voice : "Well well, looks like you've returned."

Shiyona : "Who are you?"

Voice : "Don't you recognize me?"

Shiyona : "No."

The lights come on and Shiyona sucks in her breath. Happosai is standing there, back facing her. She feels a slight attachment to him for some reason.

Shiyona : "Yes, Happosai?"

Happosai : "Would you mind letting me hug you?"

Shiyona : <Of course I mind!> "No, I don't."

Happosai : "Now?"

Shiyona : "If you wish."

Happosai : "Why?" <Yes, yes! The card is working!>

Shiyona : "Because I pity you."

A lightning bolt goes through Happosai. He turns around, shocked.

Happosai : "What?! What did you say?!"

Shiyona : "I pity you."

Happosai : "EXPLAIN!" <What is THIS!? I thought she LIKED me!>

Shiyona : "You're old, and ugly. Nobody likes you, and wants to be with you. That's why you bring yourself to them. That's why I pity you. You're lonely. I feel your pain."

Happosai : "Pity me!? NOBODY pities master Happosai!"

Shiyona : "It's because of this that I let you hug me. You need the affection. I don't mind giving you that."

Happosai is staring at Shiyona, looking so calm. Her eyes are no doubt red from crying, but there is a serenity in them, one that wasn't there since she lost her memory.

Happosai doesn't care. He grins.

Happosai : "Come then, come to grandpappy! haa haa!"



He leaps.

\*KAPOW\*

From out of nowhere, Happosai is flattened by an invisible force. And invisible it is, because as soon as he drops to the floor, a shimmering appears in the air, followed by Porcelain. Anger is written on her face. Anger and the need to cure it. She picks Happosai up by the collar and stares him in the eye.

Porcelain : "Hentai! Whatever you did to Yoru-kun, you'd better undo it or else."

Happosai : "Or else what, *boy?*"

Porcelain has never been a favorite of Happosai. Mainly because Shiyoru protects her, and also because she does a wonderful job of turning Happosai into mush most of the time. Instead, he takes every opportunity to taunt and tease her about her weakest point. Her sex.

Porcelain just gives him an evil smile.

Porcelain : "We do it the hard way."

As Nodoka and Kasumi are teaching Ranma the advanced methods of stitching and sewing, a scream comes from upstairs. Soun and Genma, both lazing around, suddenly sit up.

Genma : "The master!"

Soun : "He's in trouble!"

Genma & Soun : "Let's leave him in trouble!"

Nodoka, Kasumi and Ranma look up, then look at each other. Life has never been quiet with those two guests around, this visit particularly so. They run upstairs, meeting Akane and Nabiki at the door.

Ranma (C) : "What was *that!*?"

Akane : "I'd like to find out."

They open the door.

Kasumi : "Oh my."

-----

Somewhere in the air, high above Japan, someone is flying.  
More precisely, he is on a flying carpet which is flying, having just bought it in Arabia on a business trip.  
Even at this altitude, the person sitting on the carpet can hear a scream below him, and he knows where it is from.  
He chuckles, knowing what is going on.

Salesman : "Silly me, I forgot to mention your wishes are never granted the way you expect them to be."

-----

In the room, Happosai has been chained to a lead block the combined efforts of Ranma, Ryoga and everyone else in Nerima would be hard pressed to even lift a millimeter off the ground. Strangely, the floor of the Tendou Dojo is sturdy enough to support the massive weight without problem. Nabiki notes the repair company which did the patching up there once.

Nabiki : <It's not only cheap, it's good!>

Happosai is straining against this block, desperately trying to reach something. Something which Porcelain is holding. He is just out of reach.

Happosai's most treasured bra, one that has some sentimental value to him. (Even though it was stolen? Yeah.)

Happosai : "You wicked wretch! Give that back to me!"  
Porcelain : "Make me."

Everyone looks at them, Shiyona included, all of them surprised and silently applauding Porcelain's handiwork. Happosai strains against his chains, but fails. He slumps backwards in tiredness. Ranma notes this and grins evilly. To everyone's surprise, Ranma calls out most femininely.

Ranma (C) : "Oh, Happosai...."

Ranma slowly unbuttons her shirt, and Happosai's eyes widen. He immediately tries again to leap towards her, but the lead block holds firm. Ranma quickly buttons up again.

Ranma (C) : "How do you like it now, Happosai?"  
Porcelain : "Oh, *so close, yet so far.*"

Porcelain looks at Happosai as he stares forlornly at the most treasured bra he's ever had. (Stolen, most undoubtedly.) His eyes mist over in tears.

Happosai : "How could you do this to your own master, Ranma!?"  
Ranma (C) : "Simple. I'm not. You're not my master, freak."  
Happosai : "What did I do wrong to deserve this?" \*boo hoo hoo\*

Shiyona looks concernedly at Happosai, then walks over and squats in front of him. He looks up.

Shiyona : "You have been a bad man."  
Happosai : "Can't an old man enjoy his last few years?"  
Shiyona : "Is there no other way?"  
Happosai : "Girls are my life."  
Shiyona : "I pity you."

Shiyona gets up and walks away, while Happosai watches Porcelain pack up their stuff in the room and move out, the rest of the household following. The door closes behind Soun, who gives his master a final look, then leaves.

Happosai : "No..... don't leave me....."

An hour later, the door opens a crack. Happosai, now slumped against the lead block, looks up. Someone steps in.

Porcelain : "Shiyoru's forgiven you for cursing her. She asked me to let you go."  
Happosai : "What?"  
Porcelain : "You don't have to cure her if you don't want to, but any more monkey business and you're sleeping with the fishes."

Porcelain walks over to undo the chains she used to chain Happosai to the lead block, and Happosai quickly skips outside as soon as she does, laughing.

Happosai : "Haa haa! Happosai strikes again!"  
Porcelain : "Bastard just won't learn."

Downstairs, Shampoo, Ukyo, Ryoga and Mousse are sitting at the table, busy sipping the tea Kasumi has served them. Akane is with them, talking. Shiyona is sitting there, quiet.

Akane : "Sorry to disturb you all, but we've managed to find the old man."  
Ryoga : "Reminds me of the time Ranma got stuck as a girl by Herb."  
Akane : "Yes, but this time we don't know what Happosai did, and he most certainly won't tell us."  
Shampoo : "Shampoo no like pervert."  
Shiyona : "Please, he's not that bad, just misguided."

For the first time in the entire hour they've left Happosai in the room, Shiyona speaks up. Everyone turns to look.

Shiyona : "I guess he's just upset with me in some way if he doesn't want to cure me."

Akane : "Yeah, upset with what?"

Mousse : "I don't think he has to be upset with anyone to curse them. Especially like this."

Mousse gives Shiyona a somewhat apologetic look for having caused her curse in the first place, realizing what he meant also applied to himself. Shiyona nods at Mousse.

Shampoo : "Shiyona friend, like everyone else. We help."

Ukyo : "Yeah, sugar. But how are we going to get the old man to...."

Suddenly, Ukyo spins around from her sitting position, combat spatula swinging. She manages to intercept the tiny figure flying towards her butt, and it drops to the floor, bruise lumping on the head.

Ukyo : "Now we can get some answers, eh sugar?"

Ukyo picks Happosai up and puts him in the middle of the table, under the scrutiny of everyone. Porcelain comes running down a minute later, cursing her decision to let him go, but respecting Shiyona(ru)'s silent request. A few minutes later, Happosai looks up.

Happosai : "Hi, ladies."

He finds himself looking straight at Shiyona, who gives him a blank stare. He stands up and looks around him, grinning.

Happosai : "Hee hee, so many girls here, so little time...."

\*biff\* \*bok\* \*biff\* \*biff\* \*bok\*

Fists, spatulas and iron maces converge on Happosai at the same time, scoring direct hits. Happosai gets up again after a second.

Happosai : "What did I do wrong? Can't an old man enjoy himself?"

Akane : "You cursed Shiyona, and we want you to end it."

Happosai : "Give me one good reason why."

Porcelain : "My, forgotten your bra already?"

Happosai turns around and sees Porcelain waving his precious bra at him. He scowls and points a finger at her.

Happosai : "I can get another!"

Shiyona : "Whatever it is I did wrong, I'm sorry, Happosai."

Everyone looks at Shiyona and her sudden apology. Happosai's eyes grow wide, finger still pointing at Porcelain. He turns around.

Happosai : "Wha...?"

Shiyona : "I'm sorry."

Shiyona bows once to Happosai in her kneeling-sitting position. Everyone stares, disbelievingly. Their faces pale. Porcelain's jaw drops, the bra dropping as well, her already pale skin turning nearly white.

Happosai looks supremely confident again.

Happosai : "Ha, well then, I guess I should forgive you for all your wrongdoings."

Porcelain & Akane : <Shiyoru! What are you doing!?!>

Happosai : "And I will cure you...."

Everyone perks up and looks at Happosai as if he were the most generous human alive.

Happosai : "...once I give you a good hug!"

\*kapow\*

Just in time, Ranma comes flying over to send Happosai flying straight into the sky and amongst the stars. However, as Happosai goes flying, something drops out of his gi.

A card.

-----

Somewhere in Timbuctoo, the salesman is trading items with a witch doctor when a funny looking old thing comes flying out of the sky and lands at his feet. It is Happosai.

Salesman : <Hm, they've found the card. Wish them luck.> (In whatever language the locals speak)  
"Hm? Oh, sorry oh great one. This is nothing worthy of your notice. I shall remove it at once."

-----

"What's this?"

"It's got Yoru-kun's name on it!"

On the table, a strange card is being examined by those at the table. Porcelain reaches over and picks up the card, looking at it. Ranma joins them at the somewhat crowded table.

Ranma (C) : "Sorry I'm late, mom had me do my own makeup."

Porcelain : "This is indeed the card."

Akane : "The card?"

Porcelain : "That old man was holding in China. Now.... what am I looking for?"

Porcelain joins those at the table and looks at the card, everyone joining her. Looking over Shiyoru's statistics, she finds some strange things.

Porcelain : "Likes Happosai!?!.... Dislikes sports bras..... has perfect 40 cup D measurements!?! Wait a minute..... the sex!"

Everyone looks to where she's pointing. It is indeed only of a single sex. Porcelain taps her nail against her lips, wondering how to change it.

Ranma (C) & Akane : "Say.... that card looks strangely familiar."

Porcelain : "How's that?"

Ranma and Akane look at each other, then Akane speaks.

Akane : "I don't know.... I just feel that I've seen something like that before."

Ranma (C) : "Oh, I know! The invitations!"

Mousse : "You're right!"

They are talking about the invitation cards that Regal sent to them once. They responded to thought and would show the appropriate information if asked mentally. Ranma looks at the card.

Ranma (C) : "Try thinking about what Shiyoru's sex is supposed to be."

Porcelain : "Alright...."

Porcelain says this with more than a hint of uncertainty. She looks at the card, willing it to return Shiyoru to what he was originally. The entire card shimmers in her hand, and she drops it in surprise. She picks it up immediately and looks at the card. On it, the likes/dislikes have changed (much to Porcelain's relief), but the sex remains the

same.

Porcelain : "What is this?"

Ranma (C) : "What is what?"

Porcelain : "Look here."

Ranma and Akane do. They raise eyebrows. Just then, Porcelain slaps her head.

Porcelain : "Oh no. The Essence!"

Ranma (C) : "That glowing orb? What's.... oh, yeah."

While these two people know, everyone else at the table are curious to know.

Shampoo : "What happen?"

Ukyo : "Ranma honey, what is it about the Essence?"

Ranma (C) & Porcelain : "It said Shiyoru was to be born a girl, but something happened it couldn't stop."

Simultaneous voices ringing out together as they explain. Everyone looks surprised.

Ranma (C) : "So now what do we do?"

In China, a cave. A glowing orb. It darkens.

Essence : "*This was not my wish.*"

{Reflections. Don't give up.}

Moon. Silver light shines from it, lances of pureness, destroying the darkness.

Stars. Torches of the sky, always so close yet out of reach to us.

Night. The time people treat with suspicion and fear, awe and admiration.

In the darkness, someone is singing, a songbird of a voice.

The voice is female.

The words are inaudible, but the song is there for all who listen, mingling with the sounds of the night sky.

It is night, another night in the Tendou Dojo, and indeed, Japan.

Not so for someone. For this person, it is the second night of torture. Emotional torture, worse than any physical torture for this one person can withstand physical torture easily.

Song, emotions of the soul. Laughter, language of the soul.

Someone is singing. The tune is sad.

Porcelain : "Shiyoru...."

Porcelain is in Akane's room, both of them watching Shiyoru in the darkness. Akane and Ranma, close friends of the martial artist who came to the Dojo seeking out the Japanese martial arts legend Saotome Ranma.

The person who inadvertently caused the curse.

The person who, while Shiyoru wanted to help cure, attracted more attention than needed.

That was the cause.

Ranma. Saotome Ranma. A teenage boy with many destinies to fulfill, a legend not just of martial arts. A legend of Jusenkyo itself.

He would not, could not, have healed the hearts and souls of many people had he not have the curse.

The curses of Jusenkyo.

What are they?

They are the opposing forces of the ones who are fated to fall in. They are punishment and blessing. They are complimenting and conflicting.

Such as is the case with Shiyoru and Porcelain.

They preach peace to violence, offer stern warnings to those who have been following the ways of wrong.

Saotome Ranma. Stubborn and obnoxious, caring and conscientious. Such are the ways of him and his curse. Or is that blessing?

Akane : "I'm tired."

Porcelain : "Sleep then. It's another school day tomorrow."

Akane : "What about you?"

Porcelain : "We can stay up an entire week and not feel sleepy. Go, sleep."

Akane nods and walks to bed, P-chan in her arms, already asleep. Porcelain turns back to listen.

In another room, someone else is listening. The snores of a giant panda serve little to drown out the sorrow in the song.

Ranma : <Poor guy. I wish we knew what to do with that card. Happosai just won't tell us.>

At one time, Porcelain almost crushed the card in anger. Akane stopped her, unsure of the effects if she did. What a pity, it could've helped.

Up on the roof, a girl is singing, song the emotions of the soul. Her song brings a sense of loss to those who listen to it. She sings softly, then loudly, but always beautifully, not caring about what others think.

For the person of age 15 has no inhibitions, nothing.

Nothing left in the world.

The song is calming for the person, and serves to calm all the listeners.

But not enough.

Ranma : <I remember being stuck like that. I knew then at least I had a definite cure.>

The cure. So close.

Yet so far.

Ranma : <If only Herb were here... or his brother, they would know how the magic worked.>

-----

It is early evening in China. Herb is busy training new disciples handed to him from his human-animal kind, the legacy of Jusenkyo to the Jako Dynasty. And indeed, he is training them hard. He is not disappointed, but not satisfied either.

Herb : "Shiyoru showed better promise."

He is not affected by the magic of the I.C. As he berates those students who are not up to his standard, he hears a commotion going on behind him.

"Stop, trespasser! Nobody disturbs master Herb during training! Especially not a human!"

"Turn back or die now, stranger."

Herb turns around to see what's going on. Lime and Mint have crossed weapons to block access to a human stranger. He feels a strangeness about that person.... something not quite right about him.

Herb : "Hold, Lime, Mint! Let him pass."

Lime and Mint turn to look, then reluctantly let him pass. As the man walks up to Herb, Herb knows why the man was so strange.

In one eye, the man has a perfectly black iris, such that the pupil is invisible. In the other, had it not been for Herb's hyperacute senses, he would not have seen the iris at all, but just the pupil in all its glory. The man is wearing a white gi and black pants, white socks and black shoes.

The man nods at Herb.

Man : "Herb, is it?"  
Herb : "Yes? Who are you?"  
Man : "Your services are required, Master Herb."  
Herb : "Why? Who are you!?"  
Man : "Your disciple, Shiyoru, requires your help."

Herb is about to ask the question of who he is again, when the he suddenly remembers why the voice is so familiar.

It is the Essence of Yin and Yang. The man grins lopsidedly.

Man : "I see you've discovered my identity? Well then, your disciple needs your help. Go now, time wasted is actions unrecoverable."

The man smiles at Herb, then disappears in a flash of black and white. Herb is blinks the light out of his eyes, then sees everyone looking at him.

Herb : "Return to your training! My brother shall take over in my absence. Lime, Mint!"  
Lime & Mint : "Yes, Master Herb!"  
Herb : "We're leaving for Japan."

Lime and Mint's eyes mist over at the thought of seeing girls again. Herb's right eye begins to twitch.

==-==-

At the Dojo, Shiyona has stopped singing and is now at the Koi pond, staring at the reflection of the moon in it. Not a ripple marring the smooth finish of the water as Shiyona stares. She stops staring at the moon and turns her attention to something else in the water.  
Herself.

Shiyona : "Who am I now? What am I now? Which side do I belong to?"

She sees the face of her cursed form in the water, looking back at her.  
Only this time, she has no more cursed form.  
This IS her form.  
A ripple marring the pond's mirror-like surface.

\*drip\*

Shiyona : "I'm crying."

\*drip\*

Shiyona : "Why? I feel no sense of sadness."

\*drip\*

Shiyona : "Loss? Is that it? Loss of my own true identity?"  
Ranma : "I hope not."

Shiyona doesn't turn to look, but stares into the water as Ranma's reflection shows up in it. He is smiling slightly.

Ranma : "Look at the pot calling the kettle black. You're the one who's sad now, and I'm the one trying to cheer you up."

Shiyona lets out a long, drawn out sigh, trying to stop the tears. The second time that day.

Shiyona : "I guess so."  
Ranma : "I wouldn't blame you though. At least my cures were obvious."

Shiyona : "Yes."  
Ranma : "You really want to be left alone, don't you?"  
Shiyona : "Maybe."  
Ranma : "Nice song."  
Shiyona : "Thanks."  
Ranma : "Who taught you to sing like that?"  
Shiyona : "Myself."  
Ranma : "What, no Porcelain?"  
Shiyona : "She was wearing earplugs, even though we performed well enough at that last concert."

Ranma's smile widens into a lopsided grin, wondering how bad her singing was after they first performed, Shiyon...ru having lost her voice after the concert that night.

Ranma : "Well, you have a beautiful voice."  
Shiyona : "Now that I'm forever a girl, yes."  
Ranma : "Look, your card says your sex is a female, but you're still there somewhere inside, right?"  
Shiyona : "I don't know. I see myself in the water.... but I'm not myself anymore."  
Ranma : "Really. What was it you said the last time? Slightly more feminine as a girl but still yourself Shiyoru?"  
Shiyona : "I'm Shiyona now. Yoru doesn't exist anymore."  
Ranma : "Not to you, no. The Shiyoru we know is still here in our hearts and minds. You did tell me to be yourself, boy or girl. So where's the Shiyoru in you?"  
Shiyona : "Forget him then, for I don't think I can ever be *him* again."  
Ranma : "Ryoga once said that.... he wanted to stay as P-chan forever to be with Akane simply as her pet."  
Shiyona : "He could still change back whenever he wanted to."  
Ranma : "Listen, don't give up, alright? We'll find out how to use that card sooner or later. Just hang on. Don't give up."

Ranma gives Shiyona a pat on the shoulder, then leaves for bed.  
For hours after that, she stares at herself in the water before going to bed, an hour from sunrise.

Later that morning, Nodoka gives her son a break from training, seeing that he's progressed quite a lot. Instead, she gives him revision. Ranma is reviewing her lessons with Nodoka that morning, using every lesson her mother taught her and sweating it out every inch of the way. Akane watches in interest and admiration at Ranma's stoicism and determination to learn.... just like how Shiyoru's stoicism and determination to teach Akane to swim paid off. Somewhat. That memory kicks Akane in the guts as she remembers how sad Shiyoru was feeling the night before and for a short time, the morning after.

Voice : "O-ha-yo-o, Akane!"

Akane turns around and sees Glass and Shiyona walking downstairs together. Shiyona's face is very much unlike the night before's, a happy face instead of a dejected one. They join her at the table.

Akane : "Good morning, both of you."  
Glass : "Thanks. Oh, how's breakfast? Is Ranma cooking this morning again?"  
Akane : "Not really. Kasumi's helping out. She said she was going crazy after days of letting Ranma cook our breakfasts and just HAD to help out."  
Glass : "That's Kasumi for you. Always wanting to take the burden off others' shoulders."

Akane looks at Shiyona, her face all smiles. Akane nudges Glass' ribs and whispers into his ear.

Akane : "What's up with Shiyoru? Why's she so happy this morning?"  
Glass : "You're asking me? She woke me up with a bucket of water this morning, giggling when I started sputtering!"  
Akane : "At least she's getting better."  
Glass : "I'll say."  
Akane : "It's still early. Want to go jogging?"  
Glass : "And meet Happosai-hentai again? No thanks."  
Akane : "Sparring?"



Glass : "Ah, now that I will do."

Akane : "Come on!"

Shiyona watches as the two get up and head for the dojo hall. She scrambles up and runs after them.

Shiyona : "Wait for me!"

The two look behind at the fast approaching figure and run for the dojo.

For the next half-hour or so, the two spar against each other, sweating freely as Shiyona sits in a corner watching. She claps everytime a nice stunt is pulled, everytime a hit is parried and countered, and then counterparried. In fact, she seems to be thoroughly enjoying herself this morning, clapping and cheering excitedly. Just like a girl. (No offense!)

As Ranma yells that breakfast is ready, both Akane and Glass have worked up a huge amount of sweat and go to take their baths first rather than eat breakfast, Glass borrowing a kettle of hot water before going into the bathroom with Akane.

At the table, Shiyona has dressed for school, deep blue pinafore over a long sleeved white blouse. Ranma eyes her, wondering as she puts down the plates in front of a hungry Soun, a ravenous Genma, a watchful Nodoka and of course, the ever-calculating Nabiki.

Ranma (C) : <Where'd she get that dress from anyway? I don't remember lending her any.... yucks, what am I thinking!? I don't HAVE any dresses!>

Nabiki : "Ranma? Nice school uniform. Fits you, skirt and all."

Soun falls over laughing as Ranma's eyes grow wide, nearly crushing the plate in her hand. This morning's breakfast consists of a bowl of soup, some bowls of soba and plates of toast. Ranma's been practicing.

Nabiki gives her a grin, and she points a thumb to Shiyona.

Nabiki : "We both think so, anyway."

Ranma grimaces and looks at Shiyona, who is simply grinning (quite literally) from ear to ear, trying not to break out into full-scale laughter, afraid that her dress might get rumpled if she rolls on the floor laughing.

Ranma (C) : <At least she's feeling much better.>

Akane : "Now what's so funny?"

Akane and Porcelain, already dressed and hair still a little moist, walk into the living room as Ranma puts the bowl of soup down and sits to eat. Soun is fighting with Genma over his share of soba, as Genma tried to steal some while Soun was still laughing. As they squish each others' faces with their hands, Soun looks up.

Soun : "Oh, nothing... much. Ask your sister." \*grunt\*

Soun pushes Genma's face back as Akane looks at her sister, already eating, and Shiyona, still grinning as she eats. Akane shrugs to Porcelain.

Akane : "The things we never get to know..."

Porcelain : "Always perplex us so....."

Akane & Porcelain : "As if we cared about it, no?"

Kasumi and Nabiki look at each other, both knowing that it is going to be a *very* strange day in Nerima.

{A day in the life of a girl.} (A little light relief)

Walking to school, Shiyona is skipping happily, humming a tune to herself as she does so. She even dumped her old back-mounted schoolbag and is carrying a bookbag much like Akane with the crew of SDed (Super Deformed) Ranma characters hanging all over the place. (*hmm... is that tune Little Date? I love that song. -Ed.*)(Yes.) Akane, Porcelain and Ranma, mercifully let off from his training this school day, are staring at her.

Porcelain : "Shiyoru-kun's sure cheered up today."

Akane : "I'll say."

Ranma : "Heh, I'll bet she'll be attracting a lot of stares today, the way she's acting."

**\*poc\***

Ranma : "Ow! Whaddaya do THAT for!? It was a compliment!"

Akane : "Sexist."

Porcelain : "Jerk."

Akane : "Perverted."

Porcelain : "Buffoon."

Ranma just rubs his head, where a mini-mallet is still standing out, wondering what they mean. Akane and Porcelain exchange silent grins and keep walking.

Ranma : "Weird girls."

**\*poc\***

Ranma : "OW! Not again!"

As they keep walking to school, they meet someone they don't come across often on the way to school.

Shiyona : "Hellooo, Ukyooo!"

Ukyo is dressed in her usual boys' clothes and that usual bandage wrapped around her chest, with that usual giant spatula on her back. She is walking along the road, mind on how to win Ranma's heart and making up new okinomiyaki toppings at the same time.... all of them with the word Ranma on them. She slows and turns, seeing the group heading her way.

Ukyo : "Hi, guys. Hi, Shiyon...."

Shiyona : "Na."

Ukyo : "Na. Hi, Shiyona. You're cheery today, sugar."

Shiyona : "And why not?"

Ranma grins at himself, while Akane and Porcelain look on, both happy and curious at the same time.

Porcelain : <What change did you undergo last night, Shiyoru-kun?>

At school, people are staring and muttering among themselves as a cheery Shiyona skips through the gates, thinking her mad for looking happy coming to this crazy school.

Then they add : "Unless she's thinking of blasting the Principal into space again with those fireballs."

As the rest of the group walk in through the school gates, Ukyo is whispering to the group, a strong buzzing at the back of her mind causing her to lose her concentration on the conversation from time to time, as if something were working to (literally) change her mind.

Ukyo : "What's wrong with Shiyoru? I thought s...sh...he was always upset over this turn of events?"

Ranma : "One phrase, Ucchan. Take it as it is."

Ukyo nods, then bids them a "seeya later" as she runs off to her locker first, leaving Ranma and Akane to walk to the main building by themselves, Porcelain having run off to make sure Kuno wasn't lurking in the shadows.

As the bell goes, classes proceed as normal.... almost.

Shiyona, sitting in a corner of the classroom with Porcelain at the other corner, is busy scribbling down everything the teacher says with surprising speed, the ink in the pen actually going down visibly. As she writes, something lands onto her notes, right in front of her eyes. She stops writing and looks up to find the owner. Nobody else's head is up, and she quickly opens the crumpled paper ball under the desk.

"Break time, Cafeteria, third table to the left, second row. Food's on me.  
- Kowaru"

Shiyona's eyes widen in surprise as she reads this. She look straight ahead of her and directly in front of her is Kowaru, hunching over his desk even more than the other students. He feels a knock on his back as he silently hopes Shiyona will agree, face hot with... what, anxiety, embarrassment?  
He feels around behind his back and feels the paper ball. He opens it under his desk to avoid Mr. Kori's glare, which seems to freeze your blood there and then should he catch you lazing off in his class. He, unfortunately, had taken over pleasant Miss. Kitano since she left for her honeymoon and was soon to be called Mrs. Kitano. (It's rumoured that Mr. Kori and Miss. Yuki are a hot couple in the school, even though they don't show it.)

"Thanks. I'll consider."

Kowaru's shoulders slump as he reads the all-too-familiar words and lets out a sigh.  
Mr. Kori's eyes shoot straight to him, burning into his soul and chilling it to sub-zero temperatures.

Mr. Kori : "Yes, Yorokobi Kowaru? Do you have a problem with the way I explained the workings of alternating angles in a geometrical figure within a circle with tangents?"

Kowaru : "N...n...no, sir..."

Mr. Kori : "Then please explain to the class what I just said, a general idea should be enough."

Kowaru : <Ohshitoohshitoohshit! I'mintroubleandthere'snoonetohelp! Aahh!> "I... er... "

Mr. Kori : "Stand up, student."

As Kowaru stands, he feels something being pushed into the hands he put behind his back in shame.

Paper, it feels like.

He pulls the notes up in front of him as he stands, looking into the clearly defined "Summaries" segment of each lesson, and begins reading aloud.

Mr. Kori's face blanches as he hears the well-defined and concisely summarised notes being read, having never called out a student who could read out what he just said before with this kind of accuracy.

As Kowaru sits down, he passes the notes back to Shiyona with an unsaid but shared word of "Bless You".

In her wallet, the I.C Porcelain is carrying shimmers a little and reflects the name Yorokobi Kowaru in the Likes section.

==--==--

Akane, Ranma & Porcelain : "You *WHAT!*?"

Kowaru just scratches the base of his neck nervously as the three of them nearly scream in his face, shifting his weight from one leg to the other.

Kowaru : "I just asked her out on one date...."

Kowaru looks at Porcelain and grins sheepishly.

Kowaru : "If you don't mind."

Porcelain leans forwards and stares, eyes wide in disbelief, but then closes them as she pulls back, taking a deep breath and letting it out. Kowaru lets out a mental sigh, thanking God that she didn't decide to pound him to pulp. Yet.

Porcelain : "Oh, all right. She's a real she now, it's her life. But you'd better not harass her. One word, just one word from her, and if I'm not there, my fireball goes in my place."

Kowaru gulps, his already pale face turning paler than Porcelain's naturally pale skin (which earned her the name Porcelain).

Porcelain smiles and pats Kowaru's shoulder in a friendly gesture.

Porcelain : "Alright then, have fun."

Kowaru lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding, and whatever colour he had returns, which isn't much to begin with as Porcelain disappears into the ladies'.

As Ranma and Akane walk to the cafeteria, Ranma is suddenly attacked from behind.

Hiroshi : "HellOOOO Ranma! Nice to see you together with Akane today! It's so rare you two ever get along."

Ranma taps his foot impatiently as he waits for Hiroshi to get off his back, which he does quickly. Akane moves off without waiting as Ranma talks to Hiroshi, both of them walking slowly.

Ranma : "So, how're things on your side of the classroom?"

Hiroshi : "Slow. Mr. Kori's been really angry since Kowaru did that stunt of his."

Ranma : "No stunt man, that was Shiyoru's work."

Hiroshi : "Shiyoru?"

Ranma : "Yeah, Shiyoru. Always wears a gi, green turtleneck, long hair at the back halfway down his neck, bracers, same curse as I do?"

Hiroshi : "Doesn't ring a bell."

Ranma : "<What is WRONG with you, Hiro!?!> "Alright, what about Shiyona?"

Hiroshi : "Ah, Porcelain's friend?"

Ranma : "Er... yeah. She pulled the stunt. Lent him her notes."

Hiroshi : "Smooth work, baby. She should do this to Kori-sensei more often."

Ranma grins and nods, then ends their conversation as he ponders the strange things going on.

*\*riing\* \*riiing\**

Kasumi : "I'll get it."

*It is the Tendou Dojo, nearly 11 at night. Shiyona and almost everybody else are already asleep, but Kasumi stayed up to finish reading the book on Homemade Herbal Medicines when the phone rang. She puts her delicate hand over her 'O'ed mouth as she realizes there's nobody else to get the phone.*

Kasumi : "Hai, moshi moshi. Tendou desu."

Voice : "Hello, Kasumi. Is my daughter at your house?"

Kasumi : "Daughter?"

Voice : "Yes, Shiyona?"

Kasumi : "Oh, yes. She is."

Voice : "Can you call her here?"

Kasumi : "I'm afraid she's already asleep. Should I wake her?"

Voice : "No need. Just tell my darling girl I love her, alright? Bye."

Kasumi : "Ja."

*As Kasumi puts down the phone, her mind is reeling.*

Kasumi : "Oh my... when did Shiyoru's father refer to him as his daughter?"

*Early this morning, Ranma was just waking up when Kasumi walked into his room, her silhouetted figure blocking out the light in the doorway. Ranma sits up in his bed, eyes squinting and hair a mess as he scratches his head.*

Kasumi : "Ohyao, Ranma-kun. I have something to tell you."

Ranma : "Ugh, couldn't it wait until later?"

Kasumi : "Ranma, Shiyoru's father called."

Ranma : "So?"

Kasumi : "He was looking for his daughter."

Daisuke : "Ranma? Ranma, you there?"

Daisuke is looking straight into Ranma's face, waving a hand in front of him, and eliciting no response.

Daisuke : "He's sleepwalking."

Hiroshi : "He's sitting at a bench in the cafeteria, I don't think he's sleepwalking."

Daisuke : "Whaddaya know about these things anyway? Squat."

Hiroshi : "What about you, then?"

Daisuke : "I'm better. I know about psychotherapy, physiology, psychosis, REM...."

Hiroshi : "Spare me the diplomas. Help me wake Ranma up."

Daisuke : "Hup!"

\*slosh\*

Ranma (C) : "YEOW! Cold!!"

Ranma suddenly screams as Daisuke hefts a bucket of ice water on her, breaking her thoughts immediately. Almost everyone turns to look, but those who don't are those used to his/her constant "YEOW! HOT!"s and "YEOW! COLD!"s.

As Ranma shakes her head to shake off the water, Daisuke drops the bucket and taps Ranma on the head.

Daisuke : "You were sleepwalking, charming."

Ranma (C) : "Then shake me awake."

Daisuke : "If I remember correctly, the last one who did that is still wearing a bandage on his head when you sent him flying through the ceiling and then having him land on the statue of the principal in the main courtyard in front of the school. Good going there, destroying the statue at the same time."

Ranma nods as Kuno steps into the cafeteria, bandages wrapping his entire head and only letting his eyes through. Daisuke sniggers.

Daisuke : "Though I can't really say I pity the victim."

Just then, Hiroshi yells to the two at the queue.

Hiroshi : "Yo, guys! What do you guys want? Stock's running out!"

The two break into a run as they scramble to get the last of the food, Ranma passing a particular table where an ashen haired, pale skinned boy is waiting with two buns of red-bean paste and two cups of Milo.

Kowaru : \*sigh\*... "Too bad. But there's always hope...."

Kowaru swings his legs back and forth as he watches the clock on the cafeteria. Still twenty minutes to go, but hope is fading fast.

Voice : "Hope is always rewarded by the patient."

Kowaru turns to the source of the voice and his heart lights up as Shiyona joins him at the table. She folds her skirt smoothly under her legs as she sits, opposite Kowaru. His face is pure red, easily done so because of his skin colouring.

Kowaru : "H..h...hi..i...."

He twiddles his fingers, wondering what to do next. Then he realizes the two buns of red-bean paste in his hands.

He hands one of them and a cup of Milo over to her.

Kowaru : "H..h..here... for...you..."

Shiyona smiles and graciously accepts the goods proffered, at one point accidentally touching Kowaru's hand. His eyes widen for a split second, as his red-hue goes up a shade before calming down. As Shiyona slowly nibbles on her loaf, Kowaru just looks at his own, thoughts of eating it never crossing his mind.

Shiyona : "Is something wrong?"

Kowaru's head shoots up, and nearly scares Shiyona, who looks at him concernedly.

Kowaru : "h..huh?"

Shiyona : "Is something wrong? You're looking a little unwell."

Kowaru : "No, no! It's nothing!.....It's just.... well...."

Kowaru twiddles his fingers as he thinks of what to say, the loaf in his lap. He can feel something in his body, something sort of like a ticklish tingle go through his body as well as a slight heating up of his cheeks, which ascends to a light headedness he's never felt before. It's the feeling of love.

Kowaru : "Well... I just... well... wanted to say....."

Shiyona : "Yes?"

Kowaru : "I... ah.... erm.... would like to.... er... how do I phrase this?...."

Shiyona : "I'm waiting."

Shiyona dips her bread into the Milo and eats the brownish, cocoa-beverage soaked edge as Kowaru struggles to pluck up enough courage to ask her....

Kowaru : "Would you mind going on a date with me?"

Shiyona nearly chokes and drops the loaf on the table, beating her chest to stop the food from entering the wrong pipe. Kowaru looks worried and tries to help, but she waves him away.

Shiyona : \*cough\* "No... no need." \*ahem\* \*deep breath\* "You.... want to date me?"

Kowaru : "Er..... ye...s.... it's nothing much though."

Swallowing the last of the bread, Shiyona takes another deep breath, then abruptly blushes.

Leaning on a pillar, Ranma-chan is watching the entire affair from her vantage point. She remembers just how many people asked HER out on a date when Nodoka was drilling her on how to respond to boys' requests. Right now, a few of the cheekier ones are being teased by their friends about that lovely new red hand mark on their faces and how much it suits them.

Ranma (C) : "I can sympathize with you, Shiyoru."

Then she sees Shiyona blush and nod and Kowaru smiling brilliantly. She nearly grabs her eyeballs as they nearly pop out of her head, but instead she settles on pulling her jaw back up off the floor.

Ranma (C) : "She accepted!?"

==--==

Later that day, after school is over, Porcelain (with red knuckles) is walking back to the Dojo to continue her analysis of the I.C as Ranma and Akane stay in school to complete a project their teacher had them do. As they bicker over what they each want on their project in their classroom, someone suddenly shouts.

Person : "Look! Someone's at the top of the school building!"

Ranma and Akane stop in mid-shout, their words dropping to the floor as they run to the windows and look at where the person points to.

There, above the clock tower, is a person sitting at the edge, swinging legs.  
No, two people. One of them has a skirt.

Akane & Ranma (C) : <Who are those!?!>

Up on the school's roof, Shiyona and Kowaru are looking into the distance as a small (from their viewpoint) crowd gathers below them and start looking up.

Kowaru : "This is my favorite spot in Japan."

Shiyona : "Really? I think I know why."

A strong breeze blows as they continue looking into the distance, ruffling Shiyona's dress and she has to hold it down before it exposes too much. Kowaru lets out a sigh of contentment and runs a hand through his ashen hair.

Kowaru : "I come here to escape all my troubles. It's got the best view in the whole of Nerima, it's got a good breeze all the time, and the sun is unobstructed. You get a wonderful view of the moon at night."

Shiyona : "How do you come in at night?"

Kowaru : "Guess."

Shiyona : "You fly?"

Kowaru : "Almost there."

Shiyona : "You scale the walls?"

Kowaru : "Spider-man I'm not. No, I just unlock the gates and climb up here via the ladder we used."

Shiyona : "How'd you open the locks?"

Kowaru : "Does it surprise you I've worked under a locksmith before?"

Shiyona : "Oh. That solves the school's picked locks problem. But you're right. It is a wonderful place."

Kowaru : "I think about all my joys here. All my sorrows. And then I think of solutions to them. That's why I'm happy."

Shiyona : "Lucky you, your problems are small."

Kowaru : "And what about you?"

Shiyona : "Ever heard of Jusenkya?"

Kowaru : "Chinese cursed springs, training grounds?"

Shiyona : "Yes. I got cursed by one."

Kowaru : "...oh. What spring?"

Shiyona : "You're looking at a locked down version of the result. I can't change back, I don't know why."

Kowaru : "...I'm...sorry."

Shiyona takes a deep, shuddering breath to stop anymore feelings from rising up within her, feelings for some reason she cannot control. Kowaru puts a hand on her shoulder knowingly.

Kowaru : "There now, you're a big girl now. I'm sure you can cope."

Shiyona : "For someone I've just met, you're nice to a freak like me."

Kowaru : "What freak? You're a girl, that's it. If you're forever a girl, then I won't mind."

Shiyona smiles and nods. A breeze, not uncomfortably warm, blows, ruffling their hair, their clothes.

Shiyona : "Thanks."

-----

As the two move off the edge of the building, everyone lets out a sigh of relief and return to their activities. Akane feels an urge to go to the toilet though, and when she enters the nearest cubicle in the toilet besides their class, she notices multiple fist-shaped holes in the tilework.

-----

As Shiyona leaves for home, Kaworu walks with her. Feeling flattered and a little shy, Shiyona lets him. As they walk, Kowaru is talking about his life.

Kowaru : "I was born in Japan... Osaka, I think. I can't remember. It was a long time ago, and my family moved as soon as I came into the world. Well, I've just moved in from another part of Tokyo, so I'm trying to find my way around. My life's been pretty uneventful so far."

Shiyona : "You wouldn't believe the things I do when I'm not in school."

Kowaru : "....."

Shiyona looks at his expression and laughs. She shakes her head.

Shiyona : "No, no, I don't mean *that*. I'm a martial artist. I go travelling to seek out the best masters to teach me skills I find interesting. That's why I'm only in school half the time."

Kowaru : \*pheuw\* "Oh."

Shiyona can't help herself at his expression and laughs, though not brashly and crudely. She covers her mouth with her hand and laughs as loud as she wants, her hand muffling most of the sound. Kowaru blushes.

Kowaru : "What'd I do this time?"

Shiyona : "Nothing. You're just a nice guy to be around with, I guess. You're funny, charming, got a great place at school. I think you should consider running for school president."

Kowaru just blinks. Then they are at the Dojo, Shiyona's home away from home.

Kowaru : "Oh, here. You're home."

Shiyona : "Thanks for the escort."

Kowaru : "Oh... er... you're welcome. Well then... be seeing you tomorrow?"

Shiyona : "Sure."

Kowaru blinks a few more times as Shiyona watches, then begins to turn to leave when she calls his name.

Shiyona : "One more thing, Kowaru."

Kowaru : "Yes?"

\*peck\*

Shiyona turns him around and gives him a quick peck on the cheek. Kowaru suddenly feels woozy and hot, his entire world turning red in his eyes. He stumbles off, bumping into a lamppost as he does so. Shiyona giggles as he walks off in an uneven line, then walks into the house.

From his vantage point, Glass has observed the entire scene between the two, and his eyes almost begin to glow green with chi.

=====

At school, Ranma and Akane have finished their school project, a replica (quite perfectly done, I might add) of the Tendou Dojo. The teacher had asked them to do a model of their house and then present it in front of class, although practically the whole school knows of the infamous Tendou Dojo by now. Ranma and Akane are finishing the final touches on the house as they talk.

Ranma (C) : "Akane, you think Kowaru's going to hit it off with Shiyona?" \*slap\* "What was I saying? Shiyoru?"

Akane : "Don't know, Ranma. He's only been here a day or two."

Ranma (C) : "What about Porcelain? Won't she feel jealous?"

Akane : "Maybe. She's a tough girl. Besides, she's got Nannichuan on her, she can use that."

Ranma (C) : "Somehow it just doesn't feel right."

Akane : "Since when did anything in Nerima feel right?"

Ranma (C) : "You're right."



Just then, Akane accidentally chips off a small portion of the roof. She swears sulphurously, Ranma cringing at her choicy words.

Ranma (C) : "Always knew you were the clumsy one."

Akane : "Shut up."

Ranma (C) : "Come on, let me do it. Your clumsy hands'll ruin the model dojo more that mine will to the real thing."

Akane : "Ranma, are you saying I'm no good at model making?"

Ranma (C) : "No, I'm just saying you're clumsy."

Akane slams the table, shaking the entire styrofoam base the dojo is on, shocking everyone else who is still working on their own projects. Akane stares at Ranma. She slaps her once, the sound clearly felt and heard by not just Ranma. Everyone in the classroom cringes.

**\*PAK\***

Akane : "You jerk. You've not learned a thing from Nodoka's lessons."

Ranma (C) : "....." <She's right.>

Ranma looks down in shame, then at the model Dojo. Something strikes her as strange. Akane has turned around and is now pouting angrily on a chair.

Ranma (C) : "Akane..."

Akane : "I'm not talking to you, pervert."

Ranma (C) : "AKANE!"

Ranma shouts her name with force, something Akane can feel as it enters her eardrums. A note of urgency is in her voice. Akane wipes the look off her face and joins Ranma.

Akane : "What is it, Ranma?"

Ranma (C) : "What does this look like?"

Akane looks at the ruined pond of the model house, where bits and pieces of painted and white styrofoam have fallen in. The design is too familiar to be coincidental.

A circle of black and white, with two twining teardrops with dots is what she sees. The sign of Yin and Yang. Life and Death.

Male and Female.

Ranma (C) : "The Essence's back."

Then she looks at the ruined model house again.

Ranma (C) : "That looks like the time our wedding was ruined."

=====

At the Dojo, Shiyona is contemplating what to do with the styrofoam board in front of her, the cardboard and ice-cream sticks to one corner, and other assorted items around the floor. She's lying on a mat in her room, figuring the dimensions of her house in Singapore.

Shiyona : "Let's see... here.... there.... ah hah."

An hour later, Shiyona is halfway through her project when Porcelain steps into the room. She sits on her own futon, across from Shiyona.

Porcelain : "Shiyoru, there's something I want to ask you."

Shiyona stops working on it, she rolls over and sits up.

Shiyona : "Call me Shiyona, please?"  
Porcelain : "Answer my question and I will."  
Shiyona : "Ask."  
Porcelain : "Am I being thrown away for another?"  
Shiyona : "Why do you ask this?"  
Porcelain : "That new boy, Kowaru."  
Shiyona : "Yes? What about him?"  
Porcelain : "Am I not good enough for you as a man? I can change into one, you know."  
Shiyona : ".....I don't know. Kowaru's a nice guy.... and he's a real guy..... he's so..... I don't know. I'm sorry."  
Porcelain : "I understand."

Without another word, Porcelain stands up and leaves the room, Shiyona staring at her, wondering what is going on.

-==-==-==-

In the kitchen, Nodoka is *trying* to teach Akane how to cook, while Ranma watches on in passive interest. Nodoka notes with interest and approval that Ranma put on her apron without even any prompting needed. Ranma points at the shredded-chopped vegetables on the board.

Ranma (C) : "That a vegetable casserole?"  
Akane : "No! It's for a plate of pork and vegetables!"  
Ranma (C) : "Looks like casserole material if you ask me."  
Akane : "Who did?"  
Ranma (C) : "You're chopping it all wrong. Here, let me show you."

Akane looks at Ranma incredulously at the admonition, then moves aside and folds her arms across her chest. Nodoka whispers into her ear as Akane looks elsewhere angrily.

Nodoka : "Dear, Ranma's trying to teach you. Don't get angry, just pay attention."

Akane blinks, then walks over to watch Ranma chopping. She is still explaining how to do so to Akane.

Ranma (C) : "...you gotta not only keep the veggy straight, but also your hand. Take it easy, you're not racing against the clock. With both straight and aligned, you start chopping...."

\*chop\* \*chop\* \*chop\*

Ranma (C) : "YEEEEAAH! CUT MY FINGER OFF!"

Nodoka and Akane jump back in shock as Ranma screams. She turns around and grins at them, showing a set of ten fingers.

Ranma (C) : "Just kidding. Haa haa!"  
Soun : "WAAH! What's wrong!? Who cut their finger off!?"

Soun is crying, waterfalls being produced from his unusually large tear glands. He quickly looks around, knowing that injuries to any one in the kitchen right now means disaster. Ranma laughs at Soun's face, then bends over and clutches her stomach as it hurts from too much laughing.

Ranma (C) : "Waa haa haa! Soun! Nobody cut their finger, I just yelled for fun! Boy, you should look at yourself now!"

Akane and Nodoka look at each other, hands on their chests as they breath easily again, glad that nothing really happened. Soun stops crying and looks confused, then nods.

Soun : "If that was a joke, Ranma, it wasn't funny."

Ranma (C) : "S...s..sorry.... \*hee\* "

Soun sighs, then starts laughing himself.

Soun : "Ah well, guess that's that then."

And with that, he disappears again, his laughter still audible. Ranma and the other two look at each other, wondering what's wrong with him.

Nodoka : "Ah well, let's ignore your father for now, Akane. Come on, let's continue with where we left off."  
Akane : "Hai."

Ranma rests her elbows on the counter as Akane tries again, using Ranma's advice. At first, she almost begins chopping with the speed of the Kachuu Tenshin Amaguriken attack, but then remembers what Ranma said. She slows down, and both Saotomes exchange unseen smiles of approval.

Ranma (C) : <She may be uncute at times, but at least she's learning.>

-----

At this moment, Ryoga is walking along the west coast of Japan, wondering why the beaches of Nerima are so deserted and densely forested. He is eating as he walks, using a makeshift spoon to scoop out the flesh of a coconut he pickd off the ground after using a bakusan-tenketsu to topple a coconut tree.

Ryoga : <Where am I now?>

It is around late afternoon as he stops for a rest, and looks out to the soon-to-set sun. The red-orange of the blazing sun reflects on his skin, giving it a pleasant hue. He smiles, his canines showing.

Ryoga : <I may be lost now, but I shall find you again, Akane-san. Wherever you go, I shall be there for you.>

And just as he nods at the falling star in the distance, something else catches his attention.

Ryoga : <A ship?>

He peers into the distance and tries to discern the figures on the ship. There are three of them. And one of them Ryoga can make out very easily.

Ryoga : <Herb!? Here!?!>

Ryoga quickly hides in the bushes, knowing that the presence of Herb and his men means only trouble in Nerima.

-----

"Dinner's ready!" yells a singsong voice from the kitchen. As Soun watches the spot Saotome-kun normally sits at, he stares in surprise as one moment there is nothing there, and the next moment Genma is sitting there, napkin tucked around his neck, fork and knife in paws, licking his panda lips.

Soun : "How did you do that, Saotome-kun!?"

Genma (C) : "You blinked."

Indeed, Soun is blinking in disbelief. He only started after Genma appeared though. Then Soun blinks again as Kasumi appears and sits down besides him.

Soun : "Kasumi-chan? What are you doing here? If you're not cooking dinner...."

Genma (C) : "Then it must be my son."

Ranma (C) : "Oh ho ho, think again, Oyaji."

Genma suddenly freezes, bigsweat forming on his brow as he crushes the handle of the sign in shock and surprise. The sign falls with a clumping sound. Soun's eyes bulge and his hair flies up, as the two come to a conclusion.

Soun & Genma (C) : "Nodoka must be cooking!"  
Nodoka : "No I'm not, dears."

This time, Genma crushes the handle of his sign, but the entire sign shatters seconds later, while Soun's eyes nearly pop out of their sockets. Soun starts crying, and both Ranma and Nodoka are trying to restrain the fleeing Saotome.

Ranma (C) : "Stay. Here. Oyaji. You. Aren't. Getting. Away. So. Easily!"  
Genma (C) : "I gotta go to the toilet, honest!"  
Nodoka : "There'll be plenty of time afterwards to go once you've eaten dinner."  
Genma (C) : "At least let me use the toilet one last time before my death! Nothing's worse than dying with bowel trouble!"

\*bok\*

Akane takes Genma's signboard and buries it in Genma's head.

Akane : "Ano ne?"

In her hands, Akane is holding a plate of what practically everyone in the room considers to be instant death by food poisoning. As Ranma binds her father with steel cable, Akane sets down the dish. So far, it looks alright.

Akane : "There're more from where that came from."

Akane disappears into the kitchen humming merrily just as Nabiki arrives at the table, towel draped over her shoulders after a bath, dressed in her usual short-shorts and singlet. She looks at the plate and takes a sniff. She gets up.

Soun : "Nabiki-chan? Where are you going?"  
Nabiki : "I forgot, I'm meeting a.... business associate..... in town tonight. Won't be staying for dinner tonight."

Soun watches helplessly as Nabiki disappears upstairs to change and get out as soon as possible. Nabiki passes Shiyona on the way down and gives her a curt nod.

Nabiki : "Akane's cooking."  
Shiyona : "I'll join you."

==--==

Downstairs, Soun, Nodoka, Ranma, Kasumi and a very unwilling Genma wait for dinner to arrive. So far, Nodoka is glad at the appearance of Akane's cooking, although she has doubts whether it's edible. Kasumi pops out a teapot and some cups from under the table as they wait for the rest of dinner to arrive, and everyone starts sipping. As Ranma sips her tea, she hears footsteps on the staircase behind her. She turns around.

\*crash\* \*tinkle\*

The cup hits the floor with a resounding tinkle. Everyone starts staring.

Nabiki : "Well then, have fun. We're going out."

It's not what Nabiki is wearing that shocks Ranma, it's what Nabiki AND Shiyona are wearing.

Ranma (C) : "Where are YOU going?"  
Shiyona : "Out."  
Ranma (C) : "Aren't you staying for dinner?"

Shiyona : "No."

Both of them are dressed for a night out. And to kill. Nabiki is wearing a tight black skirt with a slit up the side all the way up to just below the waist on the left side, showing off a lot of shapely leg with supple skin which would make a man swoon from blood loss, with a sleeveless and very form fitting dress stretching from the middle abdomen and ending at mid height up the chest, which is very visible and very pronounced, with a thin gold chain around her neck and a pair of evening gloves stretching all the way to her elbows. Small, tinkling silver chain bracelets adorned with tiny gemstones ring each wrist and a pair of silver-pearl earrings complete the collection.

Shiyona is shifting uncomfortably in her clothes (courtesy of Nabiki Rent-A-Dress services Private Limited), a high-collared, sleeveless black dress that is backless and therefore has to go braless or ruin the look, along with a loose, flowing skirt which reaches the ground but doesn't touch it. ("It would cost so much to send it to the dry-cleaners' all the time," so Nabiki says. "I'd rather spend money just once having a tailor work on it to look good and avoid the ground.") The silver bracelet she bought previously hangs on one wrist, an elaborate but small necklace made from gold on her neck, with diamond-studded earrings (Courtesy of Nabiki-Rent-A-Gem services Private Limited) and finally, a small brooch at her collarbone, a small clasp of silver.

Ranma (C) : "Dahling, yah looka mahvallousa."

Kasumi : "Kawaii, onechan! Shiyona, you too!"

Shiyona : "Yeah, thanks."

Shiyona is obviously uncomfortable in the dress, which is quite tight and showing off her very feminine assets, but Nabiki nods.

Nabiki : "You'll get used to it. Come on, let's go. I don't want to be...."

Akane : "Dinner's coming up!"

Nabiki : "Late."

The two hurry off into the young night just as Akane pops her head out of the kitchen with a steaming bowl.

Akane : "Dinner's ready!"

-----

In the heart of town, two girls, both dressed in black and both glittering with the jewellery, are walking.

Nabiki : "One thing I like about you, Shiyona."

Shiyona : "What's that?"

Nabiki : "You're my second biggest customer."

Shiyona : <Only because 75% of your revenues go to the Dojo, I am.> "Oh, really? Who's the first?"

Nabiki : "Kuno-baby."

Shiyona : <Figures.> "I see."

They are walking past a restaurant, drawing looks from a small majority of the people walking by them. Shiyona fingers her dress and its high collar, which reaches halfway up her neck.

Shiyona : "I know I like high-collars, but this one's a bit tight."

Nabiki : "Nonsense! It fits you just fine. You'll get used to it."

Nabiki feels her stomach growl as the restaurant beckons, her high metabolic rate demanding food to keep her energized and her brain working at nearly full capacity.

Nabiki : "Say, what about dinner there? It's got good food, the price is right."

Shiyona shrugs and the two walk in, Shiyona fingering her handbag as Nabiki looks at her own empty hands.

Nabiki : <She's easy to fool.>

It is a plush chinese restaurant, though it doesn't resemble Neko Hanten in any way. Bright red awning and doors decorated with chinese dragons on its glass, the inside is softly lighted and soft, classical music aired through the entire restaurant, some chinese, some western. Decorative partitions with paintings on them adorn the area, while a stage and catwalk take up an entire wall on the opposite side of where the two are standing. There are many empty tables, and those that are full are occupied by rich looking businessmen entertaining clients or millionaires who decided to have a chinese dinner in this "quaint little chinese restaurant".

Nabiki : "Strange, it's not very crowded tonight."

Shiyona : "No, it isn't." <Of course not! It's the most expensive restaurant in Tokyo!! 6000 yen for a plate of fried noodles!?!>

Waiting for a few seconds, a waitress comes up to the waiting line, where the two are the only ones there at the moment, and gestures to them.

Waitress : "Welcome to the Dragon's Inn. I'll be your waitress tonight. Do you have reservations?"

Nabiki : "No, we just decided to come here."

The waitress looks at their dressing and decides that they should be rich enough to pay a generous tip. She smiles fakely (which both girls can make out clear as day) and leads them to an empty three seater table.

Waitress : "I'll be back in a moment to take your orders. Here are the menus."

The waitress gives them the menus and leaves, the two girls looking it over.

Nabiki : "Hmm... shark's fin soup with crab meat and egg. Sounds good."

Shiyona : <..... my parents are gonna KILL me for this!> "Yam pot?"

Nabiki : "Too fattening. What about their famous house-special Chow Mien?"

Shiyona : "Er... alright.... drunken prawns?"

Nabiki : "Sure. <That's three. A few more...> What about.... black pepper crab?"

Shiyona : "I'm not going to stain my gloves."

Nabiki : "It comes completely prepared. Just use your chopsticks." <Darn, there goes the dry cleaning extras.>

Shiyona : "All right then. Anything else? Hm... all right, what about steamed pomfret?"

Nabiki : "Sure. Dessert? Bird's nest soup with longans and dates, cold."

Shiyona : "Settled." <I am going to \*DIE\* this time.>

Just as she says this, the waitress appears from out of nowhere, scaring both of them. She has a classy notepad and an expensive fountain pen in her hands, waiting to write down the order in crisp mandarin script.

Waitress : "May I take your orders?"

Shiyona : "Yes, of course. Shark's fin soup...."

Shiyona completes the order, the waitress silently grinning as they call out some of the most expensive dishes in the restaurant, the people at the tables around them staring in disbelief at the two. Almost as soon as the waitress leaves the table, other service staff start mobbing them with service offers. The two wave them all away, almost irritated at their sudden enthusiasm. The other customers ARE irritated though, since they suddenly seem to be snubbed by their waiters and waitresses. As the two wait for their orders, Shiyona is silently contemplating the way she will suffer by her parents' hands.

Shiyona : <Married off against my will? Hard labour at home taking care of my baby brother? Solitary confinement in my room for half the rest of my natural life? Working at some joint to pay off my debts?>

As Shiyona frets this, she almost puts her hand through her immaculately done hair (Courtesy of Nabiki-Hair Care-Services Private Limited, NHCS Pte. Ltd for short) but stops short at the thought of the cost. Nabiki looks at Shiyona and feels a slight twinge of guilt for draining her, but it is quickly replaced by her knowledge that with the kind of hard currency Shiyona's father earns, this is almost nothing.

Almost of course, being the word in question.

Voice : "Hey, Shiyona?"

Shiyona looks up and sees Kowaru standing there, tie and suit and all, his pale skin slightly orange from the lightning. He is grinning.

Kowaru : "Fancy meeting you here."

Shiyona : "Kowaru? What are YOU doing here?"

Kowaru : "I might say the same thing. Mind if I join you two ladies?"

Shiyona & Nabiki : "Go ahead."

Kowaru : "Thanks."

Kowaru pulls himself a seat and sits, his ashen hair combed and gelled with a nice looking side parting. Shiyona feels a little warm looking at his despite the exposure of her backless gown and the air-conditioning in the establishment. She swallows, hoping nobody notices.

Kowaru : "Well, I'm here to eat dinner, of course."

Kowaru's sudden sentence breaks off Shiyona's line of thought. She looks at him as he smiles, warmly. She responds the same way, feeling a little embarrassed in front of Nabiki.

Shiyona : "We were doing the same..." <He is... so... *KAWAII!*>

Kowaru is dressed in a not-too-formal suit that makes him look like the son of a mix between the average family and the undeniably wealthy. And he is \*cute\*. Shiyona swallows again, this time the action being audible as a loud \*grulp\*.

Kowaru : "Wow, you look ravishing."

Nabiki : "Thanks."

Kowaru : "I wasn't talking to you. I was referring to Shiyona here."

Nabiki's eyes widen for a second, then revert to normal as Shiyona turns reddish under the lights. Kowaru grins, knowing what she's feeling.

Shiyona : "Don't tease me!"

Kowaru : "Really. I mean it."

Just then, the orders arrive in a row, a waiter or waitress standing in line behind each other with a plate in hand, (something which the other customers have never seen before until now,) putting each dish down and then leaving. Shiyona's troubles return. Kowaru stares at the spread, eyes widening.

Kowaru : "And I supposed you're going to be flat out broke for the next century after this."

Shiyona : "Not really, I just expect myself to be washing dishes for the next millenium after this."

Kowaru : "Make that two."

Nabiki : "In the meanwhile, don't let good food <and money> go to waste. Eat up!"

Nabiki digs in almost immediately after that, eating not too quickly but with speed, while Shiyona and Kowaru eat their shares almost slowly. Soon, dinner is over and the bill arrives.

Shiyona nearly faints at the mammoth bill.

Shiyona : <300000 yen!? I am going to the cooler for this one!>

Kowaru : "That is some bill. Maybe I can help."

Nabiki watches very interestedly as Kowaru plucks out his wallet and places roughly 150000 yen on the bill. He eyes Nabiki suspiciously, her mercenary reputation at school very well known.

Kowaru : "Dinner budget."

Shiyona breathes a little easier, although by no means easily. She takes out her credit card and puts it on the authentic leather folder, and is about to hand it back to the waitress when Nabiki holds a hand.

Nabiki : "Let me see that bill."

The waitress looks reluctant to do so, but Nabiki threatens to bring the manager here if she doesn't. She looks at the bill, scrutinizing every single cost carefully and pairing them up with the duration of dinner.

Nabiki : "Hm.... I don't remember hot towels, I don't remember peanuts, I don't remember the extra Oolong tea, I do NOT remember seeing the fried lemon sauce chicken on our table..... hm, are you trying to cheat us?"

Nabiki looks at the waitress with an accusing eye as the waitress loosens the collar on her bright red cheongsam, and then the six most dreaded words any customer can say come out of Nabiki's mouth.

Nabiki : "I want to see the manager."

-----

About ten minutes later, the three walk out of the restaurant having only paid a quarter the original cost of dinner, Nabiki looking very smug about herself while Shiyona is breathing much more easily now, the tight dress doing nothing to stop that as well as revealing the figure underneath. Kowaru stares for a while before breaking eye contact. The two girls are half talking, half arguing.

Nabiki : "See? I told you the manager'd relent. Especially since the other customers began to look dissatisfied."

Shiyona : "Yeah, especially since you almost got us kicked out of the restaurant!"

Nabiki : "He won't be messing with us anymore though."

Shiyona : "He won't because I won't be coming back anytime soon. Or in the distant future for that matter."

Nabiki : "Come on, I saved us a little money, didn't we?"

Shiyona : "You've got no moral obligations, Nabiki."

Nabiki : "Thanks."

They are passing various night-shop vendors crying their wares on carts as they walk down the road, Kowaru following on Shiyona's request. As the conversation comes to an end, Shiyona lets Nabiki take the lead as she walks besides Kowaru, who is looking at her.

Shiyona : "I didn't know you were so rich."

Kowaru : "I didn't either."

Kowaru grins as Shiyona giggles.

Shiyona : "Come on, don't kid me. Where's your family? I expected them to come with you."

Kowaru : "They're on another business trip. They'll be back soon."

Shiyona : "I guess I haven't told you everything about myself, have I?"

Kowaru : "Nope. So haven't I."

Just then, Nabiki turns around, looking at the clock of a clock seller.

Nabiki : "Hm, it's nearly nine. I'm going back first. You want to come, Shiyona?"

Shiyona looks at Kowaru, then shakes her head.

Shiyona : "Nah. You go first, Nabiki."

Nabiki : "Alright, see you. Don't come back so late."

Nabiki leaves, leaves the two to themselves. As they stand there for a while, not knowing what to do, they take in the sights and sounds around them, the bright lights and flashing signs, sound of hundreds and thousands of people walking and chattering, horns of cars, flashes from cameras of tourists.

Kowaru : "It's a beautiful night, isn't it, Shiyona?"

Shiyona : "Yes, yes it is."



Kowaru : "Want to walk? The night is young."  
Shiyona : "Ok."

Smiling, Kowaru takes Shiyona's proffered hand and they walk down the street, enjoying a night out in town.

-----

Meanwhile, Nabiki is at a roadside payphone with the earpiece to her head.

\*riiiiing\* \*riiiiing\*

Nabiki : <Pick up the phone, someone!>

\*click\*

Voice : "Hai, moshi moshi. Tendou desu."

Nabiki : "Onechan? That you?"

Voice : "Nabiki?! Yes, it's me, Akane."

Nabiki : "Have you called the ambulance?"

Voice : "Ah.... not yet...."

Nabiki allows herself a silent grin, then continues.

Nabiki : "Alright, go and call them. I'll clean up for Kasumi when I get back."

Voice : "Alright, onechan. See you."

Nabiki : "See you."

\*click\*

As Nabiki puts the receiver down, she sighs melodramatically.

Nabiki : "Another five victims claimed by the infamous Tendou Akane's cooking."

-----

"Why am I doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"This."

"Oh, walking down the street with me?"

"Yes."

"It's romantic."

Kowaru and Shiyona are walking down the street, looking into shops as they pass. Shiyona looks unsure of herself and her actions as she observes the display toy train set in the window running in endless circles.

Kowaru : "You look worried."

Shiyona : "Yes... I am."

Kowaru : "Want to tell me about it?"

Shiyona : "Can you keep a secret?"

Kowaru : "Lightning strike me dead should I lie."

Shiyona : "Alright."

Shiyona turns to face Kowaru, observing the same train.

Shiyona : "I don't know how Porcelain's going to take this."

Kowaru : "Porcelain? That pony-tailed girl with skin almost like mine?"

Shiyona : "Yes."

Kowaru : "She your...."

Shiyona : "Girlfriend... before I became this? Yes."  
Kowaru : "Well, you're a girl now.... it's not exactly healthy in the eyes of society."  
Shiyona : "She can change. Nannichuan. Spring of the drowned boy."  
Kowaru : "I see. But she's still a girl at heart, no?"  
Shiyona : "I'm a boy..."  
Kowaru : "Not anymore."

Shiyona stares at him, eye wide open in shock and surprise. He continues, smiling all the way.

Kowaru : "You show signs of... attraction to the.... opposite sex, don't you? Boys I mean."  
Shiyona : "....."  
Kowaru : "You said you got locked down... you accepted my date... no boy cursed by Niangnichuan would do that. Not willingly."  
Shiyona : ".....!"  
Kowaru : "You see, you're really a girl now."

\*slap\*

Shiyona gives Kaworu a tight slap, one loud enough to be heard throughout a ten meter radius. Everyone stops and stares at the source of the sound. Kowaru's smile fades, and his hand goes to his rapidly swelling and reddish cheek, the hotness almost burning his hand. He looks at Shiyona, almost eye level with him, and smiles again. She runs, not wanting anyone to see her tears as she disappears around the corner.

In a dark alley, three shadowed figures are stopped by two others.

Punk : "Hey, cool clothes man."  
Thug : "Where'd you get them, long hair?"  
Herb : "Back off, scum."

Another shadow joins the conversation.

Dirty Scum : "Who called? Hey, cool styles dude. Where'd you get them?"  
Lime : "China."

One shadow pops out from the garbage dumpster in which it'd been looking for weird looking ornaments to add to its already impressive body ornaments.

Grunge : "Long way, man. No way I'm going there."  
Mint : "Back off and let Master Herb through now."  
Punk : "Whoah, I think he means business. Look at those big muscles, ooh, I'm so scared."

The first shadow laughs, and the glint of several blades flash in the dark. It stops laughing and bends over.

Punk : "My pants!"

Now all the other shadows start laughing and move aside, patting the fox-boy's back as they do.

Grunge : "haa! Great show there, boy! You gotta do that to him more often! Go on!"

Mint dusts his shoulder as if wiping off something vile, and the three continue unmolested along the alley, the unsavories still laughing at their cursing buddy's bad luck while they secretly admire and fear the trio. Herb turns a corner in time to hear a loud sound like a clap, then looks around it and sees a boy, standing there, holding his cheek and looking off into a corner.

-=-=-=-=-

She runs. And keeps running.  
She stumbles, a shredding sound can be heard.

She keep running. Loud clacking in the silence of night and isolation.  
A large shadow looms in the distance, distinctly rectangular.

Up on the clock tower of Furinkan High, a breeze blows.

Shiyona is sitting there, her torn dress fluttering in the wind as she sits at the same place on the ledge that afternoon. She is wiping her eyes.

Shiyona : <He's right, there is a lovely view of the moon from here.>

Over the horizon in her view, the large full moon is hanging like a giant glowing fluorescent orb, bringing illumination to those at night, over the majestic Mount Fuji way off in the distance. At least, from her viewpoint it is hanging over Mt. Fuji. Beneath it, she can also see the town she ran out from in minutes and all the way up here, the lights blinking on and off, moving back and forth, a blur streak in her eyes.  
At least, here in Furinkan, the only lights are those of the moon, and the fireflies fluttering around in the warm night sky. One of the blinking green things float up to her and lands in her outstretched hand.

Shiyona : "Hello, little thing. Looking for a female mate, are you?"

The light seems to blink in an approving manner.

Shiyona : "Sorry to disappoint you, I'm not the one you're looking for. I'm a guy stuck in this cursed body."

The firefly seems to move and shake itself, trying to say no.

Shiyona : "I hope I can find the cure soon."

The firefly vibrates in her hand, beating its wings to create the effect, indicating something like confusion to her.

Shiyona : "Well, I've kept you here long enough. No sense imprisoning you too. Go on, scoot!"

She flicks her hand out and the firefly flies out of her hand, moving in an irregular pattern. However, it refuses to leave her sight and keeps buzzing in front of her eyes.

Shiyona : "Telling me something, little one?"

She concentrates on the glowing green fire, and as she does, it seems to leave a trail of light behind it as it repeats a continual loop of its flying actions to her. It is a familiar circle with two tear-drop shaped things bending around each other, dots in each one.

Shiyona : "Yinyang?"

The bug buzzes in front of her in an up and down gesture, then disappears into the night with the rest of its kind.

Voice : "Catching up with you is it, Jusenkyo?"

Shiyona nearly falls off the edge of the building as she jumps in shock, but holds herself steady and turns around to see Kowaru, standing there, his skin practically glowing in the moonlight.

Kowaru : "Sorry about just now. I was being inconsiderate. That was rude of me."

Shiyona : "How much do you know about Jusenkyo?"

Kowaru : "Not much."

Shiyona : "Uh huh."

Kowaru catches the disbelief in her voice and sighs. He joins her at the edge of the ledge and enjoys the breeze blowing through his hair, ruffling up the hairs which aren't stiff. He leans back and supports himself on his hands.

Kowaru : "Alright, so I do know something about it."

Shiyona : "Tell me about it."  
Kowaru : "Can't. Not unless I'm told to."  
Shiyona : "Why?"

Shiyona eyes him critically, and Kowaru turns to look at her. His features are a mix of confusion and sadness.

Kowaru : "I.... just can't say it, alright? Please don't make things any harder on me than it is. I will tell you this much though : My younger sister died because of it."

Shiyona looks at him for a while, then nods. Kowaru looks at her body up and down, noting her legs and arms, her face and hair. The hair having grown a little longer fits her frame quite well.

Kowaru : "I still say you're beautiful."  
Shiyona : "I guess so. But how can I go on like this indefinitely?"  
Kowaru : "You're thinking too much of Porcelain, right?"  
Shiyona : "I am."  
Kowaru : "You've got to let her go. She's a girl by right, she can't be that intimate with you anymore."  
Shiyona : "Why? I'm a boy by right!"  
Kowaru : "You can't change. She can. Feelings change too. Not just with the form, but with time."

Shiyona sighs, and looks out into the distance, her vision losing focus as she concentrates on nothing in .

Shiyona : "I'm so confused now."  
Kowaru : "You are, I know. You don't know whether to start changing now or wait until all possible options have been exhausted, no?"  
Shiyona : "You're right."

Kowaru nods, and looks her up and down again, noting the torn skirt and the leg that it reveals, the tear being down the left side of her legs.

Kowaru : "That dress cost a lot?"  
Shiyona : "It will soon."  
Kowaru : "It looks perfect now."  
Shiyona : "You're a boy. You think anything exposing a girl anywhere is perfect."

Shiyona suddenly clasps her mouth to muffle the gasp of surprise from her mouth. Her eyes widen in shock and surprise at what she just said. Kowaru nods.

Kowaru : "See what I mean?"  
Shiyona : "I....I...."  
Kowaru : "No need to explain."

Shiyona, her hands half open as if still in shock, begin to open completely, then she pulls her legs up and raises them to chest level, holding them together with her arms on the underside of the thigh. For the next ten minutes, pure silence reigns as the fireflies continue dancing their magic show of lights in the night air, undeterred by the strong winds buffeting their tiny forms.

Kowaru : "See these fireflies? See how small they are?"

Kowaru knows Shiyona is nodding without even turning to look. He goes on.

Kowaru : "Notice how they are always pushed back by the wind. Then notice how they just come back for more. See? That one made it to a tree."

Kowaru points to a tree where a buzzing light lands on a leaf, the tree itself practically alive with glowing lights of all sorts.

Kowaru : "It doesn't give up, not in finding a mate, not in surviving. Web-spinning spiders too, never stopping

until their web is done before they stop. I can name a dozen other animals and insects that have this kind of willpower and determination."

Shiyona : "But we are not dumb animals or insects. We're sentient humans."

Kowaru : "Point taken, but we can't give up in times of adversity, right? Humans adapt. Otherwise how could our forefathers live here? Or anywhere else for that matter?"

Shiyona : "They didn't have to deal with sex-changing problems."

Kowaru : "That is just another thing some people have to go through in life. It's just another thing for you to overcome, Shi-chan. If you can find the strength to go on, your life will just improve, won't it? Our great grandparents had to risk their *LIVES* for us."

Shiyona : "Yes... I said something like that once to Ranma."

Kowaru : "You aren't following your own advice, then."

Shiyona : "But... I...I was....I wasn't expecting.... *\*this\**."

Shiyona turns to Kowaru, pointing to her sizeable chest.

Shiyona : "I can never get rid of these again and be a male again! I was born a male, I want to be one! Ranma, his cures were always in sight! I... my... I..."

Shiyona stops there and then, and breaks down completely. Every single bit of sadness comes out at the moment, every little bit of bitterness she's endured the past few days. She takes a deep breath and lets the tears flow again, this time in full force. Head hung down, sitting on her knees, arms on her thighs, she cries.

Shiyona : *\*sniff\** "Ca...nnot...be....what...I...was...before...ever..."

Kowaru lets her cry for a while, the sobbing making his heart feel dead as if he were responsible for this turn of events. Then he moves nearer to her and holds her chin up. She looks at him, his skin bright in the moonlight. He ignores the redness and puffiness of her eyelids, her wet tears on her cheeks. He looks beyond those things, into her eyes. Her soul. Her beauty inside.

He kisses her.

{The end in sight.}

The next day, Ranma is the first to wake up, more out of habit than anything else ever since his training started. The rhythmic snoring of his father-panda seems to be subdued today, more to the fact that Ranma stuffed his ears with earplugs than by any effort on Genma's part. Popping them out of his ears, Ranma realizes just how loud oyaji's snoring is this morning and give his father a kick in the tail. The panda grunts, turns, and snores again, this time softer.

Ranma : <What's today's lesson anyway? I've learned almost everything about a girl's life.>

Ranma thinks back to the previous night, after Dr. Tofu applied his life-saving herbs to each and every family member who fell foul to Akane's cooking.

*At the doorway to his bedroom, Nodoka is talking to her ersatz daughter.*

*Nodoka : "Ranma, tomorrow is your last day of the training."*

*Ranma : <Phew!> "Yes, mom."*

*Nodoka : "It is also your most important day."*

*Ranma : <As expected.> "Oh."*

*Nodoka : "Be up early tomorrow, Ranma. You'll be receiving your special training at 5:15 AM sharp."*

*Ranma : <Say, isn't that the time....?> "Alright, mom."*

*Ranma isn't sure, but she can swear as she sees her mother turning around, a grin is on her face.*

Ranma : "Ugh, what could Okasan want with me this time?"

Ranma glances at the clock on the wall. It reads 4:45 AM. Ranma scratches his head, at the morning itch. He gets

out of his futon and changes into a red satin vest and black pants, tiptoeing out of the room so as not to disturb any one. He \*silently\* opens the door to Kasumi's room and sees her sleeping blissfully on her bed, everything still neat on the bed as if she'd not moved an inch. (In reality, she moves alot, but even in unconsciousness, she is conscientious of neatness.)

Ranma : <Even Kasumi ain't up yet! I'd better make myself some breakfast if my training's going to begin so early.>

Sneaking downstairs with only the occasional \*squeak\*, Ranma makes his way to the kitchen and looks at the breadbox. He opens it and sees the last two slices of bread in it. He grabs them, a pair of chopsticks, a plate and switches on the stove's fire. He flips one of the slices of bread into the air and onto the two chopsticks held over the fire a safe distance away, and waits a few seconds for the bread to be warmed and slightly toasted before turning it over and repeating the process until the whole thing is brown to his liking. Repeating the process on the other slice, the entire process takes only about five minutes. Then he grabs a carton of milk out of the refrigerator and pours himself a cup of milk. He eyes his breakfast sardonically.

Ranma : <What a pitiful breakfast.>

He grabs a jar of peanut butter out of the cabinet and a butter knife as well.

Ranma : <That's more like it.>

He walks out and begins to spread three layers of thick peanut butter onto his toast and chews into it, the crunchy, perfectly done toast crumbling in his mouth with minimum crumbs and almost melts in his mouth.

Ranma : <Mmm, perfect.>

He finishes everything quickly and heads to the dojo to catch up on some lost practice the past three or four days. In the dojo, he does a few strokes of his kata, listening to the birds singing their morning song, the wind's soft language as it blows into the hall and out again, creating a soft breeze. Once in a while, the splashing of water from a leaping Koi joins the sounds and Ranma adapts to it perfectly, his body not losing a single bit of its touch. Looking at the rising sun, Ranma is proud that Japan's got one of the best views of the rising sun, since it's totally unobstructed by another country if you stood at the seaside. After what seems like hours, the fifteen minutes he spends on his Art are up, and he hears footsteps in the main living room. Running out, he nearly bumps into a woman.

Ranma : "Oh, sorry mom!"

Akane : "DO I LOOK THAT OLD!?"

The "woman" as Ranma thought was Akane, still in her P.Js which in the dim light looked like Nodoka's kimono for some reason. Akane spins around, scowling, staring at Ranma with clenched fists, Ranma staring back at her.

Ranma : "Well, for a moment there, you looked o....."

With great effort, Ranma stops himself suddenly.

Ranma : <HOLD ON! What am I \**THINKING*\*!?!>

Voice in Ranma's head : <Nothing whatsoever.>

Ranma : <Exactly. Think before you speak!>

Voice in Ranma's head : <That's more like it.>

To Akane, who is about to give him a clean uppercut, Ranma has only stopped for a fraction of a second as he stops himself, thinks it over, and rephrases it.

Ranma : "...always as angry as ever." (o and a sometimes sound alike for some words....) "Cheer up, you! You won't look kawai if you don't stop pouting like that."

Akane : "Ara?"

Akane's eyes grow wide at Ranma's remark. Her fists unclench. She blinks a few times. Her scowl disappears, and

so do the wrinkles on her forehead.

Akane : "What did you just say?"

Ranma : "Cheer up or you won't look cute."

Akane blinks a few more times, then rubs her eyes to make sure this IS Ranma, and then rubs the small flap over the ear canal to make sure she didn't hear wrongly.

Akane : <Ranma isn't apologising, that comes rarely enough.>

Ranma : "Well, are you going to smile or look like a kawaiikune iinazuke for the rest of the day?"

Akane grins a little, then punches Ranma on the arm playfully.

Akane : "Don't you call me that ever!"

Ranma : "Ouch! I won't, I won't! Just don't hurt me, pleaseeeee!"

Ranma draws out the last word in a high-pitched, comical voice, and Akane grins even wider, then giggles.

Akane : "This is a fine way to start the day."

Ranma : "It's 5:15, right?"

Akane : "Yes."

Ranma : "Where's mom? I thought she was beginning my training?"

Akane : "Is she? I thought she asked me to go jogging with you?"

Ranma : "What!?"

Akane : "Well.... I almost scrapped that idea when you called me 'mom'."

Ranma : "Sorry, all right?"

Akane : "Accepted. Well, you going to wait for aunty Nodoka or go jogging with me?"

Ranma : "Er.... ah...."

In Ranma's mind, he wants to make his mom happy by waiting for her to appear and finish his training. But that's only one part. The other part is saying that he should go jogging with Akane since she said Nodoka asked her to. Then both parts start to fight.

"I say she's testing Ranma's loyalty to her and his training!"

"I say Akane's testing Ranma to see if he really likes her!"

"I say Nodoka's testing Ranma to see if he can discern her meaning behind the two incidents!"

"And I say that's what I was manipulating you into saying all along!"

"....."

Ranma : "I'll go with you, Akane. Let me get changed."

Ranma was certainly not going jogging dressed in his vest and pants if he cn help it, and certainly not as a girl, so when he leaves for his room and returns, he's dressed in two pairs of boxers and a short sleeved t-shirt he pulled out from his pack.

Ranma: "Well?"

Akane looks at him, and nods.

Akane : "Looks fine to me."

Ranma : \*ahem\* "You going running in those?"

Akane looks at herself and blushes.

Akane : "oops."

Then, in front of a horrified Ranma, she strips.

Only to reveal her jogging gear inside. Akane laughs.

Akane : "I should've taken a picture to show you your face, Ranma! It was *\*SO\** funny!" *\*haa!\* haa!\**  
Ranma : "Yeah, yeah. Who would want to look at you anyway?"  
Akane : *\*ahem\**  
Ranma : "Only those who didn't want to be called no-lifers?"  
Akane : "Let's go."

They jog out of the house. As they leave the dojo, a certain figure with short, curled hair in a kimono is looking out the window, smiling.

-----

Morning.  
The cool dew, the fine mist.  
Birds singing, the smell of freshness in the air.

In a house not too far from Furinkan High, a certain girl with reddish brown hair and a certain demeanor to her is stirring on a bed, dressed in some warm pyjamas.

<I haven't felt this comfortable since my visit home three months back.> thinks the girl. <Hold on, where am I?> She begins to panic mentally. <It's warm though. Maybe I'll just lie here a little longer.> she thinks, turning in her blankets.  
<No. Wake up and wake up now.>

She wakes up, her eyes opening suddenly. Then she sits up in bed and rubs her closing eyes to rub out some of the sleepiness and dirt that accumulates in your eyes after some time. Her lashes tickle her finger, but she ignores that feeling, concentrating on other things.

Shiyona : <Where am I?>

She looks around. She is in a room with pink walls, not too bright but just a very subtle hue, decorated with a wardrobe, dressing table, a few soft toys and a T.V. There are also two large windows that are currently open and the curtains drawn, while a desk by one window has a piece of paper being held down by a paperweight. She gets out of the bed, firm but not too hard, and notices the thick and soft blanket and the feather-stuffed pillows. She looks at herself.

Shiyona : <Where'd these come from?>

They are a similar pink to the walls around her, and have long sleeves and legs. She looks at the note, fluttering as a wind blows it. She walks over and picks it up. The morning breeze is cool and refreshing on her hand. She drags the curtain open and lets the wind come in, refreshing her immediately. The light pours in and she looks around the room.

Shiyona : <This room looks hardly lived in. As if the person moved in and then left.>

A "bolt" goes through her head as she remembers Kowaru's statement about his sister dying.

Shiyona : <This.... is her room. Was her room.>

A slight fluttering sound catches her attention, and she sees the forgotten note, flapping indignantly. She reads the note.

*"Dear Shiyona,*

*Sorry to give you a shock if you are shocked. But you fell asleep in my arms last night crying yourself to sleep and I had to carry you back to my house since you wouldn't wake up. Well, feel free to look for me or my sister for anything you need.*

*Yours truly,  
Yorokobi Kowaru "*



Shiyona scratches her head, and opens the door to the room. She looks around and over the handrail. She is standing on what is apparently the third floor, the walkway continuing to her left and right. To the far left is the staircase leading to the second and first levels of the house, while to either side are doors marked clearly with names or facilities. She heads for the one marked "toilet".

Later, she explores the second level and discovers that it contains the master bedroom, (hardly used, by the way.) another bathroom, a computer, couches and a television, LD/VCD/CD player, VCR set, and a small fridge in the corner.

On the first level is the main living room, the kitchen, and yet another bathroom/toilet, as well as a storeroom and what appears to be a mini dojo down a corridor leading outside.

Shiyona : <Wow, he must've had a hard time carrying me all the way down school, to his house, and up the stairs.  
Hold on....>

Shiyona wonders how she got changed into these clothes. She hopes it was Kowaru's sister and not him who did it. She catches herself with this thought, realizing that she is indeed thinking more like a girl than she'd dare admit.

A smell is wafting in from the kitchen, a pleasant smell too. Shiyona follows the trail and looks into the kitchen, quite large, and sees a woman in an apron and pyjamas humming to herself.

Shiyona : "Excuse me?"

The woman stops and turns around. She smiles. Shiyona realizes she looks almost like Kowaru, except her skin's much darker.

Woman : "Oh, you're awake. Good morning, Shiyona-san."

Shiyona : "G...g...good morning.... er...Miss Yorokobi?"

Woman : "Please, call me Koida. Miss Koida."

Shiyona : "Oh... er... good morning, Yorokobi Koida."

Koida : "Please, just Koida."

Shiyona : "Hai."

Shiyona feels herself turning red already as she says this, and Koida just smiles. She walks over, wiping her hands on her apron, and puts a hand on Shiyona's shoulder.

Koida : "Come on now, we're all girls here. Don't be shy! Come, come, take a seat outside, your breakfast will be ready soon."

Koida smiles again, and Shiyona notes that she is quite pretty. Slightly cream-coloured skin, with beautiful green eyes like her brother and jet-black hair along with a shapely face with a slightly sharp chin and high cheekbones as well as full lips and a charming and friendly demeanor make Shiyona trustful of her immediately. She goes outside to wait at the table, sitting on the mat, looking around.

"Ohayo, Shiyona-san!"

Shiyona stops staring outside into the lush garden that is the front lawn and looks up the stairs to see Kowaru walking downstairs, dressed in white pyjamas that make his skin look like part of the cloth itself. Shiyona looks on as he walks over to her and sits opposite her.

Kowaru : "Ohayo gozaimasu, Shiyona."

Shiyona : "Z..z..zao..an..."

Shiyona greets Kowaru in mandarin (zao means early, an means peace, although zao an means good morning.), and he nods.

Kowaru : "Met my sister already?"

Shiyona : "Y..y..yes."

Kowaru grins at her.

Kowaru : "Why are you being so shy now? Come on, we're not going to eat you. A horse maybe, but not you."

Shiyona grins a little at the little joke, then smiles. From the kitchen, Koida yells in a joking voice.

Koida : "A horse you won't have, little brother! You've already eaten two this week!"

Kowaru : "No I didn't! I ate three!"

Koida : "Whatever!"

As Kowaru turns around, shaking his head in mock disappointment at his sister's poor memory, he notes that Shiyona is laughing.

Beautifully.

He can't help but smile.

-=-=-=-=-

On the early morning streets of Nerima, Ranma and Akane are jogging along the road together, a sight so rare that the whole of Nerima stops just to stare at them. In fact, even the washer woman manages to stop her ladle just in time to stare at the two as they pass by, Ranma sighing in relief as he doesn't change in her presence. They are passing by a drinks vendor who is yelling his wares to the morning joggers as Ranma talks to Akane.

Ranma : "Shiyoru didn't come back last night."

Akane : "I noticed."

Ranma : "I hope he's alright."

Akane : "Shiyoru's a she now."

Ranma : "In his...her... heart?"

Akane : "Maybe."

Vendor : "Ah, the lovely couple there, would you two like to buy a drink? I have fruit juices freshly squeezed, I have mineral ice water from mountains all over Japan, I have soft drinks and isotonic drinks...."

Ranma and Akane stop as the vendor refers to them as something they normally never hear in public. A lovely couple. Passerbys are stopping, staring, clapping and cheering the vendor for his choice of words to describe the fairly well-known Saotome and Tendou. The two ignore them... or try to at least.

Akane : "Ah, what about some hot cocoa or something similar?"

Vendor : "Will Horlicks do?"

Akane : "Enough."

Vendor : "Two horlicks, coming up."

The vendor produces two mugs of steaming cocoa and hands them to the two, and they down them with one gulp.

Akane : "That hit the spot. Here you go."

Akane pays the vendor.

Vendor : "Thank you."

Akane : "Come on, Ranma. Let's finish this jog."

As the two leave, the vendor yells out after them.

Vendor : "Invite me to your marriage ceremony, you hear? Drinks are on the house if you do!"

Ranma and Akane both turn beet red as the vendor laughs to himself and the people nearby start to applaud, cheer and wolfwhistle.

Ranma : "Really! What are they thinking!?"

Akane : "Nothing much."

Ranma : "Hm..."

They keep jogging, then Akane suddenly remembers something as they jog pass a shophouse opening for the day.

Akane : "Say, Nabiki told me Shiyona was with Kowaru last night."

Ranma : "What!?"

Akane : "They met at the Dragon's Inn, then Nabiki left the two alone."

Ranma : "That's why she never came back?"

Akane : "Porcelain hasn't come back too. And both their backpacks are still in the room."

Ranma : "Want to go pay someone a visit?"

==--==--

At the Yorokobi's, Koida has brought out breakfast for her brother, herself and their guest.

Koida : "Nothing much this morning, just some miso soup and soba."

Kowaru : "I'm starved!"

Koida & Kowaru : "Itadakimasu!"

The two dig in, and slurp up their noodles ravenously. Then Kowaru stops and looks up. Shiyona is still looking at her own bowl, poking at the noodles with her chopsticks.

Kowaru : "Come on, don't be shy! Eat up! It'll get cold if you don't."

Koida looks up and joins her brother.

Koida : "Yes, do eat. I know it's nothing much...."

Shiyona : "Oh, no no no! It's wonderful.... I was just wondering...."

Kowaru : "What?"

Shiyona : "I was wondering where Porcelain went."

Kowaru : "Hm... that... why not we look for her after breakfast?"

Shiyona nods uneasily and then starts eating her noodles, slurping it so as not to offend Koida.

\*knock\* \*knock\*

Kowaru : "Who's that!?"

Voice : "Kowaru? You home?"

Kowaru : "Oh. Coming, Ranma!"

Shiyona : "Eep!"

Kowaru gets up and walks over to the main gates and opens them. Ranma and Akane are there, dressed in shorts and singlets, sweating. Kowaru nods at them.

Kowaru : "Been jogging? Please, come in."

Ranma : "No need, Kowaru. We just like to know where Shiyoru is."

Kowaru : "Shiyoru...? Oh, you mean locked-form Shiyona."

Ranma : "Same person."

Kowaru : "Not so anymore...."

Akane : "Look, we don't want to wait here while you puzzle us with your riddles. Where is Shiyona?"

Shiyona : "H..h..here..."

Shiyona appears from behind Kowaru, head hung down. Ranma and Akane look at her bedclothes and then at each other.

Ranma : "Kowaru, what happened last night?"

Kowaru : "Come in and I'll explain."

-=-=-=-=-

At the Neko Hanten, Cologne is busy unlocking the doors to the Neko Hanten just as dawn breaks. What she doesn't notice as she concentrates on the lock are three large shadows approaching her shop, the most imposing one with a long, billowing cloak.

Cologne feels a warning "bolt" go through her as she undoes the lock and looks up in time to see Herb appear before the glass door. She nods and steps back as Herb enters the shop, along with Lime and Mint.

Cologne : "Well, back again, Herb? What's the matter this time?"

Herb opens his mouth to speak, but Mint speaks up first.

Mint : "I..is M..Miss Sh..Sham..poo here?"

\*bok\*

Herb knocks Mint's head, eye twitching again before he stops it with supreme willpower. Lime rubs Mint's head for him as Mint recovers from the knock.

Herb : "I seek my human disciple."

Cologne : "Shiyona?"

Herb : "Who? I seek Shiyoru."

Cologne : "Shiyoru....?"

Cologne rolls the name over her old and withered tongue (*Who's old and withere!?* -Cologne), wondering where she's heard that strangely familiar name before. She shakes her head.

Cologne : "I don't know."

Shampoo : "Zao an, zheng po po!" (Good morning, great-grandmother!)

Mint & Lime : "Ahh....aa..ah.....ga...ga ga...."

As Shampoo walks out from around the corridor leading to the living area, she is stretching and yawning, her dress flattened against her figure as she walks up to Cologne. Lime and Mint drool uncontrollably, and Cologne makes a note to get Mousse to wipe up afterwards.

Herb decides to ignore the two as he decides to ask Shampoo instead, hoping that the thing the Essence warned him about hasn't affected everyone as it usually does.

Herb : "Shampoo?"

Shampoo : "Oh... what dragon-man want here?"

Herb : "I seek my disciple. Do you know where he is?"

Shampoo : "Oh, Niangnichuan boy. Shampoo no know. Last remember at Tendou Dojo."

Herb : "Very well. Thank you for your time. Lime, Mint!"

The two don't respond.

Both of Herb's eyes twitch, a product of the fact that the two "teenage" boys are always talking about girls, especially Herb's female form, in front of him.... and sometimes her, and this has had quite a stressful effect on the half-dragon, especially of late.

\*biff\* \*bufph\*

Herb : "Lime! Mint!"

\*slam\*

Everyone : "Huh?"

Everyone currently in the Neko Hanten turn to look at the person so so brazenly slammed the door open. Since the sun is shining on its back, the figure is cloaked in a shadow, but there is one feature which distinguishes it from the other people Shampoo and the others know.

It is a silver ponytail.

-----

Kowaru : "So that's what happened. Nothing else happened, really."

Akane : "Nabiki's going to go into a storm when she hears her dress was torn."

At the Yorokobi's, Kowaru has finished explaining the previous night's events to Ranma and Akane, and they are nodding their heads in understanding.

Ranma : "Well, I guess you'd better come back to the Dojo soon then, Shiyoru."

Shiyona : "Why?"

Ranma : "Outside of school, you'll want to get your clothes. Besides, you always stay at the dojo."

Shiyona : "True...."

Just then, a squeaking at the door alerts Akane, who immediately gets up and runs to the door. Ranma turns around, knowing who it is and probably why he's here. He speaks up in a bored voice.

Ranma : "Well, looks like Ryoga managed to find his way back."

Akane ignores him as she picks up P-Chan at the door, scratching and squealing at the door. She hugs him to her chest, smiling.

Akane : "P-Chan! Haven't seen you in days!"

P-Chan : "Pckock! Squee!"

Akane : "Heh? P-Chan!"

To her surprise, P-Chan squirms in her grip and tries to break free. Akane lets go in shock. P-Chan lands on the floor and starts squealing anxiously, sounding urgent. Akane nods at him slowly.

Akane : "You want us to follow you, P-Chan?"

P-Chan : "Squee squee!" (Yes, yes!)

Akane : "Where to?"

P-Chan : "Dockok! Squee qwuaa!" (Damn, forgot I'll get lost!)

Ranma walks over to the distressed looking P-Chan and picks him up by the bandanna.

Akane : "Ranma! What are you doing!"

Ranma : "Porky and I have to talk."

Akane : "How many times have you gone over this!? P-Chan's a pig, he can't talk!"

Ranma nonetheless ignores Akane's complaints and walks into the bathroom, P-Chan in hand. Kowaru, Koida and Shiyona all stare at Ranma, then to Akane, then back again, wondering what in the world is happening.

In the bathroom, Ranma throws P-Chan into a basin of steaming hot water as he sits on the edge of a bathtub, watching.

\*goosh\*

\*blup\* \*blup\*

Ryoga : "YEEEEEEOW!"

Ryoga leaps out of the tub full of scalding hot water, red as a lobster and lands on his stomach, gasping. Ranma tosses him a towel and Ryoga wraps up.

Ranma : "Well, Ryoga. How'd you find your way back?"  
Ryoga : "I followed Herb here."

Ranma falls into the tub of cold water and emerges, spluttering.

Ranma (C) : \*haack\* "What!? Herb's back!?"  
Ryoga : "You heard me."  
Ranma (C) : "Where'd he go?"  
Ryoga : "I think the Neko Hanten. I was looking for the Dojo and I ended up here."  
Ranma (C) : <The Neko Hanten and Kowaru's house are certainly far enough.> "Tell you what. We get changed and head straight there, see what Herb wants. Agreed?"  
Ryoga : "How do I get changed?"  
Kowaru : "Here, catch."

Ryoga turns around suddenly as Kowaru's voice floats out from behind them, spooking him. He receives a faceful of clothes, including jeans and a tight t-shirt. Kowaru tosses something to Ranma as well.

Kowaru : "I took the liberty of getting up and taking a look in here. Hurry up and we'll head for the Cat Cafe."

Both of them dress up in the clothes Kowaru tossed to them.

==-==-

(For the sake of saving space, I have translated the following conversation solely into english.)

Shampoo : "So Porcelain is saying that the card holds the answer to your problem?"  
Porcelain : "Yes. It appears to be able to change its curse at will, although I've not had any success in doing so."  
Herb : "And you say this card is working on my disciple now?"  
Porcelain : "Yes."  
Herb : "Let me see."

Porcelain hands the card over to Herb, who eyes it critically.

Herb : "Interesting, the magic is like my brother's, but I can't discern it. It's different and alike at the same time."  
Shampoo : "Porcelain, you said the card can change the person's likes and dislikes?"  
Porcelain : "Yes."  
Shampoo : <Now I can have Ranma no problem!>

\*ding\* \*ding\*

The door opens. Shampoo gets up with a sigh to attend to the morning customers. She ends up facing Ranma, Akane, Ryoga, Shiyona and a person she doesn't recognize. Shampoo claps her hands and smiles.

Shampoo : "Nihao, Ranma!"  
Ranma (C) : "Shampoo, where's Herb?"  
Shampoo : "Dragon-man?"  
Herb : "Saotome Ranma, is that you?"

Ranma looks at Herb as he gets up with Lime and Mint, who get up simply to admire the girls. Ranma smirks as their eyes fall on herself.

Akane : "What's the matter, Herb? Why'd you come again?"  
Herb : "I was instructed to do so."  
Akane & Ranma : "Instructed?"  
Ryoga : "By whom?"  
Herb : "What else? The Essence."

Everyone in the room look at Herb, then at each other, surprised. Ranma and the rest walk over to join them at the table, and Shiyona gives Porcelain an apologetic look.

Shiyona : "Sorry for disappearing like that."

Porcelain : "Yeah, me too."

Just then, Shampoo returns with several bowls of steaming ramen, chow mien, beef noodles, kuay teow (flat noodles usually made from wheat), and fried rice and sets them down in front of everyone.

Shampoo : "Everyone eat breakfast, no go hungry."

They nod. And take a bite.

Shampoo grabs the card out of a paralyzed Porcelain's hand as they all fall over, stunned and paralyzed by the potent drug placed in their food. Porcelain's eyes grow wide as she sees Shampoo pluck the card out of her hand.

Shampoo : "Now Shampoo make Ranma like me! Now Shampoo think to card...."

Shampoo concentrates hard on the card, willing it to change to Ranma's particulars. For a second, the card begins to shimmer, then suddenly stops as it is shot out of Shampoo's hands.

Shampoo : "Huh?"

\*clunk\* \*clank\*

A woman walks into the Neko Hanten, imposing and with an undeniable presence. Herb's eyes grow wide this time as he concentrates on the dark face and sees under the shadow, one iris of pure darkness and one iris of plain white.

Herb : <The Essence!>

{Decision.}

The woman walks into the room, and looks around. She is dressed in a black gi and white pants, with white shoes and black cloth socks. Her belt appears to be both black and white, although where the black ends and the white starts is indeterminable.

Woman : "I see I have arrived in time."

She kneels over to pick up the card, and at that moment Shampoo brings her knee up to break the woman's face.

Shampoo : <Black and white woman no have card! Shampoo use!>

The woman simply ignores Shampoo as her knee runs into an invisible barrier and nearly breaks the bone in it. Shampoo's face contorts into sheer pain as the invisible barrier also gives her a little extra interest on that hit, as her body convulses in pain. She slumps to the floor, shuddering and taking deep breaths. The woman, beautiful in every sense of the word now that the light is shining on her face, stands up with the card and looks at it.

Woman : "This magic is not within my plans. Then let it be."

She snaps her fingers, and immediately the poisoned chi of everyone in the room is cleansed and they are able to move again. Herb is the first to stand and then kneel at her feet.

Herb : "My respects to the forces of Yin and Yang."

Everyone looks at Herb, then realize who this is.

Ranma, Akane, Porcelain, Shiyona and Ryoga all look at each other and immediately give the woman their own

versions of their greetings. Even Cologne bows her head at the deviously powerful woman, in respect to the powers of Life and Death.

All : "Our respects to the Yin and Yang!"

Woman : "Please, stand, look up, just don't grovel like that."

Everyone complies quickly and look at her features, features too delicate and frail to be on one such as her, but she is power incarnate, of life and death, and could create or cease life easily if she chose.

Herb : "Gracious master, what has attracted your attention here?"

Essence : "This card."

The woman looks around the room, at Ranma, Akane, Ryoga, Shampoo, Cologne, Herb, Mint, Lime, Shiyona and Porcelain, taking in each sight and life-form. She raises a hand to Shampoo and her leg ceases to hurt, and she stands quickly.

Essence : "Shiyona. Step forwards."

Shiyona bows her head to the woman, feeling small and petty under her power and presence as she does so.

Shiyona : "Hai."

Essence : "First of all, raise your head. I am simply an avatar of the Essence, there is no need to show me that much respect."

Shiyona : "Hai."

Shiyona looks up, slowly. The woman smiles at her, nodding in approval as everyone else watches, spellbound.

This card.... it's caused your permanency, right?"

Shiyona : "Hai."

Essence : "Given your choice, what would you do with this card?"

Shiyona opens her mouth to speak the first thing that comes into her mind.

To be a boy.

Then she stops herself, her mouth shutting quickly, eyes following.

*"...are you letting Jusenkyo get to your head?.....You're a GUY for goodness' sakes!.....What made you change so much?.....You said you liked being a girl?..... A guy.....Alright, so I still don't like my curse..... but at least I'm not going to let one little obstacle stop my life....."*

Ranma's words resound in her head as her eyes take in the darkness and let her view the world again, in the past. His words.... her words.....

*"But I wouldn't call it giving up. More like acceptance..... At least he likes a good girl.....thinking too much about Jusenkyo as a bad thing..... gotta change your thinking.....the more I tried to deny MY curse.....I can't look and smell good when I'm a girl?.....Your son's still here..... You see, you're really a girl now....."*

Kowaru's words.

Kowaru's words invade her mind, echoing.

That night, up on the school rooftop.

*"I love you, Shiyona-chan."*

*"I do too."*

Her own words slam into her head like a battering ram. She opens her eyes and looks around the room.

Everyone is staring at her, everyone is looking concerned, even Herb.

Everyone, especially Porcelain and Kowaru.

Their eyes are filled with terror.



Terror of losing.  
Losing her.

She looks at the card, still in the Essence's hand.  
The words in her head are screaming, her mind garbled, her heart in total confusion.  
But her soul knows what to do.  
She takes it.

And it turns to powder in her closed fist.

{The end in sight.}

Porcelain is sitting on a boulder by the seaside. Her knees are folded up to her chest, and she has wrapped her arms around the legs, rocking slightly on the rock. The sea breeze brings a salty and tangy smell to her nose and taste to her mouth. She licks her parched lips as the sea batters the rock beneath her, the spray not touching her body.

A figure walks up behind her, joined by another. She doesn't move if she is aware of their presence.

Voice : "Come on, we're going back to the Dojo for dinner tonight."

The voice is male. Porcelain nods, not turning her head.

Porcelain : "Coming."

Voice : "Hurry, all right?"

Porcelain : "Alright."

The first figure disappears. The second stays on, then joins Porcelain on the rock, sitting down besides her.

Porcelain : "I guess some things would never be, hm?"

The figure on the rock turns to look at Porcelain, face covered in the shadows. Its hair wavers in the cool sea breeze, hair it's been growing for a week or so.

Shiyona : "I guess so."

Porcelain : "You really love him?"

Shiyona : "I do."

Porcelain adjusts her position on the rock, so she sits farther back and can stretch her legs out.

Porcelain : "We can still be friends, right?"

Shiyona : "Of course. Best friends forever."

Just then, a particularly huge wave appears and slams into the breakwater they're sitting on, drenching them both. Porcelain, still unchanged, undoes her ponytail and tries to wipe out all the water.

Porcelain : "At least I won't have the curse anymore."

Shiyona : "The Essence decided your destiny lay somewhere else now."

Porcelain : "Yeah. We have Happosai to thank."

Shiyona : "And, if we don't hurry, we're going to miss the bus."

They smile, and get up, running to the bus stop where the rest of the people are waiting. Shampoo, Ryoga, the Saotomes, the Tendous, Mousse, Ukyo (selling Okinomiyaki beach specials) heck, even Herb, Lime and Mint!

Well, Herb decided the best way to stop his twitch was to let the two keep ogling at females until their appetites for ogling at girls was satisfied. He himself decided maybe to let loose for just one day, although he's still chastising himself for doing so. Can you imagine onna-Herb in a two-piece bathing suit!? \*grin\*  
Well, the salesman came to Japan with a new line of goods as well, and one of the most popular so far.  
Happosai proof-underwear. ^\_^

Kowaru is also there, along with Koida. They are smiling as the two manage to reach the bus just in time, scrambling on board with some loud clunks. Shiyona takes a seat besides Kowaru.

Kowaru : "Glad you could make it aboard."  
Shiyona : "Glad to be on board."

Koida takes a seat besides Porcelain, who is looking out the window.

Koida : "I hope you don't mind, Porcelain. For my bro and all."  
Porcelain : "No. I made myself a promise a long time ago. I would never force anyone into a life they didn't want. Not like I was. Shiyoru understood that too, and I accepted it. Besides, we weren't really serious on getting married. I'll get over it."

Porcelain turns around as she adds the last two sentences with a dry grin, which Koida knows is still filled with pain and loss. She can see through Porcelain's eyes into her soul that she never would get over it.

Koida : "Well, you just hang on, darling. You'll find another soon enough."  
Porcelain : "I guess so. Maybe I'll just set up a dojo of my own and send the money back to my family."  
Koida : "That you should."  
Porcelain : "What should I name it...? Who should I allow to enroll?"

Koida looks into Porcelain's struggling facial expressions. She pats Porcelain's shoulder in a friendly manner.

Koida : "You can cry into my shoulder. I won't mind. Just keep it down."

Porcelain buries her face into Koida's shoulder and silently sobs.

A few seats to the back, Herb is marvelling at the incredible machine known as a bus while Mint and Lime are *\*still\** staring at the girls on the bus. A few seats further back, Ranma and the rest of the younger members are all chattering away.

Ranma : "Well, wish you luck with Kowaru, Shiyona. You'll be staying in Japan, then?"  
Shiyona : "I guess so.... but I'll still go out travelling once in a while... maybe visit home.... things I used to do."  
Kowaru : "Maybe I'll follow... but only during the school holidays."  
Akane : "Well, good for you two."  
Ryoga : "Maybe we can go travelling together someday, Shiyona. At least I'll be travelling and not getting lost."  
Shiyona : "I'd need a rope, nay, steel cable, tied to our waists so you won't get lost, Ryoga."

Everyone laughs. Shampoo speaks up.

Shampoo : "Shampoo still want to date Ranma."  
Ranma : "No way, Shampoo. Wasn't that one time good enough?"  
Shampoo : "Shampoo want date with male Ranma."  
Ranma : "Wait until my mom decides to train me again, then maybe I'll consider it."  
Akane & Shiyona : "And as usual, we'll be along for the ride."  
Ranma : "Hey, you set me up last time, Shiyona! Don't start!"  
Akane : "At least you got something out of it."  
Ranma : "You're no fun, Akane."  
Mousse : "Why not Shampoo date with me, and Ranma with Akane? It can be a double date! What do you say, Ranma, Akane?"  
Ranma & Akane : "WHAT!? Me, go out with.....!?"  
Ukyo : "It'd be an interesting idea, Ranma honey."  
Kowaru : "I'd like to see Ranma go out with Akane on a proper date."  
Shampoo : "Shampoo no want go with Mousse!"  
Mousse : "Come on, Shampoo! I'll wear contacts! I'll change my clothes! I'll cut my hair! Anything!"  
Ranma : (mumbling) "Except defeat me."

Akane punches Ranma's lights out before Mousse hears anymore. Finally, they reach the Dojo where Kasumi

is warming dinner up as everyone takes a seat and waits for dinner, Akane tending to Ranma with a cold towel.

{Epilogue}

It will be many years in the future after this event, and Porcelain has indeed set up a dojo of her own where she teaches girls self-defense techniques. Shiyona comes around every so often to help around as well, after settling down with Kowaru, and actually raising a family of three children, two daughters and one son. Her parents are proud of their son-in-law of course, and Porcelain manages to find another guy who is a widower when he signed his only child, his daughter, up. They marry soon after and have one of their own children, and move in near the Tendous'. Both girls keep in constant contact with each other (since they live in the same district anyway) and visit each other's home country and hometowns once in a while together. I won't speculate on Ranma and Akane's future though, since nobody knows and it's best left to their imagination.

Thanks for reading this.

Oh, did I mention? Soun Tendou finally agreed to take in Shiyoru... \*ahem\* Shiyona's.... younger brother and train him for a nominal price, and this attracts a lot of attention to the dojo as well. Soon, Soun has more money than Nabiki can count too. :)

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## The End.

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Notes : Well, since I was thinking about a third story with Shiyoru, I thought about a series for this and came up with *Furansu*.... not much though. I got stuck for quite a while after they got the card and couldn't find a way to counteract it. Anyway, I can say I am grossly ignorant about the school system in Japan, so I'll assume they study five days a week, Monday to Friday, yoroshi? Hmm... seems only my first fanfic didn't contain anything to do with even a hint of exposure (you know which one), but I think it's essential. Besides, if you read the manga, you should already see some. Why is it I'm always writing bad things about Happosai anyway? In my past few 'fics, I'm always making him being treated like dirt or the ultimate bad guy kind of thing, but it seems I hate Happosai so much this kind of takes over my mind. :) In case you haven't figured it out by now, I.C for the title not only means Identity Crisis and Identity Card (What a paradox.....), but... as the salesman hinted... Instantaneous Curse. Not just for the one cursed, mind. Well, this is one of my more extreme fanfics, involving more than two imaginary, completely made up characters and some slight adult content as well as a permanent lockdown of Shiyoru's curse and everything. But then again, just focusing on Ranma alone would be boring, since we've got the manga, ne? Anyway, Wong Shiyoru, Regal, Yorokobi Korawu, all the teachers of Furinkan and so on and so forth are all figments of my imagination.... and most of them will be making cameos in my other 'fics too. Thanks to Kaoru, author of The Fragile Clay Matrix for commenting and helping me on this fanfic. It was one heck of a brainer for me. Thanks to Zu-ren as well for making the great stuff for this series! The story takes place a week after episode 38. Tell me what you think @ [ranmafam@hotmail.com](mailto:ranmafam@hotmail.com)! My other works can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Temple/8599/RanFanFic.html>.